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**IAFOR Journal of Education: Studies in Education**

Volume 8 – Issue 4 – 2020

Edited by Tony Yeigh

Associate Editors: William Frick and Anemona Peres

## **Foreword** **(Musings from the Editor-in-Chief)**

In what can only be described as an “annus horribilis” it is a pleasure to be able to write that the *IAFOR Journal of Education* has continued to grow and bring articles to you from around the globe. This issue, the first of our *Studies in Education* issues, completes our four issues for 2020. The issue’s editorial team have worked hard to bring this issue to publication despite the continuing worries in the world. Many thanks go to the Editor, Tony Yeigh, and his Associate Editors, William Frick and Anemona Peres. We also thank those reviewers who find time to go above and beyond.

Reflecting on the overarching theme of our journal, education, I immediately thought of one of my favourite quotations:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
(T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, 1942)

Through education, we undoubtedly grow and change, but there is also that aspect of it that assists us to know ourselves and our world better, bringing us back to where we started, but with greater insights. I realised that, if I include my own school years, I have now been in education for over six decades: and I am still learning and changing and returning to things I thought I knew and finding different perspectives.

Our authors over the four issues this year have written from a range of viewpoints and we can learn from all of them. They have represented 20 countries from most regions of the world, providing local perspectives on global themes. As so many of us have been removed this year from travel, I am pleased that we have windows into global education concerns.

2020 has been shadowed by COVID-19 and its dreadful effects on countries around the world. It has also had its effect on education and I take this opportunity to promote our special issue for 2021 which is dedicated to the educational responses to the pandemic. Please read our website and the blog for more information about this issue.

As we approach what will undoubtedly be a very different Christmas season, my thanks to the authors, the editors, the associate editors, the publications manager, Nick Potts, and to all the reviewers for bringing not only this issue, but all the issues of 2020, to you the readers. Season’s Greetings to you all and best wishes for a brighter 2021.

Enjoy,  
Yvonne Masters  
Editor-in-Chief, *IAFOR Journal of Education*

## Editorial Advice

Preparing a submission to the *IAFOR Journal of Education* is more than writing about your research study: it involves paying careful attention to our submission requirements. Different journals have different requirements in terms of format, structure and referencing style, among other things. There are also some common expectations between all journals such as the use of good academic language and lack of plagiarism. To assist you in reaching the review stage for this or any other peer-reviewed journal, we provide the following advice which you should check carefully and ensure that you adhere to.

### 1. Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a practice that is not acceptable in any journal. Avoiding plagiarism is the cardinal rule of academic integrity because plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, is presenting someone else's work as your own. The *IAFOR Journal of Education* immediately rejects any submission with evidence of plagiarism.

There are three common forms of plagiarism, none of which are acceptable:

1. **Plagiarism with no referencing.** This is copying the words from another source (article, book, website, etc.) without any form of referencing.
2. **Plagiarism with incorrect referencing.** This involves using the words from another source and only putting the name of the author and/or date as a reference. Whilst not as grave as the plagiarism just mentioned, it is still not acceptable academic practice. Direct quoting requires quotation marks and a page number in the reference. This is best avoided by paraphrasing rather than copying.
3. **Self-plagiarism.** It is not acceptable academic practice to use material that you have already had published (which includes in conference proceedings) in a new submission. You should not use your previously published words and you should not submit about the same data unless it is used in a completely new way.

### 2. Meeting the Journal Aims and Scope

Different journals have different aims and scope, and papers submitted should fit the specific journal. A "scattergun" approach (where you submit anywhere in the hope of being published) is not sound practice. Like in darts, your article needs to hit the journal's "bullseye", it needs to fit within the journal's interest area. For example, a submission that is about building bridges, will not be acceptable in a journal dedicated to education. Ensure that your paper is clearly about education.

### 3. Follow the Author Guidelines

Most journals will supply a template to be followed for formatting your paper. Often, there will also be a list of style requirements on the website (font, word length, title length, page layout, and referencing style, among other things). There may also be suggestions about the preferred structure of the paper. For the *IAFOR Journal of Education* these can all be found here: <https://iafor.org/journal/iafor-journal-of-education/author-guidelines/>

#### 4. Use Academic Language

The *IAFOR Journal of Education* only accepts papers written in correct and fluent English at a high academic standard. Any use of another language (whether in the paper or the reference list) requires the inclusion of an English translation.

The style of expression must serve to articulate the complex ideas and concepts being presented, conveying explicit, coherent, unambiguous meaning to scholarly readers. Moreover, manuscripts must have a formal tone and quality, employing third-person rather than first-person standpoint (when feasible), placing emphasis on the research and not on unsubstantiated subjective impressions.

Contributors whose command of English is not at the level outlined above are responsible for having their manuscript corrected by a native-level, English-speaking academic prior to submitting their paper for publication.

#### 5. Literature Reviews

Any paper should have reference to the corpus of **scholarly** literature on the topic. A review of the literature should:

- Predominantly be about contemporary literature (the last 5 years) unless you are discussing a seminal piece of work.
- Make explicit international connections for relevant ideas.
- Analyse published papers in the related field rather than describe them.
- Outline the gaps in the literature.
- Highlight your contribution to the field.

#### Referencing

Referencing is the main way to avoid allegations of plagiarism. The *IAFOR Journal of Education* uses the APA referencing style for both in-text citations and the reference list. If you are unsure of the correct use of APA please use the Purdue Online Writing Lab (Purdue OWL), – <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> – which has excellent examples of all forms of APA referencing. Please note APA is used for referencing not for the general format of the paper. Your reference list should be alphabetical by author surname and include DOIs whenever possible.

This short guide to getting published should assist you to move beyond the first editorial review. Failure to follow the guidelines will result in your paper being immediately rejected.

Good luck in your publishing endeavours,

Dr Yvonne Masters  
Editor-in-Chief, *IAFOR Journal of Education*



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## From the Editor

Welcome to the first issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Education: Studies in Education*. This is an exciting time for the journal, as this issue represents a particular focus relating to the exploration of significant themes and ideas in education, alternative and exceptional programs for teaching and learning, and the investigation of promising practices in education. In this issue, the international “flavour” of the journal is evident, with articles and authors from a wide range of different countries and cultures reporting on research that involves distinctive learning experiences, progressive teaching approaches, matters of educational policy, school leadership, and professional training. In this respect *Studies in Education* supports the larger mission of the *IAFOR Journal of Education* to promote the exchange of research and ideas internationally, facilitate inter-cultural awareness, encourage discussion across discipline areas and share new knowledge and information globally.

You will find the scope of coverage for this particular issue is quite broad and innovative, with articles reporting on research that ranges from primary and secondary school studies through to tertiary learning, policy guidance, dissertations and religious influence. These articles also involve a wide range of methods, including narrative and discourse analysis, case studies, phenomenological inquiry, quantitative statistical analysis and mixed methods.

To give you an idea of the breadth of research foci for this issue, there is an investigation into the use of animals to support special or “additional” needs education, an analysis of specific concepts about community within Islamic teaching and learning, a report on the characteristics of successful school principals, a model proposed for supporting autonomous learning, a concept paper proposing analytical indicators to help transition traditional concepts in design education, an examination of linguistic capital, evaluation of a national curriculum, and an exploration of the impact of postgraduate academic failure – plus more!

I wish to thank everyone who submitted to this issue. We received a great many submissions and the excellence of these was generally very good. To those whose submission was not accepted for this issue, I encourage you to use the feedback you have received to revise, or even rewrite, your article and submit again - either to the next issue of *Studies in Education*, a different, *IAFOR Journal of Education* issue, or to another Scopus listed journal, as appropriate to the focus of your work. The point is to share your research collegially with other researchers, in order to promote your specific ideas and contributions, and to receive feedback from peers. Together we fill the “gaps”, as well as support one another along the way.

It is also important to acknowledge the time and effort of the people who helped make this issue a reality. It takes a team of capable and professionally-minded individuals to bring a journal to the point of publication, and I am deeply thankful to all those who contributed to the preparation of this issue by giving of their time, effort and capabilities to undertake the many reviews required. In some cases, this involved reviewing multiple submissions even while the reviewer themselves was working and researching as a full-time academic. Please know this is greatly appreciated. A special thanks to Bill Frick and Anemona Peres, who as associate editors provided valuable assistance and feedback to me.

I trust you enjoy this issue of *Studies in Education*, finding in it novel ideas and perspectives that assist your own thinking and “doing” when it comes to research. When we share ideas together, we build collaborative understanding.

Best Wishes,  
Tony Yeigh  
Editor: Studies in Education

## Notes on Contributors

### Article 1: Study of NIS Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Professionalism in Kazakhstan

**Bakyt Amirova** is a teacher of English at Nazarbayev Intellectual School of Chemistry and Biology in Pavlodar, Kazakhstan. Bakyt obtained a Master of Science in Educational Leadership, Nazarbayev University. She promotes teacher leadership and provides professional support to novice teachers in her school.

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### Article 2: A Perception-Based Curricular Review on the K to 12 HUMSS Strand Curriculum

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### Article 3: Empowering Adult Immigrant Learners Through Systematic Motivation Work in the Classroom

**May Olaug Horverak** is headmistress at an adult learning centre and runs an inter-municipal project on working with life skills in school. She has a PhD in English, and a background as a teacher and a child welfare worker.

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**Kedir Diary** is a social worker at an adult learning centre and works in an inter-municipal project on working with life skills in adult learning contexts. He also has experience from health care work and from running a transportation business.

### Article 4: EFL Teachers' Autonomy Supportive Practices for Out-of-Class Language Learning

**Tuba Isik** (PhD student, Cukurova University) works as a research assistant in the ELT Department at Erzincan Binali Yildirim University, Turkey. Currently, she is involved in projects investigating teacher autonomy support and autonomous language learning with technology beyond the classroom.

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**Cem Balçikanli** (PhD, Gazi University) is a professor in the Department of English Language, Teaching at Gazi University, Turkey. His primary research interests concern learner autonomy, and language learning with technology.

**Article 5: Academic Failure: Unspoken Experiences by International Postgraduate Students in a Malaysian University**

**Jasvir Singh's** expertise is in higher education with a particular interest in exploring international students' current issues such as their academic success lived experiences, employability and career aspirations as well as learning experiences in a blended learning environment.

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**Article 6: An Issue of Urban/Rural Division? Examining Mongolian Language Education in the IMAR**

**Qi Zhang** is an assistant professor in School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies, Dublin City University, Ireland. Her recent research interests include applied Chinese linguistics, language attitudes and pedagogy, and Chinese language education among ethnic minorities in China.

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**Article 7: Pedagogical Praxis: Muslim-Filipino Madrasah Teachers' Conceptuality of Instructional Process**

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**Article 8: How do Principals of High Performing Schools Achieve Sustained Improvement Results?**

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**Royce Willis** has a background in Psychological Science and is currently working as a Research Officer and Casual Academic at Southern Cross University. His research spans psychology and education, with his education-specific research including Blended Learning, School Improvement, Teacher Identity, and teacher and student retention.

### **Article 9: Recreating Discourse Community for Appropriating HOCs in Law Undergraduates' Academic Writing**

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### **Article 11: Introducing Animal-Assisted Intervention for Special Education in Integrated Farming System**

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**Study of NIS Teachers' Perceptions of Teacher Professionalism in Kazakhstan**

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand the central phenomenon of teacher professionalism, identify the perceptions of teacher professionalism and what factors contribute to or inhibit teacher professionalism. The main research question of this study is how do Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools teachers perceive teacher professionalism in the school? Subsidiary research questions were addressed in order to reach the purpose of the study: what are the teachers' perceptions of the factors that contribute to teacher professionalism at school? and what are their perceptions of the factors that inhibit teacher professionalism? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants and analyzed with the help of thematic coding and interpretation. The researcher used purposeful sampling. The study is significant because it voices teachers' perceptions of how teacher professionalism is defined in the educational system of independent Kazakhstan as well as in the Central Asia region. The research findings revealed that teacher professionalism in Kazakhstan is a complex notion that comprises various aspects of teaching and learning including commitment to the profession, school-based courses, professional learning communities, and supportive work environment. There are also certain factors that inhibit professionalism including lack of time-management skills, lack of motivation, burnout and paperwork. The study has limitations as only ten participants shared their perspectives on teacher professionalism. Future studies could extend the research by conducting a similar study in other Kazakhstani school contexts, or other schools in Central Asia, to explore other teachers' perceptions regarding professionalism involving teachers of different subjects teaching in rural and urban areas.

*Keywords:* Kazakhstan, Intellectual Schools, Nazarbayev, perception, teacher professionalism

Teacher professionalism has been explored in many countries at different times. However, there have been no empirical studies on teacher professionalism in Kazakhstan. To address the gap, the following study has been conducted at the site of Nazarbayev Intellectual School. The network of Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) was launched in 2008 with the mission to reform both teaching and learning in secondary schools. NIS schools have become a platform for innovative education in collaboration with international staff. NIS students study in a trilingual learning environment and have an intensive school curriculum which allows the learners to think critically and creatively as students take part in various project work and competitions. School educators prepare integrated cross-curricular lessons, use criteria-based assessment to assess student's progress, and focus on their professional development through participation in professional learning communities such as Lesson Study or Action Research. The current research aims at voicing teachers' perceptions on teacher professionalism, as well as identifying the factors that contribute to or inhibit professionalism in schools.

The main purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate in-depth the perceptions of teacher professionalism by NIS teachers, concerning the factors that inhibit or contribute to teacher professionalism at school. The main research question of this study is: How do NIS teachers perceive teacher professionalism in the school? The following subsidiary research questions will also be addressed: 1. What are the NIS teachers' perceptions of the factors that contribute to teacher professionalism at school? 2. What are the NIS teachers' perceptions of the factors that inhibit teacher professionalism at school? In view of the above research questions, a qualitative research design was employed for the study.

### **Literature Review**

The concept of professionalism in teaching is mostly discussed in sociological, educational and ideological contexts in the literature. It is significant to define teacher professionalism in relation to changing political, historical and social contexts, as the notion of teacher professionalism is influenced by the context and time that define it (Demirkasimoglu, 2010; Hargreaves, 2000; Mockler, 2005). The researchers have identified a variety of definitions of teacher professionalism in the last two decades. An analysis of some definitions found in the research is presented below.

Helsby and McCulloch (1996) define the concept of professionalism as “teachers' responsibilities to control and develop their own knowledge and actions for the benefits of their clients” (as cited in Webb et al., 2004, p.83). According to this definition, children )or “clients” as the researchers name them) and their progress in learning should be the crucial part of teaching. Student-oriented or student-centered teaching approach has become dominant in modern pedagogy and this approach enables learners to develop their potential, collaborate with other peers, and contribute to class discussions and projects.

Torres and Weiner (2018) emphasize the importance of knowledge when defining teacher professionalism. The researchers state that professional bodies (colleges and universities) and key stakeholders (practitioners, scholars) determine what counts as “knowledge” which is mostly gained via formal education.

Hanlon (1998) argues that “professionalism is a shifting rather than a concrete phenomenon” and states:

*...when I discuss professionals I am talking about groups such as doctors, academics, teachers, accountants, lawyers, engineers, civil servants, etc., that is those groups commonly thought of as professional by the lay public, academics, the professionals themselves and so on. (as cited in Whitty, 2000, p. 282).*

A study by Wardoyo et al. (2017) emphasizes that the government plays a crucial role when it comes to defining teacher professionalism. As the researchers state, professionalism is defined as four main competencies that a qualified teacher should have. They are “pedagogical competence, personal competence, social competence, and professional competence” (p. 90). The outlined competencies are connected with the performance of teachers at work, their effectiveness as educators and leaders through teaching and interacting with other colleagues.

Webb et al. (2004), in their comparative analysis of teacher professionalism, claim that modern educational reforms become the reason for transforming the roles and responsibilities of school staff, and this transforming nature of teachers’ work has influenced the perceptions of the teacher’s role as a professional. These researchers emphasize that the notion of teacher professionalism is defined by two opposing conceptions. According to the first concept, there is a “traditional ‘social service’ view of professionalism” whereas the second conception emphasizes “a ‘commercialized’ view of professionalism, with its emphasis on managerial and financial skills” (p. 83) Many researchers discuss two discourses that prevail in defining teacher professionalism, which might be considered in a different way.

Evans (2008) defines professionalism as “new” or “modified” professionalism. This author explains that new professionalism can be analyzed in the light of a reform and standards agenda (pp. 20–29). “New” professionalism, as Evans states, has three conceptions: demanded, prescribed and enacted. Demanded or requested professionalism is connected with certain demands or requests that are expected from employers. Prescribed professionalism reflects proposed performance measures by analysts. Enacted professionalism means your professional practice is observed and analyzed by a specialist from a related sphere. The current researcher postulates that only the latter can be considered as the “only meaningful conception of professionalism” (Evans, 2008, p. 29), since it mirrors “the *reality* of daily practices” (p. 29). The researcher concludes with the following definition of professionalism:

Professionality-influenced practice that is consistent with commonly-held consensual delineations of a specific profession and that both contributes to and reflects perceptions of the profession’s purpose and status and the specific nature, range and levels of service provided by, and expertise prevalent within, the profession, as well as the general ethical code underpinning this practice (Evans, 2008, p. 29).

### **Factors Contributing to Teacher Professionalism**

Many researchers agree that continuing professional development helps teachers to stay professional in their sphere, emphasizing that professional development is closely connected with teacher professionalism (Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Sachs, 1997; Swann et al., 2010; Webb et al., 2004). Researchers have a similar view regarding the interconnection between professionalism and professional development, emphasizing the importance of continuous professional development for teachers (Evans, 2008; Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Mockler,

2005; Wardoyo et al., 2017). The findings of these researchers suggest that school practitioners are interested in being informed about current educational research findings. Trends in international research and teaching experience contribute to professional development of school educators. Finally, many researchers point out that opportunities for professional development enable teachers to be retained in the profession (Day & Smethem, 2009).

In other research works, lifelong learning has also been mentioned as an important factor that contributes to teacher professionalism (Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Webb et al., 2004). These studies reveal that educators are enthusiastic to learn and upgrade their skills since teachers consider continual learning as one of the key characteristics of teacher professionalism. Other researchers, while discussing teacher professionalism, have become interested in developing research skills, as they consider this skill necessary for their own development as well as for student learning (Davies & Ferguson, 2010).

Another factor that contributes to teacher professionalism is collaboration with colleagues. There is much research emphasizing that collaboration with colleagues plays a significant role in defining professionalism at school sites (Hargreaves, 2000; Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Kennedy, 1997; Sachs, 1997; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Webb et al., 2004). This research points out that a collaborative atmosphere in school enables teachers to join forces with the purpose to negotiate, reflect and solve the challenges of a teaching practice. Working in a supportive environment increases a teacher's morale, confidence and emotional well-being (Day, 2002; Webb et al., 2004).

Commitment to teaching has also been identified as a factor that contributes to teacher professionalism in school (Day, 2002; Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Locke et al., 2005; Okas et al., 2014; Webb et al., 2004;). These studies reveal that such intrinsic factors as commitment and motivation also define teachers' professional identities. Despite the fact that there is accountability and control dominating in the educational systems of many countries, commitment to teaching is considered to be a cornerstone of modern teaching by many teachers. Making a difference in students' lives has always been a core element of the teaching profession, and commitment to better teaching and learning has been pointed out as a significant part of teacher professionalism.

### **Factors Inhibiting Teacher Professionalism**

Ifanti and Fotopoulou (2011) indicate that bureaucracy decreases teachers' motivation to work. In this respect the current research participants expressed concerns regarding paperwork, leading to an expression of dissatisfaction about this. Unnecessary paperwork was also mentioned as a factor that inhibits teacher professionalism in the cross-country study by English and Finnish researchers (Webb et al., 2004) and in other studies set in various contexts (Day & Smethem, 2009; Locke et al., 2005). It was mentioned in the latter research that paperwork too often stems from accountability, which makes teachers responsible for students' exam scores and test results. Indeed, the age of accountability has put much pressure and work intensification on teachers' practices around the world (Day & Smethem, 2009; Hargreaves, 2000; Locke et al., 2005). Another issue that concerns many teachers is the fact that they have turned into technicians rather than educators. Such transformation is rooted in national testing systems, league tables and school monitoring systems (Locke et al., 2005; Webb et al., 2004). There is an increasing recent trend in the education systems of many countries that teachers teach for tests, making students memorize instead of developing such skills as critical thinking and problem solving.

Lack of autonomy has also been identified as a factor that negatively affects teacher professionalism (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Swann et al., 2010; Torres & Weiner, 2018; Webb et al., 2004 ). These researchers state that a prescribed curriculum is considered by many teachers as a negative aspect of current teaching (Swann et al., 2010; Webb et al., 2004). Their research findings indicate that teachers lack flexibility and autonomy in their workplace which often leads to job dissatisfaction (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005), loss of spontaneity in teaching (Webb et al., 2004) and experiencing pressure (Locke et al., 2005).

To date, with the increase of workload, accountability and government interventions, teachers in many countries feel deskilled, pressured and not trusted (Day & Smethem, 2009; Locke et al., 2005; Webb et al, 2004 ). There is much evidence that most educational reforms have resulted in more paperwork, increased challenges of everyday teaching practice, and temporary instability in their work (Day, 2002). Teachers often feel inundated with workloads that prevent them from teaching, leading to guilt (Hargreaves, 1994), deprofessionalization (Webb et al., 2004), burnout (Mustafa, 2013; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005) and stress (Day & Smethem, 2009). Such negative consequences result in teachers' lack of motivation towards their work, making school educators feel confused about their roles (Mustafa, 2013).

## **Methods**

A qualitative research method was used to gain insight into the nature of teacher professionalism. Teachers' perceptions of professionalism were viewed as the central phenomenon of the study, exploring the main research question: How do NIS teachers perceive teacher professionalism in the school? Face-to-face interviews for collecting data were carried out. For the study, we were interested in obtaining more data from the interviews for further in-depth analysis and interpretations regarding teacher professionalism. The qualitative design allowed us to set interviews with the research participants and explore their perceptions on teacher professionalism. As well, we were able to find out factors that contribute to and inhibit teacher professionalism in each school context. Thus, a qualitative research design helped to create conditions that allowed teachers to share their experience and reflections about what professionalism is to them.

### **Research Sampling and Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used for this research. This type of sampling allowed us to choose the participants for the study and explore the phenomenon of the study in-depth. The main sampling criteria were teaching different subjects and having a variety of years teaching experience for the sample. "To develop many perspectives" in our study, (Creswell, 2002, p. 207), we used maximal variation sampling to understand better the perception of teacher professionalism with NIS teachers. Creswell (2002) states that "qualitative research relies more on the views of participants in the study and less on the direction identified in the literature by the researcher" (p. 17). Therefore, it was crucial to obtain the data from different perspectives. We intended to understand how NIS teachers of various subjects and educational backgrounds viewed professionalism.

Before conducting the research, we asked permission from the school principal of NIS. The purpose of the study was explained and we received permission for further research work in the field. An official letter from Nazarbayev University was also provided to explain the stages of the research.

Ten NIS teachers from different subject departments were selected with the help of a purposeful sampling strategy. About 100 teachers work at the site of NIS school, mostly females. Being limited by time scope and availability of the participants, only ten participants were selected for the study. The participants were of different ages, nationalities and professional backgrounds. The selected interview candidates were teachers of physical education, English language, biology, chemistry, physics, math, art, history, and Kazakh and Russian languages. We talked individually to each interview participant to schedule a suitable time and place for organizing an interview. The summary of the research participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of the research participants

Participant	Subject	Teaching experience		Gender
P1	English	3 years		Female
P2	Russian	26 years		Female
P3	History	4 years		Male
P4	Biology	21 years		Female
P5	Art	15 years		Female
P6	Maths	4 years		Female
P7	Chemistry	14 years		Male
P8	Physical education	17 years		Female
P9	Kazakh	20 years		Female
P10	Physics	19 years		Female

### Data Collection-Interviews

One-on-one interviews with open-ended questions were chosen as the main tool for data collection. As Creswell (2002) states, one-on-one interviews are a good tool for interviewing participants who are open to speak and who can “share ideas clearly”. Although such interviews are a “time-consuming and costly approach” (p. 218), they also provide an opportunity for the participants to reflect, analyze and delve into the issue of the research.

Semi-structured interviews provided greater flexibility and precision for the study, while interviewing the participants using this type of interview also offered the ability to change the pace of the interview process when needed, adding extra questions for clarification or skipping some of them if a prior answer had already addressed the issue. Another advantage of these semi-structured interviews was that respondents were allowed to reflect and mull over ideas before they answered, deepening the topic they discuss. It is significant to encourage interviewees to voice their opinions and perceptions.

Thus, using a semi-structured interview appeared appropriate for the current study, as it offered participants an opportunity to express their ideas about the concept of teacher professionalism in school openly. Asking open-ended questions in qualitative research allows participants to “best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (Creswell, 2002, p. 218).

### Ethical Considerations

At the very beginning of the interview, all the participants signed an informed consent form.

In the informed consent form, we stated that the name, occupation, and other information concerning the participant would remain anonymous. We also mentioned that the participants' answers would be recorded for further analysis. The data would be kept in a password-protected computer, which had limited access. It was indicated to each participant that only the researcher would have access to the data and might have to show some part of the data to the research supervisor for her guidance in data collection and analysis. When the data analysis was complete and final paper approved, all data would be destroyed. The participants were told about the purpose of the research, their rights and benefits of the study. Since many of the participants had been interviewed for the research purpose for the first time, some of them asked questions regarding the nature of the study, and all their questions were answered. All participants agreed to participate in the research, and there was no one who rejected taking part in the interview.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

As the interviews revealed, teacher professionalism cannot be considered as something rigid and static; on the contrary, professionalism is quite a dynamic and flexible phenomenon. The majority of literature in this area suggests that teacher professionalism is a changing notion of which teachers should be aware. A history teacher provides his definition of teacher professionalism:

*For me, teacher professionalism means to have certain skills for better teaching and more effective learning. Professionalism is associated with a constant strive for further professional development which should be in accordance with the time context and learners' needs.*

Seven teachers perceived professionalism as a dynamic phenomenon, which enables teachers to revise and improve both teaching and learning. Professional teachers stay focused on recent innovations and changes in education, as they realize there is no effective teaching without constant development and improvement.

Another striking characteristic of teacher professionalism is ongoing professional development. The vast majority, nine out of ten interviewees, believed that professional development plays an integral role in becoming and being a professional teacher. As one of the participants, who teaches Russian, admits:

*Teacher professionalism is highly competitive today and to stay afloat in the profession, modern teachers have to improve their practice through reading about teaching methods and recent educational research areas. Teachers should know their subjects efficiently as well as take part in various local, republic and international events, like workshops or conferences.*

Nine interview participants stated a conviction that professional development is a significant part of teacher professionalism that enriches teaching and learning in school. These teachers agreed that professional development is an ongoing process that improves teaching practice and their skills for the better.

Seven respondents mention meeting learners' needs as a key characteristic of teacher professionalism. During interviews, these teachers pointed out that they spend much time



preparing for the lessons and finding the relevant materials for learners' needs. A physics teacher talks about her preparation for the lessons:

*To prepare good lessons, I spend much time looking for appropriate class materials. It is really time-consuming as the learners have different language abilities but it is really rewarding. For me, it is important to make my lessons useful for each learner.*

Among the research participants were teachers with three years of teaching experience, as well as teachers who have been in their profession for more than twenty years. Despite the level of experience however, both young and mature teachers were convinced that professionalism is defined by a deep knowledge of the subject an educator teaches, and how successfully a teacher can motivate students for in-depth learning. Ten interview participants explain that it is vital for professional teachers to know their subject very well.

For example, an art teacher voices her opinion about the significance of deep subject knowledge for teachers:

*It is important for teachers to know their subject well: how to teach it in an effective way, how to motivate students for their class engagement and contribution. Every teacher chooses his way to students' hearts and with in-depth knowledge (of their subject matter) the way is much easier.*

Professional competencies include not only the subject knowledge but also good knowledge of children's psychology and their age-related differences. During the interviews, six participants emphasized that knowing child psychology and age-related differences is crucial for a professional teacher. As a biology teacher explains:

*A professional teacher, in my opinion, should strive for professional growth in his/her subject as well as in pedagogical and psychological aspects. Having sufficient knowledge and skills will result in the effectiveness of the work and the quality of education.*

Eight participants noted that ICT skills have become a significant "must-have" for contemporary teachers. Teachers should be confident IT users to lead a lesson in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A math teacher emphasizes the shift in the demand of skills in a teaching profession:

*Nowadays teachers are not only expected to teach but to do many other things as well. One of them is to use IT very well: teachers create presentations, tables, create online documents, use Edmodo for learning and do many other tasks or projects that require sufficient ICT skill. Teachers with good ICT skills are considered to be leading professionals now.*

### **Factors Contributing to Teacher Professionalism**

Eight respondents mention that commitment to the teaching profession and strive for professional development play a crucial role in becoming a professional teacher. A chemistry teacher believes that commitment to the profession is significant saying that:

*I think, it is important for teachers to have that inner desire to be a professional educator since our job requires constant development and*

*learning. We cannot just stop and teach the same things for years. Our knowledge and teaching approaches should be revised and improved. If a teacher does not have a desire to learn, he or she cannot be considered as a teacher anymore.*

This quote reveals that professional commitment is an essential quality for school teachers. Eight teachers agreed that commitment and motivation to the profession contribute to professionalism; it is a driving force of school improvement, especially in terms of professional development for teachers.

All ten participants believe that having a variety of opportunities for professional development sustains teacher professionalism at school. A teacher of physical education describes how opportunities for development improve her teaching practice:

*For me, it does not matter if it is an online course or a course at the school site. I always try to take more from my participation. For example, I attended a course dedicated to develop critical thinking skill. I found it very useful as I learnt some techniques and tasks that will help me to develop students' critical thinking ability. Such courses make me more professional in my subject, I feel more confident during the lessons.*

This teacher's response reveals that opportunities for professional development enable teachers to improve their teaching practices, which appear to result in more effective student learning (Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Webb et. al, 2004). There is a common pattern in terms of attitude towards having a variety of opportunities for professional development, wherein most interview respondents feel motivated and enthusiastic to gain more knowledge and methodological support from the opportunities the school provides.

During interviews, eight participants mention a '2+1' school project as an activity that contributes to teacher professionalism. Teachers with little experience pointed out that the school project '2+1' helps them in becoming more professional. The '2+1' project allows teachers to attend and observe each other's lessons on an agreed time. Every teacher is supposed to attend 2 lessons by other teachers who teach the same subject as the attendee, plus 1 lesson by a different subject teacher. These professional visits help beginning teachers to learn more about teaching methods and learning strategies that they can apply later in their lessons. Moreover, a '2+1' project contributes to better collaboration among teachers at school, as they discuss the lesson stages and share their views together. As a teacher of English says about the advantages of this project:

*When I have a chance to visit my colleagues' lessons, I learn more about using interesting teaching techniques that I can apply in my lessons. I find lesson observations very useful as I can see my students working in another lesson and the observations help to be a more effective teacher. I do not have many years of teaching experience so such observations give me an opportunity to improve my teaching style and understand children's psychology better.*

Four participants said that a mentoring program in school contributes to teacher professionalism. Three of the four respondents are beginning teachers. According to the participants with less than five years of teaching experience, the school offers good

opportunities for enhancing teaching practice through a mentoring program. The mentoring program creates conditions for a professional collaboration between a beginning teacher and a teacher with a rich teaching practice, wherein teachers plan lessons together, observe each other's lessons and provide constructive feedback regarding teaching and learning. Young teachers stated that this program contributes to their professional development and the gaining of useful teaching experience. A teacher of history describes how the mentoring program helped him address challenges in the classroom:

*I had problems with some naughty students in my class who teased other students and (I) didn't know what to do with them. I explained the situation to my mentor and asked for advice...She suggested some useful tips that I started applying in the lessons. Later, to my excitement, their behavior changed and the relationships became better...Her help was a relief to me.*

This response reveals that the mentoring program nurtures teaching practices, especially for beginning teachers. This program, as younger teachers state, is a key initiative for becoming a professional teacher.

Eight interview participants defined their participation in professional learning communities (PLC) at school as a factor that has a positive influence on their professionalism. A PLC is a group of educators who meet regularly, share expertise, and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. There are three main PLCs in the schools that these participants attend for their professional development: "action research", "lesson study" and "teaching talented and gifted children". Eight interview participants mentioned that such PLCs enrich their teaching and student learning. A Kazakh language teacher shares her experience regarding the effectiveness of being part of a lesson study project on her practice:

*I am part of Lesson study group. I think that working with colleagues in such professional communities makes me feel I am not alone with the challenges or issues that emerge in the class or school. My colleagues from lesson study group help me explore my practice through observations, class projects and discussions.*

Consequently, it should be emphasized that participation in a school PLC can have a positive influence on teachers' practices. Indeed, eight participants identified PLCs as a factor that contributes to teacher professionalism, stating that participation in a school PLC has enriched both their teaching and student learning. According to the responses of these eight participants, PLCs help teachers to reflect on their practices and discuss classroom challenges.

Another factor that contributes to teacher professionalism is school-based courses that teachers attend to improve their language skills (Kazakh and English) and ICT competencies. The courses are intended to provide support and assistance to school teachers, despite their teaching experience or subject. Seven interview participants claimed that these school-based language courses are beneficial for teaching in a trilingual learning environment, and ICT courses increase teachers' confidence while creating presentations or online documents for lessons. Some teachers attended courses because they have a language or technology goal. Teachers are enthusiastic to attend Kazakh or English language courses, because they work in a trilingual environment. Teachers and students are expected to have sufficient skills in

three languages. As a consequence, during their lessons, teachers of the school organize activities that improve students' language skills. A physical education teacher describes how a school language course enhanced her level of Kazakh language:

*I attend Kazakh lessons for teachers twice a week. This is a very unusual experience for me as in my previous work we didn't have such opportunities. I often try to use Kazakh and English languages during my lessons with my students, especially for setting tasks and giving instructions. There is much progress in my Kazakh, I should admit.*

The final factor mentioned during the interviews was work environment. Nine respondents consider a friendly and trustworthy environment at school as one of the key factors that contribute to teacher professionalism. Teachers' responses reveal that working in a friendly place makes them feel safe and confident. A teacher of Russian explains how a friendly school environment keeps her enthusiastic during the day:

*This is my third year in this school and I have found some good friends here. I realize I work more efficiently if I have breakfast or lunch with school colleagues whom I can trust and talk openly. In general, I don't want to say that everyone on board is friendly and nice as I do not know some of the teachers, especially who came last year. Anyway, there are some teachers, who can make my working day brighter even when I have so many things to do at work.*

According to the majority of the participants, a supportive work environment promotes collaboration and trust among schoolteachers. Nine participants imply that in such working environments they are open for building rapport as well as feel motivated to work and collaborate by learning and sharing with other teachers. Knowing that you are trusted as a specialist increases teachers' morale and self-esteem. Therefore, it is vital to create a supportive work environment where teachers will feel comfortable to teach and collaborate.

### **Factors Inhibiting Teacher Professionalism**

Seven participants believed that if teachers are not motivated to develop professionally, such an attitude can be a hindrance to better teaching and learning. What is more, more than a half of the participants claim that lack of motivation can prevent school improvement. A teacher of biology describes how lack of teachers' motivation might affect school improvement:

*I am afraid (of) what might happen if all teachers became not interested in their professional development. As one of the Kazakh poets said, "teacher is the heart of the school" and these words emphasize the significance of teachers' contribution to learning, teaching and school improvement in general. Therefore, if the teachers lack motivation to increase their professional potential, the students' academic achievement will decrease and the school will not be able to develop in a sustainable way.*

Nine respondents considered lack of time-management skills as another important factor that inhibits teacher professionalism. According to the participants, this factor can prevent them from effective planning and prioritizing tasks. A teacher of English shares her opinion regarding poor time-management skills:

*In this rapid pace of life and constant flow of information, it is quite challenging to organize your day and stick to the things that you have planned. I want to do certain things during the day, like checking and marking the students' assignments, attend the meeting, plan the lessons and go to school courses but the plans turn out to be half done at the end of the working day. This makes me even more stressful. I even don't have time to read and learn something new for myself.*

Eight participants mentioned burnout as a factor that inhibits professionalism at school. In most cases, burnout is associated with being exhausted, stressful and emotionally deteriorated. This is quite a common phenomenon for many professions, including teachers. A science teacher explains how burnout has affected her at times:

*I teach five or six lessons a day and I also have extra lessons for weaker students. My schedule is pretty tough as I spend most of my time teaching the class or grading the students' work. I feel so tired at the end of the day that at home I just relax. I do not read or learn something and that is very frustrating for me. There are days when I have not so many lessons and it is when I can learn and reflect my own practice.*

It can be noticed that burnout at work does not allow teachers to find spare time for reading or learning, as they have to prepare for or teach classes. If teachers feel too stressful or too tired, they are not likely to be able to dedicate time to increase their teaching potential through reading research or learning more about recent innovations in education. Therefore, burnout inhibits teacher professionalism in school.

Seven interview participants complained that too much paperwork is a hindrance to their teaching practice and professional development. The participants believe that teaching has become more of a bureaucracy: new reports and forms need to be completed on a regular basis. A teacher of Kazakh shared the following view regarding school paperwork:

*About fifteen years ago, I did not have so much paperwork. Basically, I was checking and grading students' work; you know, a normal routine for teachers. I would say that in the last five-six years teaching has transformed in a significant way and for me, this change is not for the better. Teaching has become more of clerical work than a learning process. Writing reports, letters and different forms takes most of my time. After that, I feel uninspired ...and do not want to do anything, just want to rest for some time.*

The interview participants point out the final factor inhibiting professionalism is a lack of autonomy for teachers. Seven out of ten participants claim that they have limited opportunities for exercising flexibility at school. A language teacher shared her view on the limited opportunities for teachers' autonomy during lessons as follows:

*I like our school program as it develops all four main skills of our students: they listen, read, write and speak in Russian during the lessons. However, I have some concerns. The problem I have is that my lessons are focused more on doing the tasks to achieve learning objectives rather than practicing language skills. For example, there are about seventeen learning objectives in the term. Since the terms are not long, that means we are short of time. The*

*students have to achieve all the objectives, and there is not enough time for doing some extra activities that I would like to do with the students. We just stick to the learning objectives.*

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

These interview findings reveal that teachers perceive professionalism as a flexible and dynamic phenomenon. Both young and mature teachers admit that professionalism is a changing notion that enables teachers to stay focused on their practices.

During the interviews, nine teachers emphasized that professionalism is closely connected with professional development explaining the significance of ongoing development and learning for professional teachers. Hargreaves & Cunningham (2010) as well as other researchers (Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Sachs, 1997; Wardoyo et al., 2017; Webb et al., 2004;) have also found teachers indicating professional development as one of the most important factor of professionalism.

We found that it is crucial for teachers to meet learners' needs and make the lessons encouraging and supportive for all learners. Most teachers consider giving learners the best education and making a difference to students' lives as the core elements of teaching and learning. Webb et al. (2004) also identified a similar finding in their research, stating that children and their learning is consistently a priority for teachers from different backgrounds.

Furthermore, these teachers perceive professionalism as deep subject knowledge that enables teachers to motivate students for better learning. This finding is notable in that all ten participants were convinced that sufficient subject knowledge is an essential part of teacher professionalism. This finding is also in line with Locke et al. (2005), who found that teachers view the knowledge and skills necessary for a teaching career as considerably important in identifying professional school educators.

During the interviews, the participants named information and communication technology (ICT) skills as a crucial must-have for a modern classroom. Teachers highlighted that ICT skills enrich their lessons and engage learners in an effective way. Similar findings are also presented in Ifanti and Fotopoulou's (2011) study. Equally, Okas et al. (2014) have indicated that such skills enhance teacher professionalism in school.

Overall, teachers' answers are in line with the research findings of other studies. These similarities reveal that teachers share common understanding and perceptions about professionalism. The educators of Kazakhstan also share generally similar perceptions about factors that contribute and inhibit teacher professionalism.

## **Implications**

### **School Administration**

Schools may create good conditions for increasing professional collaboration among its teachers by promoting a supportive and trustworthy environment at school. Teachers may meet with school administration and share the issues they face in their daily teaching or they can complete surveys about the challenges that inhibit their work in school. Together teachers and school administration can discuss and solve the issues. Such constructive

cooperation can be reasonably expected to result in more effective teaching, higher student academic achievement and school improvement.

Schools can also provide a certain amount of time that is systematically dedicated to teacher professional development. During this time, teachers may read articles, learn Kazakh or English languages and focus on their research or projects. Spending time in this manner may help teachers to reduce their stress, take a break from their routine work and reflect on their teaching practice. Time for professional development should contribute to teacher professionalism and also promote one of the main values of modern education - lifelong learning.

### **Educational Policy Implications**

The study findings also suggest policy implications for teacher professionalism at NIS schools. The successful initiatives of NIS network schools may be also implemented in other Kazakhstani schools. Such school projects as “2+1” mentoring program, action research and lesson study should become widespread within the country’s schools to support professionalism among early career and more experienced teachers alike. Common school projects may enable teachers to build professional learning communities to share their challenges in their teaching practices and address issues together. Such collaborations is likely to increase teacher morale and commitment to the profession.

Key policy makers may also provide a variety of opportunities for teacher professional development by initiating trainings and workshops that will address the needs of school teachers. It is crucial to keep teachers updated with recent reforms and innovations and such professional trainings and workshops should enhance teaching and learning. Therefore, the implementation of professional development programs should sustain teacher professionalism in the school context.

The final implication of the study for educational policy makers is to reduce paperwork for school teachers. There has been too much accountability placed on teachers over the last decade, not only in our country but in others as well. Accountability requires teachers to write various reports and forms to prove that they do what they are supposed to do. Bureaucracy has become a dominant part of teaching and this is not a change for the better. It is significant for stakeholders, parents and other members of the community to ensure that teachers teach and students learn in an efficient way. However paperwork should be reduced to a minimum, and the reduction should seek to allow teachers to prepare interesting and engaging lessons, collaborate with other school colleagues, and find time for professional development.

These suggested implications can be expected to contribute to sustaining teacher professionalism in Kazakhstani schools. It is important to provide conditions for teacher professional development and continuous learning, especially in today’s fast-paced world, where teachers are expected to be competent, vibrant and flexible in their workplace. To sustain professionalism means there should be an overall emphasis on effective teaching and learning through the professional development of school educators.

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**A Perception-Based Curricular Review on the K to 12 HUMSS Strand Curriculum**

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### Abstract

This study examines the perception of Humanities and Social Science teachers among public Senior High Schools in the Department of Education's Humanities and Social Sciences strand in the Philippines. It uses Erden's element-based model of evaluation by considering the alignment to the goals of the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines, the purpose, and core courses of the program, and the teaching-learning process. It also uses Tyler's Rationale as frameworks in assessing the curriculum. Likewise, the study examines the problems and difficulties in curricular implementation. Upon administering a survey to 25 Humanities and Social Science teachers among four public senior high schools, data revealed that the respondents perceived the curriculum goals, and the purpose of the program as highly observed, while the core courses of the program and teaching-learning process were satisfactorily observed in the curriculum. Also, sex and age were not factors in their level of assessment of Humanities and Social Science goals. The problems and difficulties encountered by teachers included unbalanced time allocation of learning competencies, lack of available learning materials, and lack of specialized teachers. Based on the findings, it is suggested that the government provide stronger teacher support programs to address the gap in curriculum implementation. The K to 12 program also needs a full review, as the study only provides a presurvey to more significant institutional issues. While the Humanities and Social Science curriculum appears aligned with the goals of their disciplines, and to the country's educational goals, its realization still depends upon the teachers' implementation in the classroom level.

*Keywords:* basic education, HUMSS, basic education, educational reform, teacher perception

## Introduction

The Philippines overhauled its 10-year basic education curriculum following the implementation of the Republic Act 10533 or “The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013”. The said law aimed at improving the curriculum and raising the number of years of basic education. This educational reform resulted in the addition of the two-year Senior High School (SHS) program and the mandatory kindergarten year. The new curriculum generally aimed at providing Filipino students with enough time to master the skills and concepts for a college education with the addition of two exit points: work and entrepreneurship (International Consultants for Education and Fairs Monitor, 2013).

These two years of SHS encompass Specialized and Applied Subjects for skills development and Core Subjects for college readiness. It also facilitates four career paths which are the Academic, Technical-Vocational Livelihood, Sports, and Arts and Design Tracks (Shahani, 2015). Among the strands under the Academic Track is the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS). This curriculum generally seeks to produce critical thinking, socially responsible, and globally aware citizens. These include skills development on logical reasoning, creativity, appreciation of one’s culture, research and communication skills, responsibility, productivity, environmental consciousness, and global visioning (Southeast Asian Minister of Education, Organization, Innovation and Technology, 2012).

While the goals of the new curriculum are promising, the K to 12 program allegedly lacks systematic conceptualization and implementation (Umil, 2014). Ridon, the nationalist *Kabataan* party-list representative, viewed the K to 12 program as haphazardly implemented (Umil, 2014). While teachers are always ready to teach the students, the curriculum support is not sufficient to equip them with K to 12 competencies. Additionally, the League of Filipino Students, a progressive youth group, viewed the new curriculum to be not for the Filipinos, but for the capitalists who need already-trained workers for their companies. They saw it as only producing semi-skilled laborers and peddling graduates to foreign capitalists, and suggest that the whole education sector is fast becoming a large exploitative machine (Umil, 2014).

*Anakbayan*, another progressive youth activist group, has affirmed this issue by highlighting the flawed, problematic framework of the K to 12 program. Crisostomo, the group chairperson, said that this will only create cheaper, more exploitative labor and will only further subject Filipino youths to foreign monopolies. Thus, the K to 12 program may well be problem-ridden rather than solution-oriented (Education Crisis Worsened Under Aquino, 2012, as cited in Calderon, 2014, p. 546).

Additionally, the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), a nationalist organization of teachers, has also expressed the need to suspend the K to 12 program, citing its lack of preparation for classroom facilities and qualified teachers. Valbuena, the ACT chairperson, identified a backlog in the construction of classrooms and laboratories, in the deliveries of references, and in the hiring of competitive and qualified teachers to teach SHS (Human Rights Philippines, 2015, as cited in Abulencia, 2015, p. 234).

Teacher-interest lobbyists such as the Teachers’ Dignity Coalition (TDC) and *Ating Guro* Partylist affirm these concerns. They rated the Department of Education (DepEd) with a B (74%-below) regarding its K to 12 program implementation. Basas, the TDC chairperson, similarly cited a shortage of essential resources such as seats, classrooms, learning and teaching

materials, and other facilities, and teacher readiness (Malipot, 2014, as cited in Abulencia, 2015, p. 233).

Senator Cayetano and Senator Gatchalian's positions confirm these issues further. Senator Cayetano, who is the current Lower House Speaker, recently asked the Legislative Branch to review the K to 12 program as it is not fulfilling its purpose in preparing the SHS graduates for college and work (Diaz, 2019). Graduates of the new curriculum cannot find jobs nor exhibit college readiness skills. These problems add to the existing institutional issues on the lack of classrooms, facilities, and teaching personnel. Senator Gatchalian, who leads the committee on K to 12 program implementation, even expressed the need to assess the government's readiness in implementing the K to 12 program citing insufficient preparation and declining student performance (Terrazola, 2019).

Thus, it has become essential to evaluate the K to 12 program, especially the SHS curriculum implementation. In particular, the HUMSS strand needs curricular assessment if the curriculum is to comply with the goals of the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines, which are the development of critical thinking skills, and the development of socially responsible and globally aware citizens (Kallendorf, 2002; Southeast Asian Minister of Education, Organization, Innovation and Technology, 2012). These are the same skills needed for one to examine the perceived problem-ridden nature of the K to 12 program.

### **Literature Review**

Tyler (1949) stated that a curriculum should be a program of constant evaluation and revision. A good curriculum must be dynamic as it looks into the nature and structure of knowledge, the learners' needs, and the society's needs. Referred to as Tyler's Rationale, it explores curriculum perspectives such as educational objectives, selection of learning experiences and its organization, and method of assessment. Thus, most curricular reviews employ this paradigm. For Tyler, the identification of educational objectives will set the content and type of student learning. It will be the basis for the selection and organization of contents and materials, the development of instructional procedures, and the preparation of tests and examinations. More importantly, the curriculum must adhere to the philosophy of the discipline and the country's educational system. Lastly, the results of the evaluation will be the basis for improving or adjusting the curriculum to attain the educational objectives. However, Tyler's Rationale is a linear model and lacks a feedback mechanism that could place importance on the opinions of teachers.

Erden (1998) developed the element-based model of evaluation, by looking into the opinions and viewpoints of participants regarding program components. With specific curriculum elements set, fundamental flaws and deficiencies in the curriculum quickly emerge. This model explicitly seeks to evaluate the extent of meeting the objectives and the underlying defects and problems of a curriculum. Erden (1998), as cited in Aslan and Günay (2016), said this model answers evaluations on general and specific objectives, conditions of learning and testing, and relationships between curricular elements. The said curricular elements help in identifying potential problems that may emerge during the design and implementation. Thus, by considering program components on targets, content, education, contexts, and evaluation as curricular elements, Erden's element-based model allows for a holistic approach in curriculum evaluation (Aslan & Günay, 2016). This model is also best evaluated using teachers' and students' opinions, who are the interpreters and receivers of the curriculum.

While the two curricular evaluation models allow for a broader perspective of the curriculum, Bilbao et al. (2015) highlighted the principles of scope, sequence, continuity, integration, articulation, and balance as specific elements of a good curriculum. By considering these curricular principles, the educational system would respond to the goals of the discipline, the needs of the students and teachers, and the goals of education.

Generally, curriculum evaluation occurs via four different phases: curriculum planning, which considers the school's vision-mission and goals; curriculum designing, which includes the selection and organization of learning activities; curriculum implementation, which is the actual application of the design or plan in the classroom to produce the intended learning outcomes; and curriculum evaluation, which determines the extent of achievement of educational goals (Bilbao et al., 2015; Erden, 1998; Tyler, 1949). Thus, the analysis of data for the current study will revolve around these theories.

### **Related Studies**

Curriculum reviews aim to evaluate academic programs by highlighting its processes, effectivity, relevance, and deficiencies (Erden, 1998; Tyler, 1949). It is a critical examination involving curriculum implementers and receivers. Results and recommendations of different curriculum reviews are thematically grouped, based on the following problem areas:

**Problem of Educational Goals and Purpose.** The study of Muhammad et al. (2019) suggested a need to review curricular outcomes to align the country's demand towards Education 5.0, Industry 4.0, and Sustainable Development Goals. Similarly, Gallagher et al. (2013) saw a need to revisit Westwood Public Schools' mission-vision statements and the need for content and skills continuity. On the other hand, Leduc (2010) observed the alignment of Natick Public Schools' K-12 Social Studies curriculum to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Social Studies Frameworks. However, the development of shared resources was still needed.

**Problem of Content and Continuity.** Aside from Gallagher et al. (2013), this is also shared by Shin (2017), citing insufficient theoretical grounds and unclear achievement standards, as well as a gap between classroom and practical learnings. Similarly, Khoza (2015) revealed that in-service teachers' lack of familiarity with learning theories underpinning curriculum resulted in implementation problems. Using Tyler's Rationale, Fozoni et al. (2016) showed the need to emphasize the concepts and skills of citizenship learning and the creation of appropriate activities. Jaca et al. (2018) also saw the difficulty in actual classroom implementation, which was partly caused by a lack of specific criteria brought by a poorly articulated content standard. Correspondingly, the absence of a proper framework defining the inclusion and organization of learning competencies was shown by Bernardo and Mendoza (2009), following the 2002 Philippine Basic Education reform. This reform included problems with unsuitable suggested time allotment, lack of teaching-learning materials, and creation of additional tasks for teachers. Additionally, the curriculum review by Roy (2015) highlighted a "loaded curriculum", where the emphasis on state standards resulted in the inclusion of an overwhelming number of subject content areas. There was also a need for integration between the classroom and external realities.

**Problem of Moderate to Negative Perception.** Aside from the issue of content due to unbalanced curriculum courses and undefined content standards, Alghazo (2015) determined that respondents only had positive regard on core courses but not on majors. Using the element-based model of evaluation, Aslan and Günay (2016) revealed the moderate opinions of teachers

and students on curricular elements. However, respondents were more likely to answer the “disagree” choices. Correspondingly, a negative teachers’ view was seen by Taole (2013) following a curricular change, and highlighted that teacher support was still the basis for every curricular reform. Teacher support is an essential component as teachers’ presumptions affect curriculum interpretation and implementation.

**Problem of Implementation.** The need for teacher support is most common in different curricular reviews. Yusof et al. (2017) showed teachers’ positive regard on curricular change. However, there were problems such as inappropriate competencies on modules, time constraints, lack of teacher training, and extra efforts leading to teacher burden. Similarly, Thompson et al. (2011) revealed a lack of teaching-learning resources and unfamiliarity with the topics as problems; and Kilinc (2016) on curriculum deficiencies such as lack of learning materials and insufficient curriculum content though there was generally a positive view. In the local study of Rivera (2017), there seems to be complacency of Filipino teachers in the K to 12 program implementation. This study revealed that teachers’ pedagogy deviates from the learner-centered aims of the program. Additionally, the study of Calderon (2014) emphasized the critical role of teachers, given that the curriculum is new but old problems such as the lack of facilities and declining performance still exist.

Focusing on the ideas and issues discussed about curriculum, this study identifies the gap between standard classroom education and actual classroom implementation. It will do this by assessing the alignment of the K to 12 HUMSS curriculum, based on the identified curricular elements and the problems and difficulties encountered by the teachers of this curriculum.

## Methodology

### Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the respondents’ level of perception on the Humanities and Social Science goals as observed in the HUMSS curriculum?
2. Is there a significant relationship between the overall level of perception of the Humanities and Social Sciences Goals, and the respondents’ sex and age?
3. What is the respondents’ level of perception on the HUMSS curriculum regarding:
  - 3.1 Purposes of the Program;
  - 3.2 Core Courses of the Program; and
  - 3.3 Teaching-Learning Processes?
4. What problems and difficulties do teachers encounter in the implementation of the HUMSS curriculum?

### Research Locale, Research Design, Respondents

This study focused on determining the perception of SHS teachers among four public High Schools offering the HUMSS strand in Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines. This study followed the descriptive research design. It aimed at gaining the respondents’ perceptions on how well were the curricular elements namely, the alignment to (1) Humanities goals, and (2) Social Sciences goals; (3) purpose of the program; (4) core courses of the program; and the (5) teaching-learning process, were observed in the HUMSS curriculum. Each of the sub-questions therein was rated using a five-point scale where 1 was Not Observed at All (NO), 2 was Fairly Observed (FO), 3 was Satisfactorily Observed (SO), 4 was Highly Observed (HO), and 5 was



Very Highly Observed (VHO). The last part of the questionnaire contained three semi-open ended questions, asking the respondents to provide additional information on the problems and difficulties they had identified.

The respondents were chosen based on their teaching positions and subjects handled. First, the respondent must be an appointed Senior High School teacher from the Civil Service Commission. Second, the respondent has taught any of the Specialized HUMSS subjects: Community Engagement, Solidarity and Citizenship; Creative Non-fiction; Creative Writing; Disciplines and Ideas in the Social Sciences; Disciplines and Ideas in the Applied Social Sciences; Introduction to World Religions and Belief Systems; Philippine Politics and Governance; and Trends, Networks, and Critical Thinking in the 21st Century (Academic Track, n.d.). A total of 25 teachers qualified, which represented the respondents' entire population.

### **Limitations**

The study focused on the first two years of SHS program implementation (2016-2017; 2017-2018). It considered all four public schools offering the HUMSS strand in Mandaue City, assuming that private schools have substantial administrative support while public schools do not because they depend on government support. More importantly, the study examined teachers' perceptions of their curriculum-related experiences, therefore providing primarily a qualitative description of these experiences.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire composed of 44 questions including the profile in terms of age, sex, and educational background; the curriculum; and the problems and difficulties. The sets of questions considered the available literature and the curricular elements previously studied. The instrument was pilot-tested with a Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.945. The study complied with ethical research standards by getting permission from the Schools Division Superintendent and the school principals, ensuring respondents' confidentiality, and getting the respondents' consent before survey administration.

For the descriptive measures, the study used descriptive statistical treatments, such as frequency and percentage distribution, mean, and standard deviation, in presenting and analyzing the data. For correlational statistical treatment, a chi-square test determined the independence of the level of assessment concerning gender. In contrast, a Pearson-*r* test determined the level of significance of the level of assessment concerning age.

## **Findings**

### **On the Goals of the Humanities and Social Sciences Disciplines**

Generally, respondents viewed the goals of the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines as highly observed in the HUMSS curriculum. As to the Humanities goals, respondents highly observed "tolerance" while "sense of local and national history" was least observed. This difference in perception means that some components of the Humanities goals require greater emphasis. However, the respondents generally perceived this curricular element as highly observed.

Table 1. Respondents' Perception of the Goals of Humanities in the HUMSS Curriculum

HUMANITIES GOALS	Weighted Average	Qualitative Description*
<i>1.1 An inquiring mind:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum allows students to think uniquely.	3.48	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum allows students to think logically.	3.52	HO
<i>Mean</i>	3.50	HO
<i>1.2 A sense of history - local and national:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum promotes local history.	3.48	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum promotes national history from the perspective of one's locality.	3.48	HO
c. The HUMSS curriculum promotes understanding of world history from the perspective of local/national history.	3.40	SO
<i>Mean</i>	3.45	HO
<i>1.3 Tolerance:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum helps students to respect others' points of view.	3.88	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum promotes appreciation and recognition of human diversity.	4.04	HO
c. The HUMSS curriculum provides an avenue for inclusivity.	3.72	HO
<i>Mean</i>	3.88	HO
<i>1.4 A sense of internationalism:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum recognizes the emerging world community to which people can identify.	3.72	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum advocates for greater cooperation among nations.	3.40	SO
<i>Mean</i>	3.56	HO

\*Legend used in subsequent tables:  
4.21-5.00 - Very Highly Observed (VHO)  
3.41-4.20 - Highly Observed (HO)  
2.61-3.40 - Satisfactorily Observed (SO)  
1.81-2.60 - Fairly Observed (FO)  
1.00-1.80 - Not Observed At All (NO)

In relation to the Social Sciences goals, respondents highly observed “integrating ideas and making connections from other disciplines” while “civic responsibility and active civic participation” were least observed. These differences in perception means that there are components of the Social Science goals that also need greater emphasis. However, the respondents generally perceived this curricular element as highly observed.

Table 2. Respondents' Perception of the Goals of Social Sciences in the HUMSS Curriculum

SOCIAL SCIENCES GOALS	Weighted Average	Qualitative Description*
<i>2.1 Civic responsibility and active civic participation:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum promotes attitudes needed in nation-building.	3.80	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum provides avenues for students to participate in civic work.	3.72	HO
<i>Mean</i>	3.76	HO
<i>2.2 Critical thinking skills:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum promotes reflective and reasonable thinking.	3.92	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum helps students in problem-solving or decision-making.	3.72	HO
c. The HUMSS curriculum develops students' strategies and skills in decision-making.	3.76	HO
<i>Mean</i>	3.80	HO
<i>2.3 Integrating ideas and making connections from other disciplines:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum promotes an interdisciplinary understanding of human society and the natural world.	4.00	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum helps students connect ideas from various disciplines.	4.08	HO
<i>Mean</i>	4.04	HO
<i>2.4 Developing awareness and understanding of contemporary social issues:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum promotes awareness of different social issues.	3.84	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum promotes a holistic understanding of different social issues facing the world today.	3.92	HO
<i>Mean</i>	3.88	HO

### On the Respondents' Age and Sex and their Perception of HUMSS Goals

Generally, the respondents' sex and age were not factors in their perception of the alignment of the HUMSS curriculum with the Humanities and Social Sciences Goals. The computed chi-square of 1.85 and a  $p$ -value of 0.1736, which was greater than  $\alpha=.05$ , means that sex was not related to their perception of Humanities goals. Similarly, the computed chi-square of 1.10 and a  $p$ -value of 0.2936, which was greater than  $\alpha=.05$ , means that sex was also not a factor towards their perception of the Social Science goals.

Table 3. Relationship between Respondents' Sex and their Perception of the Humanities and Social Sciences Goals

Group		Teachers' Perception		$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
		Not Observed at All/ Fairly Observed/ Satisfactorily Observed	Highly Observed/ Very Highly Observed		
Humanities Goals	Male	2	8	1.85 <sup>ns</sup>	0.1736
	Female	7	8		
Social Sciences Goals	Male	2	8	1.10 <sup>ns</sup>	0.2936
	Female	6	9		

\*ns = not significant

Age was not a factor in their perception of the Humanities as indicated by the computed Pearson *r* of 0.056 and a *p*-value of 0.78, which was greater than  $\alpha=.05$ . Similarly, age was not a determinant towards their perception of the Social Science goals with the computed Pearson *r* of 0.305 and a *p*-value of 0.14, which was greater than  $\alpha=.05$ . As to the Social Sciences, the calculated *r*-value of 0.056, which was  $<0.2$ , means that there was a very weak relationship between age and their perception, thus, a negligible correlation existed for this relationship.

Table 4. Relationship between Respondents' Age and their Perception of the Humanities and Social Sciences Goals

	Variables	N	Mean	SD	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Humanities Goals	Age	25	37.48	8.25	0.056 <sup>ns</sup>	0.78
	Level of Assessment		3.61	0.67		
Social Sciences Goals	Age	25	37.48	8.25	0.305 <sup>ns</sup>	0.14
	Level of Assessment		3.73	0.68		

\*ns = not significant

### On the Purpose of the Program

Generally, respondents perceived the purpose of the program as highly observed with a general weighted average of 4.01. Respondents highly observed that the curriculum “prepares students for a college education” while “promotion of the country’s national interest” as the least. However, the respondents perceived all elements as highly observed. This high perception means that respondents viewed the educational goals to be well-articulated in the HUMSS curriculum.

Table 5. Respondents' Perception of the HUMSS Curriculum's Purpose of the Program

PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM	Weighted Average	Qualitative Description*
<i>3.1 Adherence to the Department of Education's Mission and Vision</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum follows DepEd's Vision to "create Filipinos who passionately love their country and whose values and competencies enable them to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to nation-building" (Department of Education, n.d.).	4.04	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum follows DepEd's Mission to "protect and promote the right of every Filipino to quality, equitable, culture-based, and complete basic education" (Department of Education, n.d.).	4.04	HO
<i>Mean</i>	4.04	HO
<i>3.2 Promotion of the country's national interest:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum adheres to national state policies such as pursuing the right to self-determination, social justice, the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights, etc.	3.92	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum discusses contemporary international issues that are significant to the country.	3.80	HO
<i>Mean</i>	3.86	HO
<i>3.3 Preparation of students for college education:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum prepares students with needed knowledge for a college education.	4.16	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum prepares students with the required skills needed for a college education.	4.08	HO
<i>Mean</i>	4.12	HO
General Weighted Mean	4.01	HO

### On the Core Courses of the Program

Generally, respondents perceived the core courses of the program as only satisfactorily observed, with a general weighted mean of 3.35. Interestingly, respondents perceived the sequence of contents and theories as highly observed. At the same time, they only had satisfactory observation of the number of subjects that were either over-represented or under-represented. This difference means that while the HUMSS curriculum contains enough content and theories, there is a problem with the allotted time.

Table 6. Respondents' Perception of the Core Courses of the HUMSS Curriculum

CORE COURSES OF THE PROGRAM	Weighted Average	Qualitative Description*
<i>4.1 The sequence of contents and theories in core courses:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum contains the right content needed for Humanities.	3.60	HO
b. The HUMSS curriculum contains the right content needed for Social Sciences.	3.56	HO
c. The curricular design for HUMSS subjects is progressive such that one subject becomes a prerequisite to a higher subject.	3.44	HO
<i>Mean</i>	3.53	HO
<i>4.2 The number of over-represented subjects:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum contains topics with too much number of hours required per curriculum guide (CG). For example, a topic has two-week coverage in CG, but the topic should only be for one week.	3.08	SO
<i>4.3 The number of under-represented subjects:</i>		
a. The HUMSS curriculum contains topics with less number of hours required per curriculum guide (CG). For example, a topic only has one-week coverage in CG, but the topic should go for two weeks.	3.08	SO
General Weighted Mean	3.35	SO

### **On the Teaching-Learning Process**

Generally, respondents perceived the teaching-learning process as satisfactorily observed with a general weighted average of 2.96. Respondents had a moderate opinion on teacher readiness and availability of teaching-learning resources. However, respondents assessed “the manner of implementation” as highly observed while the “availability of teaching guides and references” as fairly observed. These differences in perception mean that while teachers are ready to teach, they lack the tools needed to deliver the curriculum.

Table 7. Respondents' Perception of the Teaching-Learning Process of the HUMSS Curriculum

TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS	Weighted Average	Qualitative Description*
<i>5.1 The manner of implementation by teachers of the curriculum:</i>		
a. HUMSS teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to teach the curriculum.	3.72	HO
b. HUMSS teachers use various strategies that resulted in higher student performance.	3.68	HO
<i>Mean</i>	3.70	HO
<i>5.2 The availability of teaching guides and references:</i>		
a. DepEd teaching guides available for teachers' use.	2.92	SO
b. DepEd learning materials are available for students' use.	2.28	FO
c. DepEd books, references, and other resources are available for teachers' and students' use.	2.20	FO
<i>Mean</i>	2.47	FO
General Weighted Mean	2.96	SO

### On Problems and Difficulties in the Implementation

Table 8 confirms the results in the core courses and teaching-learning process. Fourteen (14) respondents said that there were too many learning competencies for a short period. Seventeen (17) respondents also identified the lack of books or references, which forced them to use their money to purchase resource materials. Additionally, three respondents said that there was a lack of specialized teachers to teach HUMSS. On the other hand, respondents identified least on learning competency being too general, lack of teaching equipment, non-cooperation of external stakeholders, and excessive extra-curricular activities. These issues only mean that there is a problem in the implementation of the HUMSS curriculum in the actual classroom setting.

Table 8. Respondents' Opinions on the Problems and Difficulties in the Implementation of the HUMSS Curriculum

Problems and Difficulties	<i>f</i>	Rank
1. HUMSS Curriculum		
• there are too many learning competencies for a short period	14	1
• the topics are repetitive/overlapping	8	2
• the curriculum is too crowded	4	3
• the sequence is disorganized	4	4
• learning competencies are too general	3	5
2. Resource Materials		
• there are no DepEd books or references provided	17	1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the teacher uses personal money to purchase resource materials</li> </ul>	16	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the school does not have the equipment needed for 21st-century learning</li> </ul>	4	3
3. Others		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lack of specialized teachers in HUMSS</li> </ul>	3	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>extra-curricular activities affect classes</li> </ul>	1	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>non-cooperation of external stakeholders</li> </ul>	1	3

### Discussion

The results of these analyses suggest that, overall, teachers had high perceptions of the HUMSS curriculum. This level of perception means that, generally, teachers have a favorable view of the K to 12 program. This positive view is in contrast to Taole (2013), where teachers had a negative view following a curricular change. However, a detailed analysis of the curricular elements also revealed flaws and deficiencies of the HUMSS curriculum of the K to 12 program.

#### Alignment to Humanities and Social Sciences Disciplines

The teachers highly observed the alignment of the HUMSS curriculum to the goals of the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines. This high perception means that the specific goals of these disciplines were well-articulated and well-observed in the curriculum. In contrast to Aslan and Günay (2016), teachers only had a moderate level of opinions on curricular elements. For Kallendorf (2002), this alignment of the HUMSS curriculum may produce literate citizens who can speak and write with clarity, who are active in the community, and who can make sensible decisions. Thus, the HUMSS curriculum is viewed as an effective curriculum in molding and delivering the social skills and values needed to create socially responsible and globally aware Filipinos.

**Factors of Perception.** The respondents' age and sex were not factors in their perception of the HUMSS curriculum. These two variables were likely not associated because teachers, regardless of sex and age, freely determine the content of learning and the manner of classroom delivery. The National Research Council (2012) also supports the view that the teacher ultimately decides how and what to teach in the classroom. Correspondingly, teachers are the ones who finally decide the fate of any educational enterprise (Ndlovu, 2017). Thus, the HUMSS teachers' perception of the HUMSS curriculum is not affected by their sex and age.

#### Purposes of the Program

Results indicated that teachers highly observed the integration of national goals and the DepEd's Mission and Vision in the HUMSS curriculum. This result is consistent with Leduc (2010), however it was again in contrast to Aslan and Günay (2016), where teachers only viewed these elements as moderately observed. Similarly, Gallagher et al. (2013) and Muhammad et al. (2019) also saw the need to reassess prescribed educational goals with the current needs of their countries. The recent implementation of the SHS program in 2016 probably explains this contrasting view. Thus, the revised HUMSS curriculum remains relevant to the needs of society.

The highly observed perception on the adherence of the HUMSS curriculum to the DepEd's Mission and Vision, and the promotion of the country's national interest, means that the educational philosophy and the goals of the nation were well-represented in the HUMSS



curriculum and its teaching-learning process. Using Tyler's Rationale, the educational purpose of the school to create nationalistic, law-abiding, and productive citizens was well-articulated in the curriculum, and the ability of these goals to produce educational experiences that students need to undertake was evident. Thus, the perceived strong relevance of the HUMSS curriculum contrasts with the perception of many youth activists, who suggest that the K to 12 program only produces semi-skilled laborers.

### **Core Courses of the Program**

Results also indicated that teachers only viewed the sequence and organization of the curriculum as satisfactorily observed. The moderate observation of curricular elements is consistent with Aslan and Günay (2016). Alghazo (2015) had the same results where core courses were positively regarded but still needs additional resources to other subject areas. Balantic (2014), Fozoni et al. (2016), Gallagher et al. (2013), and Roy (2015) also had similar results where they identified problems on clear scope and sequence; concepts, skills, and learning activities; and curriculum continuity. However, teachers highly observed the sequence of contents and theories. As per Bilbao et al. (2015), an effective curriculum follows the principles of scope, sequence, continuity, integration, articulation, and balance, and these were perceived as well-articulated in the HUMSS curriculum.

Conversely, respondents only satisfactorily observed the number of subjects that were either over-represented or under-represented. Following the suggested time allocation in the curriculum guide, there are topics that "take more time" to discuss while some are "too dragging." This unbalanced time allocation was also consistent with the studies of Balantic (2014), Bernardo and Mendoza (2009), Gallagher et al. (2013), Jaca et al. (2018), Roy (2015), and Shin (2017), which identified curricular problems in criteria, scope, and continuity. Thus, although the HUMSS curriculum contains the right topics, its existing suggested time allotment and topic organization appear problematic.

### **Teaching-Learning Process**

Results also indicated that teachers viewed the HUMSS curriculum as only satisfactorily observed. While teachers had the required knowledge and skills to be able to teach the curriculum, it missed out on teaching tools. As to the manner of implementation, the readiness of teachers to teach HUMSS subjects was probably because of the series of regional training before the SHS implementation (Department of Education Region VII, 2016). This readiness to teach contrasts with the lack of teaching guides and learning materials, which only had a fairly observed rating. Perhaps this was due to the tight implementation timeline of the K to 12 program which left the government with a limited period to acquire learning materials (Umil, 2014). These problems echo the concerns of *Anakbayan* (Calderon, 2014), ACT, TDC, and *Ating Guro* Partylist (Abulencia, 2015). These same issues were also identified in the studies of Bernardo and Mendoza (2009), Kilinc (2016), Thompson et al. (2013), and Yusof et al. (2017), where there is a lack of materials and teaching tools to attain the learning competencies. Using Tyler's Rationale, the lack of learning resources and teaching guides were indicators that there is a problem in meeting the educational purpose of the HUMSS curriculum.

### **Problems and Difficulties**

The responses to the problems and difficulties provide a better understanding of the teachers' perceptions. Generally, the number of learning competencies and time allocation were problems encountered by teachers. This concern is consistent in the studies of Balantic (2014), Bernardo and Mendoza (2009), Kilinc (2016), Roy (2015), and Yusof et al. (2017) of a loaded curriculum, and where subjects were either dragged or contracted.

As to the learning competencies, one teacher noted that the learning contents and skills were “*very heavy*” yet teachers have only one semester to deliver it. This same teacher said that some subjects must be implemented for one year to be “*fully internalized by the students while emphasizing the practical application*”. Another respondent also noted that the content standard did not relate to the learning competencies, for example, on the topic of migration.

As to the time allocation, topics were repetitive or overlapping such that there were topics that can go with another subject. Teachers also highlighted the problem of a disorganized sequence of subjects with prerequisites yet were offered in the same semester. Perhaps this was because of the limited number of HUMSS teachers in each school, which forced them to provide cognate subjects at the same time.

As to the resource materials, DepEd did not provide books and learning materials. Thus, teachers had to use their money to buy teaching resources in addition to more preparation time. Another problem was the lack of qualified teachers handling HUMSS subjects wherein three respondents were Mathematics teachers yet were assigned to teach HUMSS subjects. Another issue involved work immersion as students were still underage, and the excessive number of extra-curricular activities that affected the delivery of instruction.

These were the same issues highlighted by Bernardo and Mendoza (2009), Taole (2013), and Thompson et al. (2013) where major educational reforms resulted in problems in content, implementation, and support. Though the respondents perceived the HUMSS curriculum as highly aligned to the Humanities and Social Sciences goals, it still had issues in the actual implementation by the teachers.

Overall, it seems evident that, regardless of country and type of curriculum, teacher support is still the basis for every curricular reform (Calderon, 2014; Taole, 2013), which the Philippines falls short in its implementation of the HUMSS strand of the K to 12 program. The concerns expressed by different activist groups and government officials confirm that the K to 12 program needs an institutional review following a lack of support at the classroom implementation level.

### **Recommendations**

The national government is advised to take a more proactive role in the monitoring and implementation of the K to 12 program. Years after the law’s passage, it still needs strong support at the grassroots level. The government should establish strong teacher support programs to address the problems encountered by the primary implementers of the curriculum. This program refers to creating feedback mechanisms where teachers can voice their ideas, and where they can participate in the decision-making process. Also, the Department of Education needs provision to address the backlog of school buildings, teaching equipment, and facilities. The hiring of more qualified teachers would fundamentally address the issue of teachers teaching subjects outside their field of expertise. Lastly, there is a need for a curriculum review of the whole K to 12 program, aimed at investigating curriculum deficiencies and problems in terms of content, target, context, time allocation, and evaluation. This study only provided a glimpse of what could be more significant problems for the rest of the program.

## Conclusion

Generally, this study has revealed that the HUMSS curriculum of the K to 12 program provides a systematic learning experience for the students to grow academically and socially competent. The new curriculum embodied the principles of a good curriculum as it follows the principles of scope, sequence, continuity, integration, articulation, and balance. Using Erden's element-based model of evaluation, the current study revealed that the respondents positively observed the alignment of the Humanities and Social Sciences goals, the purpose of the curriculum, the core courses, and the teaching-learning process of the HUMSS curriculum. By then using Tyler's Rationale, the study revealed that these teachers highly perceived the articulation of the country's educational purpose and its organization in the HUMSS curriculum.

However, problems and difficulties in implementing the said curriculum appear to hinder the achievement of its educational purpose. Although the K to 12 program as associated with the HUMSS curriculum remains a good concept, it still lacks sufficient support at the level of classroom implementation. This seems to stem from perennial problems involving the lack of classrooms and teaching-learning facilities, as well as inadequate government support for the teachers who ultimately decide the fate of all educational endeavors. In turn, this has created a gap between the formal standards for classroom education and actual classroom implementation. Thus, because of insufficient support being provided, the K to 12 program appears unable to implement the country's major educational reform at an adequate level.

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**Empowering Adult Immigrant Learners Through Systematic Motivation Work  
in the Classroom**

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### Abstract

This is an action research study investigating how one can work systematically in adult learning centres to support adult immigrant learners to increase their intrinsic motivation and develop strategies to take responsibility for their own development and learning. We have applied what we call a five-step motivation method, where the adult students define and write down what is important to them, their success factors and their obstacles, and choose focus areas and strategies to apply to achieve what is important to them. As part of the process, the students also reflect on these elements in class discussions led by the teacher, which means that the students support each other to find solutions to their obstacles and to find strategies to work towards their goals. The student reflections from the sessions are part of the data collected in this study, and these are complemented by students' self-reports on the usefulness of the approach. The project was carried out in several groups at three adult learning centres, and the findings show that the majority of the participants were satisfied with the approach. They report that they became better at planning and more motivated to work towards their goals. An element that was emphasised by the teachers was the importance of letting the students use their native language when needed. We conclude that the method we present here may be a useful tool to assist adult immigrant learners to experience intrinsic motivation and develop strategies for mastering learning and life.

*Keywords:* adult learning, learning strategies, motivation, self-determination theory, self-regulated learning



*The year is 1987, and the place is Northern Iraq. I'm stationed at a military hospital because of my health care educational background. One day I was commanded to go to the war arena, and I was assigned the task to check on medical equipment. Every day I had to stay in my refuge, which was a small hole in the ground; 1 meter deep, 1 meter long and 50 centimeter in breadth. I had to stay in the hole the whole day not to be shot by the enemy. I could only leave it during night to work and to collect food and drink. In this hole, I experienced both mental and physical obstacles, but if I wanted to come home and see my family again, I had to focus on my own goal and my own plan, and manage to keep myself alive and fight death. I survived this horrible situation using the same type of strategy that the motivation method presents; I asked myself what my goal is, what the obstacles are, and what type of effort I have to make to survive. (Quote from an immigrant)*

This story illustrates the essence of the five-step motivation method presented in this article, a method that challenges people to identify their own goals, strengths and weaknesses in order to find solutions to possible obstacles. Many immigrants who come to a new culture with a foreign language, perhaps without official documentation on education and work experience, have difficulties succeeding in their new lives as the obstacles may be overwhelming. This study, carried out in three adult learning centres in Norway, presents an approach that may facilitate motivating and empowering immigrants by providing them with a strategy for mastering learning and life in general. The five-step approach applied builds on self-determination theory, stating that in order to be intrinsically motivated the three basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness must be met (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When applying the five-step motivation method, the teacher facilitates learners to take control of their own development and learning and lets learners choose goals according to their own values and ambitions, in order to meet the needs of competence and autonomy. The learners also discuss possible solutions to obstacles in a community of peers, which facilitates meeting the basic need of relatedness.

One essential element that influences whether immigrants succeed in being integrated in Norwegian society is their ability to learn the Norwegian language. We have an immigration law in Norway stating that people with status as immigrants have the right and duty to attend 600 hours of Norwegian and social science teaching (Introduksjonsloven, 2003, § 17), and if they need more Norwegian teaching, they have the right to receive up to 2400 extra hours (§18). Most immigrants who come as refugees enter into what is called an “introduction programme”, where they get a salary for attending classes for two or three years. Many refugees lack school certificates and they need to take classes to prepare for upper secondary school or higher education. Many do this while they are in the introduction programme, in addition to learning Norwegian. The latest trend in Norway is that more and more immigrants prepare for upper secondary school, regardless of whether they have an education from before or very little educational background, as it is becoming more and more difficult to get a job without documentation of some type of formal education.

In spite of comprehensive programmes, many immigrants experience that learning a new language and succeeding in a new society is a challenge. The purpose of the before-mentioned introduction programme is to “strengthen newly arrived immigrants” opportunities for participation in occupations and society, and gain economic independence” (2003, §1, own translation). Still, statistical numbers reveal that immigrants struggle to achieve this. While the unemployment rate for the total population generally has been low in Norway, (2.7% in 2018;

Statistics Norway, 2018), the unemployment rate among immigrants is normally higher (6.4% in 2018; Statistics Norway, 2018). This makes one ask the question as to whether the integration efforts we make in Norway have the effect that we wish for, or whether there is a need to search for new methods and approaches.

A recent research report on the Norwegian introduction programme for immigrants shows that it is difficult to prove a correlation between single efforts and results for participants in the introduction programme, and the conclusion of the report is that there are too few really qualifying measures in the programme as it is now (FAFO, 2017, p.31). This indicates a need for innovation in this field, something our study presents. The research question of this study is: Can a systematic approach, identifying goals, strengths and obstacles and deciding on focus and action, support adult immigrant learners to achieve increased motivation and strategies that help them take responsibility for their own learning and life? In the following, we present issues being debated currently in research in this field, the research methodology applied, the results and findings, and a discussion of these.

### **Literature Review**

For several decades, the idea of multiculturalism has been prominent in many liberal, Western nations, a concept that refers to the existence of cultural plurality in societies (Mitchell, 2017). However, there has been a significant political backlash to this idea of states that successfully can accommodate a diversity of cultures and religions. There have been several reactions in Europe against multiculturalism, claiming that it has failed as the celebration of cultural difference has been at the expense of community cohesion (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). This criticism has been countered by adult educators emphasising the importance of cultural dialogue and open educative spaces for different cultural groups (Morrice, 2018; Roets et al., 2011; Wildemeersch, 2011). Still, it is a much-debated issue in research on adult education of immigrants whether practices build on the idea of multiculturalism, or rather on an idea that immigrants need an intervention to successfully be included or integrated in society (Morrice et al., 2017).

In their critical work on discourse of adult education in Sweden, Fejes et. al. (2018), point out that the role of adult education is helping citizens adapt to a constantly changing society in line with normative assumptions concerning how citizens should be. They refer to this process as shaping neo-liberal subjectivities. In an earlier publication, the same authors claim that underlying this practice, there is a notion that the adult learners are not yet “full” citizens, and that adult learning is a place for abnormal citizens to be shaped and molded into desirable subjects, or into an employable workforce (Sandberg et al., 2016). In spite of positive notions and ambition to empower, Sandberg et.al claim that the adult learners appear to be failed citizens who need motivation and goals in life. In another study based on interviews with adult learners and teachers of adult education, the same researchers describe the Swedish municipal adult education as a place “for the individual to create a goal-oriented future” (Fejes et al., 2018, p. 471), with a focus on the labour market. This is described as an instrumental and non-relational process with little interaction among peers.

In line with the more recent research studies conducted in a Swedish context, a study conducted more than a decade ago by Morrice (2007), investigating lifelong learning and social integration of refugees in the UK, concluded that the discourse of inclusion leads to narrow learning opportunities for immigrants. She argues that there is a need to recognise the significance of the social capital the immigrants hold, and more informal and social learning

opportunities (2007). Also in German and Austrian contexts, research presents the same criticism (Heinemann, 2017), that the adult learning programmes for immigrants focus on economy and submission, making the learners employable and polite, as many of them later will hold badly paid positions with little independence.

A recent study from England and Scotland also shows efforts to create alternatives to the economy-driven programmes focused on labour markets (Duckworth & Tett, 2019). The alternative approach presented in this study facilitates learners to reclaim identities of success by giving them opportunities to recognise the discourses that shape them and how these discourses impact their lives. The learners were given space to explain their own life and learning narratives, and through this understand events that had held them back. By doing so, negativity was removed, and academic progress and personal fulfilment was achieved. An important element mentioned in this study is that the results were especially positive when the tutors engaged with the learners in an egalitarian way.

Research on adult learning for immigrants is limited in a Norwegian context (Monsen, 2015). However, one interesting finding from research on basic reading and writing training is that, very often, this type of instruction is seen as little relevant or useful, and it does not consider the adult learners' previous knowledge and experience (Alver & Dregelid, 2001; Monsen, 2015). A recent qualitative study shows that identity, self-feeling and motivation may be affected if one is not allowed to show who one is and what one is able to do (Alver & Dregelid, 2016). Research has shown that for students with less education, it is particularly important that their life- and language-experiences are not excluded (Auerbach, 1993, p. 18). Collier & Thomas' (2002) research on bilingual models concludes that it is important that cognitive, emotional and social needs are met in a developing language learning situation.

In Nortons's investigation of diverse aspects in relation to identity and language learning, she problematizes that learners can be defined as either motivated or unmotivated (2000). She also problemizes the dichotomous distinctions between the language learner and the language learning context and the learner's identity related to the world and the future. The learner's investment in English must be understood in the context of their changing identity across time and space, and the opportunities they have, meaning what situations they have access to participate in. Important aspects in second language learning which must be understood are learners' desire for friendship and social integrity (Spolsky, 1989), for feeling worthy and comfortable, for the possibilities for work – preferably in their professions – (Norton, 2000), and for the understanding of possibilities for the future (West, 1992). These aspects are taken into consideration in the approach applied in the current study on how to empower immigrants. The approach applied here, which will be more thoroughly described below, does not only focus on individuals' possibilities for the future, but also on individuals' past, their dreams and qualities, and how the social capital they hold can help them learn in the present, as well as shape their future.

### **Methodology**

This study is part of a larger action research study (cf. Postholm, 2007), where we have developed and adjusted a five-step motivation method for different contexts in order to meet the need for increased motivation for learning in school in general. The current study is a qualitative case-study (Creswell, 2013, p. 99), where we examine how the five-step method we have developed may support adult students with immigrant background to become more motivated and take control of their own lives and learning. The analysis is based on students'

reflections from the implementation of the method, as well as students' and teachers' evaluations of the method.

### The five-Step Approach

The five-step motivation method applied in this study consisted of the following steps (figure 1):

- 1) What is important to succeed with in life? What is important in the near future?
- 2) What skills do you have? What are you satisfied with in your present situation?
- 3) Is there something in yourself or in your situation that stops you from reaching your goals? 4) What do you choose to work on the next month to reach the goals you have?
- 4) What will you do to manage to carry this out?

These questions were repeated several times throughout the school year, partly focused on general issues in life, and partly focused on language learning and other subjects in school. Some groups participated only one semester, and in these groups the method was applied only once.

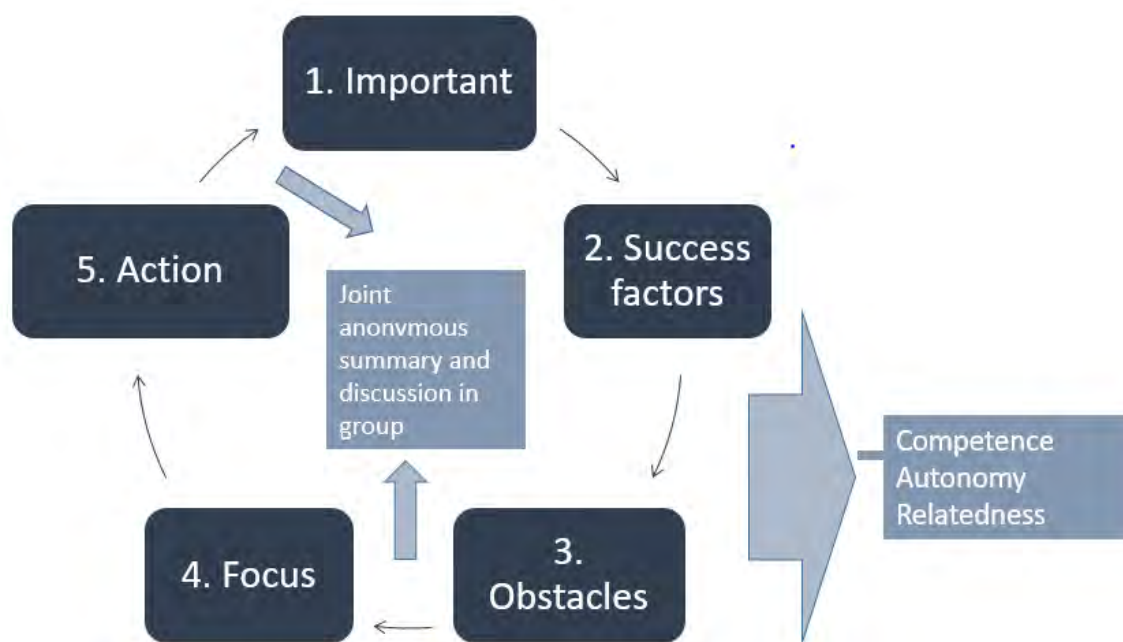


Figure 1: A five-step motivation method (previously published in Horverak, Langeland & Fagerhaug, 2018; Horverak & Aanensen, 2019; Horverak, 2020)

The students discussed the questions in class and then wrote individual answers in books with allocated random numbers. Only the students knew their own numbers, so they could retrieve their own books the next session. The teachers collected the books after each session and started every following session with a summary of what the students in the group had written. Then, the class discussed what could be done to reach the different goals and to overcome the obstacles mentioned. In most of the sessions, the students were allowed to discuss using their native language, and interpreters were used for some of the students with very little Norwegian language competence. Students who had very weak Norwegian skills were also allowed to write in their native language, and the text was translated into Norwegian.

Some of the groups had a “focus week”, where the motivation method was applied in different contexts. In two of the groups preparing for upper secondary school, the method was applied in the disciplines Norwegian, mathematics, English, religion and social sciences. In two of the groups learning Norwegian, the method was applied in a student business project carried out as part of the Norwegian teaching. A tool we use in the project called “the Focus Model” was also applied in these groups, where the students defined together what they found important. Following this, they sorted out what was urgent, what was distracting and what was wasted.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The reflections the students wrote during the motivation sessions are part of the material in this study, as well as observations from the sessions in classes. An inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) of the students’ reflections was carried out. At the end of the first semester, the students also filled in evaluations with questions concerning how they had experienced the motivation sessions and whether they experienced increased motivation to learn. The evaluation form used after the first semester was translated to Arabic and Tigrinja, the dominant native languages in the groups. The students were allowed to choose what language to use in their evaluations.

At the end of the second semester, a new evaluation was carried out. As most of the students had improved their language skills at this point, the evaluation form was not translated to other languages, and the students were encouraged to write in Norwegian. The groups who participated only one semester also filled in this evaluation form. The teachers also evaluated how the motivation method worked, what was positive and what was challenging, and some of the teachers’ reflections are included at the end of the analysis.

The following questions were included in the student evaluation given the second semester:

- 1) Give examples of something you have managed to focus on as a result of the motivation sessions.
- 2) How have you worked with the obstacles you have in yourself or in your life?
- 3) How will you consider your own efforts to follow your plans?
- 4) Do you feel that the work with the motivation method has affected the learning environment or how you view your fellow students? How?
- 5) Has the motivation method given you increased motivation to work towards your own goals? (Options: yes, no, I don’t know).
- 6) Have you become better at planning and focusing on what is important to you (Options: yes, no, I don’t know).
- 7) How satisfied have you been with the motivation method? (Options: Not satisfied, somewhat satisfied, very satisfied, I don’t know).

The students’ answers are partly presented qualitatively through examples of themes in the material and partly quantitatively through percentages of different answers.

### **Participants**

Most immigrant student groups at two adult learning centres participated in the school year 2018/2019. This included five student groups who attended a preparatory programme for upper secondary school, following the curricula for lower secondary school, and four student groups who learnt Norwegian according to the curriculum for Norwegian and social sciences obligatory to immigrants in Norway. In addition, two groups from a third adult learning centre

participated in the autumn semester 2019. These two groups were attending the final year of the preparatory programme for upper secondary school.

Student groups at adult learning centres are dynamic and change during the year, so it is difficult to find exact numbers on how many students were exposed to the intervention. We therefore count as participants all students who filled in evaluation forms and accepted that their reflections could be used for research and calculate a response rate based on the total number of students in the group at the end of the semesters. In the total school year 2018-2019, 46 of 89 students participated in the first semester (response rate: 52%), and 45 students participated in the second semester out of 61 students (response rate: 74%). In autumn 2019, 23 students participated out of a total number of 34 students (response rate: 68%) The majority of the students had Arabic as their first language, and the second most common native language was Tigrinya. Details about the participants are not included as this may compromise anonymity.

### **Reliability and Validity**

There are different challenges with the reliability and validity of the findings in this study – whether we can trust the findings and whether we can generalise (Jacobsen, 2005, p. 345). One challenge with an intervention study in an adult learning context is that people from other cultures may have norms that interfere with how they respond to the type of evaluation applied here. For example, not all cultures accept criticism of authorities, and perhaps the students respond positively out of respect for the teachers. Another challenge is that they may give a positive response at one point, because they feel optimistic when working with the method in class, but at another later point, they may feel more negative as they do not feel things have changed. The obstacles are still there, but they felt perhaps more optimistic at the time they evaluated the method. Some students may also have had problems understanding the questions in the evaluation form due to limited competence in Norwegian. These are all threats to the reliability of the findings in this study.

To respond to some of these challenges, we analyse the students' reflections from the motivation sessions, to see how the method actually works. We have also included open questions in the evaluation and asked the students to give some reflections on how they perceive the method, which may yield more accurate answers than choosing either “yes” or “no”. We also let the students use their native language when needed and supported them in the process with translations.

Another challenge with this study is that the sample is limited, and it may be difficult to generalise based on the findings. This is a threat to the validity of the study. Still, we argue that the experiences and examples we present may be transferrable to other, similar contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, more long-term studies with more extensive measuring instruments are needed in order to investigate possible effects of the five-step method in adult learning contexts.

## **Results and Findings**

This study investigates whether a five-step motivation method may facilitate increased intrinsic motivation and development of strategies for learning and developing in life. The analysis presents tendencies in the students' reflections on what is important in life, what success factors and obstacles they experience they have, what they need to focus on and how they are to carry

this out. The results also include summaries of students' evaluations of how they perceive the method and their own development. Finally, teachers' reflections are presented.

### **Students' Reflections**

Most of the students consider education and work to be important in life, and that they need to learn Norwegian in order to succeed with getting a job. Several of the students also emphasise that they want to become independent and contribute in society. One of the students writes "*If there is something I am interested in and want in life, it is to take care of myself through working like everyone else do*". Another student writes "*I want to pay taxes and be an active participant in the Norwegian society*". The aspect of wanting to contribute is repeated by several of the students: "*Through work, I want to give as much as possible to the Norwegian society*". More of the students' report that they want to start a business, for example as a tailor or a hairdresser, or they want to open a shop or a restaurant. Many of the students are also concerned with having good health, and this is related to working and contributing to society: "*I want to achieve mental calmness, wellness and safety in my life, and to achieve this, I must work and make an effort to contribute*".

Another theme in the students' reflections on what is important is relations, both within the family and in society in general. Many of them are concerned about whether their family is okay, for example, one of the students wrote "*That my child is healthy*". Others are concerned about getting news from relatives that are not in Norway. A wish to understanding Norwegian culture and becoming integrated is another central theme in the students' reflections, and this also concerns building relations. As one of the students expresses: "*I wish to find Norwegian friends*". Again, the issue of learning Norwegian is reported as important to become integrated. Also getting a driver's license is mentioned as important for being integrated, and for succeeding with getting a job.

When it comes to success factors, many of the students mention previous work experience. Others write that they are good at handling children or people in general. Another success factor revealed in the students' reflections is hope - they have a hope and a wish to become integrated and to learn Norwegian. Others write that they have motivation, and some write that they are fast learners. Having children is also mentioned as a success factor, as this may help them learn Norwegian and become integrated in a new society.

When reflecting on obstacles, most of the students point out the challenge of learning Norwegian and becoming integrated in Norwegian society. One student writes "*Nothing without language*". More of them write that they easily forget because they do not have anybody to practice with during their spare time, as they find it difficult to get in touch with Norwegians and get Norwegian friends. One example of a specific challenge mentioned is arranging children's birthdays, as misunderstandings easily appear: "*Therefore, there are almost always conflicts after birthdays, as I cannot understand what Norwegians like*". Other challenges mentioned are uncertainty concerning their financial situation and their status in Norway, for example whether they will receive citizenship.

One theme that is clear when it comes to obstacles is time. The fact that immigrants have a limited period to finish what is called "the introduction programme" is a challenge. They need to learn Norwegian and become prepared for upper secondary school in two or three years, and this is a rather short period of time to many. This is what is often referred to when they write that time is a challenge. Others emphasise the problem of finding time to schoolwork and learning Norwegian in a hectic life with family obligations and other challenges: "*I cannot do*

*more than I do now. I am exhausted because I do not have any Norwegian friends [...] I am tired in my heart because the whole family depends on me as my husband is sick*". More of the students mention health issues - both physical pains and mental problems as depression and stress. Others have problems studying enough because of children's illnesses or because they think about family members in other countries. One student reflects:

*I am mostly lonely and have no one that can motivate me, and this has to a certain degree removed me from my goals, and I am not satisfied with my situation currently, but I hope I can take some steps to improve my life.*

The most recurring themes in the reflections on what the students are to focus on are language learning and schoolwork. The students write that they want to improve their Norwegian by talking to friends and contact neighbours. Some specify that they will talk Norwegian to fellow students during the breaks, others that they will walk in parks and talk to other parents. They write that they will practice reading different texts, and many of them write that they will learn new words by watching Norwegian television: *"I will watch television and write down some difficult words"*. More of them express that they will work on grammar, and some of them are more specific, as this example shows: *"Do grammar exercises from Norsk Start every Friday from 21.00 to 22.00"*. More of them express that they will do homework, for example *"Do homework 1½ hour a day"*, and others write that they will learn a certain number of words each day. Others write that they will go to the library and borrow books. In the different subjects in school, the students report that they need to focus on learning Norwegian terms specific for each subject.

In the material from the student business, different goals are listed: to experience and carry out a project, to learn about business and finances, to learn Norwegian and get to know Norwegians, to contribute with making food, to contribute with sewing and to work together as a group. Some mention skills such as being able to sew, to paint, to clean, to do carpentry, to sell, to bake and make food and to use social media. Others mention more personal skills such as being systematic, being social and liking to help others. Of obstacles, language is mentioned, and some write that they are not good with numbers or finances. In the reflections on what they need to focus on, several of them mention that they need to practice Norwegian, both by reading and by meeting with others in the afternoons and in breaks. Some of the students report that they will focus on learning words they need when working with sewing. In material from the second round, the students are more specific about their role in the business: one will lead the sewing team, one will lead the party committee, which is to organise a multicultural buffet for the local community, some of them will focus on planning and making food for the planned party, some will focus on making advertisement and advertise on Facebook, and other relevant webpages, and some will focus on sewing.

### **Students' Reflections on the Five-Step Method and Their Own Development**

In the evaluation after the first semester, 78%, report that they have increased their motivation to learn and 72% report that they feel the method was good for them (table 1).

Table 1: Students' responses to the evaluation after the first semester (n =46)

Question	Yes	No	I do not know
Increased motivation	78%	11%	11%
Method felt as good for them	72%	11%	17%



One of the students writes that the method is good «*Because I learnt how to motivate myself*». Another student writes “*I organised my time and felt that I had to study and learn as quickly as possible*”. A third student writes “*It gave me energy to learn more*”. More of the students express that the motivation method helped them plan their future.

The results at the end of the second semester confirm the positive responses from the first semester (table 2). 78% report that they experience increased motivation to work towards their own goals, and 80% report that they have become better at planning and keeping focus.

Table 2: Students’ responses to evaluation after second semester (n =45)

Question	Yes	No	I do not know
Increased motivation to work towards goals	78%	13%	9%
Better at planning and keeping focus	80%	7%	13%

When asked about how satisfied they are with the method, 44% report that they are very satisfied and 49% that they are somewhat satisfied, whereas only 7% report that they either do not know or are not satisfied.

The results from the third school, where the students only took part in the project for a short period during the autumn semester, also show that the method helps them (see table 3). 91% report that they experience increased motivation to work towards goals, and 96% report that they have become better at planning and keeping focus.

Table 3: Students’ responses to evaluation in school 3, after one semester (n =23)

Question	Yes	No	I do not know
Increased motivation to work towards goals	91%	0%	9%
Better at planning and keeping focus	96%	0%	4%

22% report that they are very satisfied with the method, 48% are satisfied, and 17% somewhat satisfied, whereas only 13% either do not answer or report that they do not know. In this round, the option “satisfied” was added to the evaluation form.

One of the students write that in order to deal with obstacles “*I try to focus on what is positive. I take care of my health. I use my good mood as a weapon*”. Many of the students write that they make plans and they succeed with following their own plans. Most of the students report that the learning environment has not been influenced, but one student writes that they motivate each other by using the motivation method. Another student writes “*It became easy for us to talk to the students in the group and ask how we can practice on difficult subjects*”. Some of the students also emphasise that the method creates a better dialogue between the teachers and the students, and that they appreciate receiving advice from the group.

### Teachers’ Reflections

The participating teachers emphasise that the motivation work gives the students a place to express what they are concerned with, and a place where they can complain and get out frustration without this having any consequences as everything is anonymous. Some teachers also point out that it is a relief to think that it is not only the teachers’ responsibility that students learn, the students also have a responsibility to work with their own learning process. As

pointed out by the students, the teachers also say that they get a better dialogue in the classroom as they get to know each other better and build relations through working with the method.

One topic the teachers reflect on is the use of mother tongue. There is a preference for letting the students use their mother tongue when talking about such personal issues as how to master life, and what is good and what is challenging. One teacher says:

*I think it is good that they can use their mother tongue, as this concerns so much that they do not have enough words. The mother tongue is their heart language, and since this is about mastering life, they should be allowed to use it, at least in the beginning.*

At the same time, it is mentioned that it could also be a problem if the students just continue writing in their mother tongue when they could manage to write in Norwegian as they need writing practice.

Another aspect the teachers mention is that when they apply the method in all disciplines, they see that the students develop a set of common concepts for talking about their learning process. One teacher describes how a student reminded another student about how they had worked with the same approach in another lecture. Before applying the method across disciplines, the teachers feared that it would perhaps be too much, and that the students would be tired of hearing the same questions in all contexts. However, when reflecting on this afterwards, they agree that it is positive as it supports the students to developing a common framework for talking about learning. They also mention the need to repeat the process so that the students integrate this way of thinking. One of the teachers emphasises the value of developing this type of strategy for learning in all disciplines before moving on to upper secondary school.

## Discussion

This study investigates how teachers of adult immigrant learners can support their students in developing a strategy for mastering life and learning. The main findings show that the five-step method as described here, where students define what is important to them, success factors and obstacles, and make plans on what to focus on and how to do it, may contribute to students experiencing increased motivation and improved planning skills. Applying the method also led to a better dialogue in school between teachers and students, and a common framework for learning. These findings comply with Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (2000), that if students experience autonomy, competence and relatedness, they will be intrinsically motivated to learn. The students had the opportunity to be autonomous through making their own plans, they felt competent as they set the goals themselves and managed to follow their plans, and they worked with finding solutions to obstacles in a supportive community of peers, and through this they could experience relatedness.

One of the most important contributions of this study is a methodology that allows one to take the students' knowledge and experience as a starting point. This is needed in the field of adult learning, as research shows that teaching in this context is often considered as little relevant or little useful (Alver & Dregelid, 2001). By starting with the students' own lives and their previous experience, it is easier to meet the students on their premises in teaching. This is in line with the approach advocated in Duckworth and Tett's recent study from the UK (2019), where it is reported that adult learners reclaimed their identities through their personal narratives. The most important aspect of the five-step approach applied in the current study is

perhaps that it takes the whole person into account, so that cognitive, emotional and social needs are considered, as pointed out as important needs to be met in a language learning context (Collier & Thomas, 2002). This way of working also contrasts the neo-liberal governance mindset, critiqued in much recent research on adult education for immigrants (Fejes et al., 2018; Heinemann, 2017; Morrice, 2007).

Neoliberalism means that individuals are structured to obtain a certain behaviour and individual freedom is transformed into the instrument through which individuals are directed (Lorenzini, 2018). By applying the five-step method, we aim at focusing more on the learners' narratives and competences, what is called success factors in the method, and not only on what they need to prepare for a future occupation, or to be successfully integrated. There is, however, a danger that the method may become too instrumental, and fall in the category of neoliberalism if there is too much focus on future goals and what is realistic to achieve in the future. To avoid this, it is important to dwell on question two in the approach, what competences, or success factors, do the adult immigrant learners have, what have they experienced before, and what in their situation is positive? Individuals' understanding of the world and possibilities for the future are influenced by what range of resources they have access to (West, 1992), and for immigrants, it may be challenging to identify resources in a new and foreign context, where previous experience is perhaps dismissed due to lack of documentation. It is therefore important to support immigrants to retrieve their narratives, and reidentify their skills and resources.

It is also important to let immigrants identify the obstacles they themselves experience, as asked about in question three of the five-step method, and not let others define their obstacles for them, as there may be different views here. Still, it is a challenging balance to keep focus on adult immigrants' needs and dreams, and at the same time, help them succeed in a society where it is required that they adapt. It is perhaps the society that really needs to change, and not the immigrants. Perhaps the whole concept of integration needs to be reinterpreted and adjusted in the Western world in order to achieve a true multicultural society where different cultures coexist and diversity is appreciated.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings presented in this study, we conclude that the five-step motivation method presented here can facilitate adult learners to develop a strategy for mastering life and learning. Both the teachers' and the students' reflections show that the method may be a useful tool that contributes to increased motivation and improved planning skills. Some of the essence of the method is that it takes the students' individual lives, goals and obstacles as a starting point. To get the chance to express oneself about personal issues is something the students appreciated and something that made the teachers have a better understanding of what the students were concerned with and considered important.

Even though this study shows good results, there is a need for more research on the method to see if the findings presented here can be supported by more extensive studies carried out over longer time and with a larger sample. Another aspect that may be further explored is how working with the motivation method could be transferred to making and adjusting individual plans in cooperation with the refugee services, plans that are obligatory for all immigrants in Norway who are part of the introduction programme. This could lead to increased cooperation in addition to supporting the immigrants' role in making plans for their future.

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## **EFL Teachers' Autonomy Supportive Practices for Out-of-Class Language Learning**

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### Abstract

Autonomy support is a recently defined role for teachers, and they are expected to help learners engage in autonomous out-of-class learning. With a focus on English language learning outside the classroom, this study intended to uncover English as a foreign language teachers' practices related to autonomy support and to discuss the challenges faced by the teachers in this process. Eleven teachers working at the tertiary level at a state university in Turkey were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in three sessions to find out the extent to which the teachers help their learners become autonomous. The findings revealed that the teachers perform many autonomy-supportive behaviors which are feasible in language classrooms such as motivating students, giving language advice and promoting peer collaboration. In doing this, the teachers utilize five different support mechanisms: affective, resource, capacity, technology, and social support. On the other hand, the findings uncovered such constraints as crowded classes, overloaded curriculum, and low learner motivation. These challenges were perceived as barriers hampering teachers' efforts for autonomy support. This study highlights the feasibility of creating an autonomy-supportive language learning environment and provides implications for teachers of English as a Foreign Language.

*Keywords:* autonomy support, learner autonomy, learning, out-of-class language, teacher, technology

## Introduction

Recent research has stressed the interconnectedness of technology use and out-of-class autonomous language learning and shed light on various qualifications required for autonomous language learning with technology (Lai, 2017; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013; Reinders & White, 2016; Richards, 2015). With reference to these qualifications, a vast amount of research has investigated the nature of learners' out-of-class learning experiences and their readiness for autonomous language learning with technology (for example Gonulal, 2019; Lai & Gu, 2011). The literature concluded that most language learners lack the required qualifications, which are found to be best acquired with teacher support (Lai, 2015a, 2015b; Lai, Yeung, & Hu, 2016). However, despite the importance of the teachers' role in autonomy support, to date relatively little work has focused on teachers' practices supporting autonomous learning out-of-the class. Previous research has provided invaluable insights about teacher perceptions of and attitudes toward autonomy support, and about the challenges faced by language teachers (e.g., Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Nakata, 2011). One common conclusion from this prior research is that a wide gap exists between the desirability and feasibility of autonomy support in language classrooms. However, the literature lacks focus on the feasibility of autonomy support and is limited to provide a detailed account of teacher' related practices. To this end, the current study aimed to explore teachers' autonomy-supportive practices at the tertiary level, and investigated the feasibility of autonomy support in language classrooms.

## Literature Review

Learner autonomy refers to the learners' capacity to take control of their learning (Benson, 2011). According to Holec (1988, as cited in Huang & Benson, 2013), learners need to have the ability, willingness, and freedom to be autonomous in their learning. Firstly, the ability refers to metacognitive (learning management skills) and metalinguistic skills (the knowledge of the target language to control the learning). Thus, autonomous learners create a personal agenda "which sets up directions in the planning, pacing, monitoring, and evaluating the learning process" (Chan, 2000, p.75). Secondly, autonomous learners should be motivated intrinsically or instrumentally to take responsibility for their learning (Breen & Mann, 1997). Lastly, they need to be permitted to act independently by the significant agents in this process as teachers, and to have convenient learning situations in which learners have a degree of independence to control their learning (Huang & Benson, 2013).

Out-of-class language learning is defined as an engagement in various language learning activities undertaken beyond the confines of formal learning institutions (Benson, 2011; Richards, 2015). This form of language learning is assumed to create a convenient learning situation for language learners without teacher interference. Out-of-class learning environments may have a potential for providing situational freedom in which willing language learners can practice and develop their metacognitive abilities. Thus, it has often been related to the development of learner autonomy and argued to be closely intertwined with autonomous language learning (Benson & Reinders, 2011). In other words, out-of-class learning may serve as a platform by which learners can take full control of their learning in a teacher-independent environment, and thus be an autonomous language learner.

In this respect Benson's autonomy definition (2011) focuses on capacity, and argues that autonomy is not a personal attribute of a learner but rather a feature that can be developed in the learning process. For the development of this capacity, there are several other features that language learners also need to have. First and foremost, learners should be willing to take

responsibility for their learning (Chan et al., 2002; Lai & Gu, 2011). Secondly, they should have independence and metacognitive skills to manage learning procedures (Lai, 2017). Additionally, when learners use technology for their out-of-class language learning, they also need to be aware of the potential of technology and know how to locate, select, and use appropriate technological resources (Castellano et al., 2011; Lai et al., 2016). Similarly, Bailly (2011) also proposes three conditions for language learners to display autonomous skills: motivation (willingness), learning resources (appropriate language learning tools), and learning skills (capacity for learning management).

Researchers have paid growing attention to the interconnectedness of learner autonomy and out-of-class language learning (Benson & Reinders, 2011). The research shows that technology use is a significant predictor of autonomous out-of-class language learning (Reinders & White, 2016; Richards, 2015). In an influential work, Lai and Gu (2011) investigated 279 language learners' out-of-class language learning practices with technology. They found that out-of-class language learning is much more complicated than expected. For example, while language learners actively use technology for language learning, their technology use shows variations. In other words, learners use technology selectively due to such reasons as language proficiency, lack of knowledge about potential technological resources, and limited knowledge about how to access technological learning materials. This study by Lai and Gu showed the significance of the skills needed for autonomous language learning with technology such as making informed learning decisions according to their learning styles, preferences, needs and goals (Chik, 2014), or knowing how to control “the time, the pace, the path to the goal, and the measurement of success” (Healey, 1999, p.400). Reinders and Hubbard (2013) argued that learners need some skills to cope with the constraints of technology in the language learning process. Autonomous language learners need to choose appropriate language learning materials in accordance with their levels and learning goals. In the same vein, they are supposed to make informed decisions among a vast number of choices. Moreover, learners need to distinguish the most useful forms of interaction on platforms that involve social interaction. Lastly, learners are also supposed to have a critical capacity to identify what information is relevant or not for their learning.

The work by Lai and Gu (2011) has led to further research intended to uncover the complex nature of learners' out-of-class language learning with technology (for example Çelik et al., 2012; Dincer, 2020; Şahin Kızıl & Savran, 2018; Trinder, 2017). One common conclusion of these studies is that most language learners are far from being autonomous since they lack the required skills. Moreover, learners have a high expectancy of their teachers to guide them on how to locate, select, and use technological resources for language learning purposes. Thus, these learners need to be supported to manage their out-of-class language learning with technology (Lai et al., 2016). Importantly, teachers have been found to be a vital stakeholder to provide this support, and a new role has consequently been assigned to the teachers: “autonomy-supportive teacher” (Lai et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2015; Reinders & Hubbard, 2013).

Given the research evidence about the importance of the teachers' autonomy-supportive role, concerns have been raised about whether teachers can handle this prominent workload, and a growing body of research has provided insights into teachers' related perceptions and practices for autonomy support (for example Alhaysony, 2016; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Nakata, 2011; Wichayathian & Reinders, 2018). The most consistent finding from this research is that teachers have indicated a strong preference for autonomous language learning and for involving the learners in the decision-making process in their teaching since it is believed to be conducive to their students' language learning (Al Asmari, 2013; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012;

Wichayathian & Reinders, 2018). However, the teachers questioned the feasibility of autonomy-support in their current teaching environments due to reasons such as learners' lack of motivation, their dependence on teachers, their unwillingness to take responsibility, lack of class time and curriculum restrictions. These studies collectively indicated that there is a wide gap between the desirability and feasibility of autonomy support even though teachers expressed their desires for it and listed some autonomy-supportive practices in their classes such as raising students' awareness about the importance of autonomous out-of-class language learning and encouraging independent work in and out-of-class (Haji-Othman & Wood, 2016; Nakata, 2011; Yunus & Arshad, 2014). Some research studies also raised concerns about teachers' readiness for their recently defined autonomy-supportive role. They argued that teachers should be autonomous first and understand the pertaining pedagogy and skills before autonomous learning initiatives are initiated in the classroom (for example Al Asmari, 2013; Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011).

Previous work surveying teachers' related perceptions and practices found that teachers are aware of the significance of learner autonomy and desire to promote it among their students; however, they are skeptical about its feasibility in practice due to a range of challenges. With reference to the gap between the desirability and feasibility of learner autonomy support, it is clear that despite significant progress in uncovering teachers' perceptions of learner autonomy and these challenges, the literature is still too limited to provide a clear picture of how feasible teachers' autonomy-support actually is. It is a fact that out-of-class language learning is complex in nature, and a bulk of research has been conducted to uncover the learners' practices so far. However, the investigation of teachers' practices to support autonomous language learning out-of-the class still lacks focus in research. Thus, it merits further investigation to enhance our understanding of the complex nature of autonomy support with technology, and this current study has been designed to provide insights into the feasibility of autonomy support and show how teachers support their students' autonomous out-of-class language learning. To this end, this study seeks to uncover English language teachers' current practices pertinent to autonomy support and the challenges perceived by the teachers in this procedure.

## **Method**

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The research setting of the study is a foreign languages school of a state university in Turkey. The foreign languages school provides foundational English courses to English-based departments such as civil aviation, engineering, and pharmacy. The classes are conducted either face-to-face or online. It is also of importance for this study that the university has a small library in which there is a limited number of language learning materials and has no self-access center. Thus, the language teachers serve as the only means of providing support for learners' out-of-class autonomous language learning.

Eleven EFL instructors (four females, seven males) participated in this study. While the least experienced instructor worked for four years, the two most experienced instructors had 30-years-experience in the field. Moreover, most of the participants continued their post-graduate education in different departments related to English language such as English language teaching (ELT), English language and literature, and translation and interpretation. Table 1 presents the details of the participants' demographic information and interview durations.

Table 1: Participant demographic details and interview durations

Participant	Gender	Age	Years of Experience	Graduation (Department )	The Highest degree	Interview Duration (In minutes)
P1	M	35	12	ELT	MA	43,12'
P2	F	32	7	ELT	Ph.D. (Student)	57,61'
P3	F	29	6	ELT	MA (Student)	53,03'
P4	M	32	8	ELL	Ph.D. (Student)	40,42'
P5	M	56	30	ELT	Bachelor	80,04'
P6	M	32	8	ELT	MA (Student)	46,58
P7	F	28	4	T&I	MA	58,47'
P8	F	30	6	ELT	Ph.D. (Student)	52,23'
P9	M	32	8	ELT	MA (Student)	46,58
P10	M	31	6	ELL	MA	50,00'
P11	M	54	30	ELT	MA	26,37'

Note: F=Female; M=Male; T&I=Translation and Interpretation; ELL=English Language and Literature; ELT=English Language and Teaching; MA=Master's degree; PhD=Doctor of Philosophy, LTC=Language Teaching Certificate.

\*He was a visiting teacher from a foreign country.

### Data Collection and Analysis

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection instrument in this study. An interview guide was created based on the existing literature (Lai, 2015a; Lai et al., 2016; Nakata, 2011) to examine teachers' autonomy-supportive practices. To ensure the credibility of the guide, two experts in the field reviewed it. Then, the study was piloted with one instructor, and later the guide was revised accordingly. The interviews were conducted in either Turkish or English, depending on the participants' preference. Signed informed consent forms protected the rights of the participants. The interview sessions were organized in line with the design of Dolbear and Schuman's three series of interviews (Schuman, 1982, as cited in Seidman, 2006). In the first session, the researchers aimed to become familiar with the context of the study and the participants, and to build a knowledge base for the following interview sessions. In the next session, the questions elicited the participants' practices for promoting learner autonomy. In the last session, the researchers intended to establish a link between technology and learner autonomy and to induce the participants' related experiences and reflections on them. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed after each session to prepare additional follow-up questions for the following session. Thus, the researchers got the chance to elicit more in-depth elaborations on the practices mentioned previously.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and then analyzed according to the steps of theoretical thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). After iterative readings of the data, the researchers listed the initial codes. In the first phase, they divided the codes into two categories: autonomy-supportive and non-autonomy supportive teacher behaviors. Then, they focused on autonomy-supportive codes including motivation, language advising, learner involvement, promoting cooperation, language learning strategies. Finally, they sorted these codes into five themes: affective, resource, capacity, technology, and social. While constructing the themes, the existing literature was used to name the themes (Bailly, 2011;

Dörnyei, 2001; Lai et al., 2016). Later, two experts in the field coded 25% of the data to enhance the dependability and conformability of the study (Miles et al., 2014). Lastly, the coding results of all the coders were compared and discussed. After the intercoder discussion, the researchers revised the codes and finalized the themes. In the presentation of the analysis, the themes and their contents were illustrated in tables. Sample excerpts were also provided to support the research findings. Each participant was distinguished with a number (for example, P1=Participant 1) to protect their anonymity.

## Findings

### EFL Teachers' Autonomy-Supportive Practices

Thematic analysis of interviews reveals that the participants perform a variety of autonomy-supportive practices. Five themes related to teachers' autonomy-supportive practices emerged as a result of the data analysis. Table 2 illustrates the themes and summarizes the content of each theme.

Table 2: Description of the teachers' autonomy-supportive practices

Themes	Content
Affective support	<i>Increase language learning motivation and lower affective barriers for language learning</i>
Resource support	<i>Help learners find appropriate learning resources and suggesting language materials</i>
Capacity support	<i>Help learners to manage and take the responsibility for their learning</i>
Technology support	<i>Guide learners about how to use technology for language learning</i>
Social support	<i>Promote cooperation among the language learners</i>

**Affective support.** All the participants consider learner motivation one of the primary conditions for learner autonomy. Accordingly, they give affective support to the learners using different strategies parallel with Dörnyei's (2001) suggestions to generate, maintain and protect motivation in language classrooms. They attempt to increase the learners' goal-orientedness (establishing learning goals) by verbal encouragement, use of interesting technological language learning tools, and try to increase learners' self-confidence.

In terms of motivation, almost all the participants claim that they try to increase the learners' goal-orientedness by introducing study-abroad chances. For instance, P8 said that she introduces mobility/study abroad programs at the beginning of each year. "*Students realize how important English learning is to be accepted for Erasmus Program*". P2 also uses study abroad programs for the same purpose, and she claimed that "*students set their learning goals in this way*". Moreover, the participants not only motivate their students by verbal encouragement, but also use technological tools to make language learning more attractive. They believe technology encourages students to learn English and engages all the students in the class. They usually make use of educational tools and games to enhance their instruction. For example, many participants make use of *Kahoot* (a free game-based digital learning platform) to liven up their classes.

Many participants also underscore the importance of self-confidence in foreign language learning. Because the learners perceive English as too challenging to learn and get demotivated by this case, the teachers attempt to boost their self-esteem using many strategies. For instance,

P1 uses *Simple Wikipedia* on which the sentences are so simple that the learners think they can understand English very well and get motivated. In P1's own words, "*I just copy a text from there and give it to students as translation homework. Because it is simple English, they think they can do it. It keeps them motivated*".

**Resource support.** The participants provide the learners with language resources and guidance about how to use those materials. However, the willingness of learners qualifies how effectively they use those resources. Almost all the participants were aware of this factor and stated that the learners' willingness to learn English motivates them to put much more effort into helping them. For instance, P3 indicated, "*I do my best to help demanding learners, but I can't say I spend much time on those not interested in learning*".

Most of the participants take the role of a language advisor and provide learners with language learning resources in line with their goals. Underlining the importance of the learners' needs and interests, P4 said, "*If a student wants some techniques for getting a high score from an exam, I lead him to study on those techniques by recommending some resources*". P4 also added that "*But the others just want to learn spoken English, and I also lead them to speaking clubs which are available at the university*".

**Capacity support.** Compared to the other two teacher autonomy-supportive practices, teachers' efforts to help learners to manage their learning (for example identifying needs, planning, monitoring, and evaluating the learning process) is more limited. Many participants fall short of promoting learners' capacity to maintain and sustain their learning. However, a few participants perform some practices which can be considered potential feasible steps for capacity support. For example, the teachers share learning strategies based on their own learning experiences and pedagogical knowledge. P9 observes his role as a guide in the class. He spends time on how to learn a foreign language, how to improve language learning skills and how to speak English fluently. He thinks explaining all the alternatives to learn a language helps learners become more independent in their learning.

The participants also expressed that setting goals is crucial for learners to be autonomous language learners. They help their students to set their goals. Also, in some instances, they try to persuade them English is vital. For example, P8 said that their students come to class without any learning goals because they always fail through their language education. She noted, "*I show something valuable to learn a foreign language in the first session of the semester and try to persuade them to set learning goals accordingly*".

A few participants pointed out the importance of giving the syllabus beforehand to raise learners' awareness of monitoring and evaluating their learning. They expressed that the learners know what they will learn and see throughout the semester. On this issue, P2 stated, "*I believe whatever we [teachers] teach, we should tell them [students] 'at the end of this lesson, you can gain these skills to help them monitor their learning'*". P2 further noted the importance of sharing responsibilities with the students. She let her students be responsible for their learning with the flipped classroom method and helped students think, "*I should study this on my own rather than waiting for the teacher to expose these*".

**Technology support.** The findings showed that most participants support autonomous language learning with technology in several ways. For this purpose, they use the technology itself in class, teach how to use technology for language learning and verbally recommend educational technology tools. The findings also suggest that teachers' technology use in class



affects learners' out-of-class technology use.

Most of the teachers expressed the importance of technology for language learning and listed how they use different strategies to promote independent learning with technology. For instance, P5 suggested some websites and mobile phone applications for self-study. Suggesting some websites as well, P10 demonstrated how he uses websites (e.g., <https://busyteacher.org/>) while preparing his lessons. Thus, he intends to raise the learners' awareness about how to select and use technological resources. Some participants also noted that they suggest some language learning websites and mobile phone applications for specific language learning skills such as *Busuu* and *Duolingo*. Another participant, P9, underlined the importance of need-oriented guidance and said, *"If a student's pronunciation is not very good, I offer them to listen to voice records or the TV or radio channels broadcasting in English"*.

The participants also underscored the practicality of technology for language learning. They emphasized how easy to learn with technology in today's technological conditions. *"Everybody now has smartphones in their pockets so they can easily download and install language learning applications on their mobile phones and use them whenever and wherever they want"*. Furthermore, P6 highlighted the new role of a language teacher in this technology-rich environment and stated, *"I always encourage [my students] that we [as teachers] are not needed anymore, because we have plenty of teachers on YouTube"*. Therefore, he leads the learners to technological tools, applications and websites, and transmits the responsibility of learning to the learners themselves.

Many participants also claimed that their courses affect the learners' digital literacy and their technology use habits in a way. They gave several examples of their practices and how they affect the learners' technology use. P2 said that even though her class was not a technology teaching class, her tasks helped her students to learn a lot about computers and other digital devices. Similarly, P3 shared her related experiences and stated that she was using a TV series in her classes and said, *"My students really liked to learn English from a TV series, and many of them continued to English series and movies to learn English"*. Thus, what she did in class affected the learners' out-of-class learning. P8 also added how the learners were affected by way of her teaching. *"Some students didn't know what Blog is. Today they follow blogs in English"*.

**Social support.** Most of the participants promote cooperation among learners, both inside and outside the class. They believe in the usefulness of peer/group learning and take advantage of peer feedback in class. For instance, P8 recounted that she makes use of peer feedback in the writing sessions and indicated its effectiveness. *"They may not be able to find their mistakes but when they see the same mistake in their peers' paper, they can easily see and correct it"*. While many participants claimed to support peer feedback/learning for in-class activities, some of them asserted their preference for out-of-class collaboration. They explained the effectiveness of peer learning outside the class and why they make use of expert-novice matching. P4 reported that low-achieving students getting help from high-achievers could get higher scores because they learn different things from each friend before the exams. P10 also further added that *"I cannot help outside the classroom all the time and I match academically weak and successful students to complete out-of-school activities and assignments together"*. Besides this, he transfers the responsibility of the learning to the learners and encourages them to learn cooperatively.

### Perceived Constraints Faced by Autonomy-Supportive Teachers

The participants focused on a lot of constraints while describing how they support learners' out-of-class autonomous language learning. The responses showed that the constraints are based on two factors: institution and learner. Under the constraints theme, two sub-themes emerged and Table 3 presents the sub-themes and summarizes their content.

Table 3: Description of the constraints perceived by teachers

Sub-themes	Content
Institution-based constraints	<i>crowded classes, poor technological infrastructure, overloaded curriculum and limited class time</i>
Learner-based constraints	<i>low motivation and teacher-directed learning culture</i>

**Institution-based constraints.** The most oft-repeated institutional problem was crowded classes. The teachers stated that they fall short of providing enough support for identifying learners' strengths and weaknesses, promoting cooperation among learners, and involving them in decision-making in crowded classes. For example, P7, who used to give attention to each student in small classes, stated that she does not have enough time and energy to pay attention to every learner anymore. *"I do not have time to observe and help all my students now"*. Instead, she supports the enthusiastic students who demand help to continue study English out-of-the class.

The findings, in general, suggest that the language teachers do integrate technology into their classes and support learners with technological tools for their out-of-class language learning. However, the teachers have problems with the poor technological infrastructure of the classrooms. P9 stated, *"there is only one computer, and only the teacher can use it"*. While this problem hampers technology integration to support learning in class, it also leads to a teacher-directed classroom atmosphere where all the responsibility of teaching is on teachers. Thus, students become passive information receivers.

Another major issue was the challenge of getting the objectives of the curriculum done in time, which is the workload of the teachers in a limited period. Three participants expressed that they had so many other things to do in the class apart from helping students to be autonomous language learners. Therefore, there should be another department, a language advising center, to help learners for their out-of-class language learning. P1 recounted that *"because our job is to teach a foreign language, we need to do it. But I think there must be another department at the university"*. It seems evident from the responses that a fixed curriculum poses a problem for the participants; either they mention it or not. The participants spend time helping learners in their free time, but in class, they need to manage their time to complete the curriculum requirements.

**Learner-based constraints.** The participants reported that few students wish to learn English, and the rest only complete course requirements. For instance, P11 stated that *"My students tell me they just want to pass the class, it doesn't matter to learn English or not"*. Some participants also face some discouraging students' behaviors or statements, as can be seen in P4's experience: *"The majority of students want me to add extra 5 points to their grades instead of advising about how to learn English better"*.

The learners' learning culture also affects their language learning habits, beliefs, dispositions,

and values. Learners bring their past learning habits to the current system, and it becomes a challenge to change them. Even if the teachers try to establish a totally new language learning environment, they have difficulty to adapt to the recent changes. For instance, P2 changed her teaching method by using a different approach, flipped learning. However, it was challenging for her to make students motivated. *“The students are used to teacher-directed and spoon-fed way of learning and studying for only the exams not for their development since the very early stages of their education”*. So that she described her experience as a challenge and used the word “force” to define her efforts to make them study in a new way. She also expressed that even if her students continuously complain about the conventional language teaching methods, when they face some difficulties in the new way of learning, they want to go back to the past system.

### Discussion

This study investigated English language teachers’ autonomy-supportive practices and revealed constraints underlying the barriers to autonomy-support. The data were collected qualitatively with semi-structured interviews. The findings showed that the teachers utilized a variety of support mechanisms. Even though their individual practices look small steps, their current practices create a promising picture for the feasibility of autonomy support in foreign language classes.

In line with Bailly’s (2011) proposal for autonomous language learning with technology (i.e., willingness, learning resources, and learning skills), the teachers utilize affective, resource and capacity support. Teachers attempt to increase their students’ language learning motivation; help learners find appropriate learning resources and suggest language materials; help learners manage and take the responsibility of their learning. The thematic analysis further revealed two other autonomy-supportive practices, namely technology and social support, which are also pivotal for learners’ autonomous language learning. In other words, teachers guide their students about how to use technology for language learning and promote cooperation among learners. However, teachers face institutional and learner-based constraints hampering their efforts for autonomy support.

Lai et al. (2016) revealed that learners need teacher help for selecting appropriate language learning materials for their out-of-class learning. Moreover, many language learners are not aware of the potentials of technology and cannot also use technology for language learning even though they are digital natives (Çelik et al., 2012; Lai & Gu, 2011). Thus, teachers should take the role of an advisor and a guide to help them (Wichayathian & Reinders, 2018). Similarly, the teachers in this study believe they should take the role of a language advisor for learners’ out-of-class language learning and a guide for resource selection (Gardner & Miller, 2011; Morrison, 2008). Parallel to this assertion, the teachers in this study expressed their willingness to support learners’ autonomous learning and reported their practices for this aim. They use and model various language learning technologies in their classes; give technical training on how to use them for language learning purposes and recommend technological tools for out-of-class language learning. On the other hand, they tend to help willing students in terms of resource support, rather than wasting time and energy for unmotivated students. The teachers’ in-class technology use also affects learners’ out-of-school technology use. Concurring with various prior research studies (Lai, 2015a, 2015b; Lai & Gu, 2011), the participants’ efforts were claimed to enhance the quality of the learners’ technology use for language learning and to increase their digital competence. Thus, those practices might have a positive impact on learners’ autonomous language learning with technology.

It is widely argued in the literature that learners' willingness to take the responsibility of their learning is of importance for out-of-class language learning and the development of autonomy (Dörnyei, 2001; Huang & Benson, 2013; Reinders, 2010; Zimmerman, 2011). In accordance with this, the teachers in this study consider learner motivation one of the primary conditions for successful language learning and the development of learner autonomy, as well. They provide affective support using different strategies, as proposed by Dörnyei (2001). The teachers attempt to increase learners' goal-orientedness, raise their self-confidence in language learning, and use technology to make language learning more enjoyable. However, the teachers in this study expressed that many students are not entirely motivated to learn English autonomously. This finding reflects various studies which conclude that the learners' unwillingness is one of the challenges in the development of learner autonomy (for example Alhaysony, 2016; Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2017).

Another major finding of this study was that the teachers face many constraints, as found in various studies from different contexts. The teachers addressed crowded classes (Alibakhshi, 2015), poor technological infrastructure (Park & Son, 2009), and overloaded curriculum (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012; Wichayathian & Reinders, 2018) as the issues which hamper their autonomy-supportive practices. Furthermore, the teachers identified their students as reluctant to learn English autonomously (Al Asmari, 2013; Chan et al., 2002; Farahani, 2014; Yunus & Arshad, 2014). The teachers further indicated the learners' teacher-centered learning culture, which affects the learners' learning habits, beliefs, dispositions, and values. This issue might be connected to the Turkish education system in which "the authority is not shared; individuality and creativity are less encouraged" (Balçikanli, 2010, p.99). Because of students' limited agency, they are expected to resist changing and taking control of their learning.

### **Conclusion**

This current study has provided insights into how English language teachers working at the tertiary level in a state university in Turkey support their students' out-of-class autonomous language learning and the challenges in this procedure. The study revealed significant implications for teachers. Given that teachers are supposed to create an autonomy-supportive learning environment in their classes, they could initiate changes in their routines. One of these changes could be to learn more about the learners' autonomy levels and technology competence by conducting simple surveys at the beginning of each semester. Therefore, they can redesign their classes and share their responsibilities based on the learners' readiness for autonomous language learning. Another point is that teachers can inform learners of the procedure of their material preparation and show how they find and prepare teaching materials in line with their objectives in the classroom. In this way, learners could be more aware of how they can select appropriate learning resources and manage their own learning out-of-the class. What is more, the more teachers know about language learning technologies, the more they tune into supporting learners for out-of-class learning. Given that, teachers can participate in in-service teacher training programs to keep up with the new technological advancements and current pedagogical skills needed for teaching language learners of 21st century.

This study is not without limitations. The data were collected with a single data collection instrument, semi-structured interviews, which is based on the participants' self-report. This situation is potentially susceptible to "social desirability bias" (Grimm, 2010). Namely, the participants might have described their practices as better and more socially desirable than their actual state. Observation and documentation would be useful to get a more comprehensible overview of teachers' related practices. Another limitation was that the study included a small

cohort of teachers working at the tertiary level, and the findings may not apply to language teachers in other contexts.

While discussing the findings, the teachers' demographic details were not considered due to the small sample size. However, some differences were observed in the perceptions and practices of the teachers with different educational backgrounds and the lengths of teaching experience. For example, the teachers who were Ph.D. candidates were more autonomy-supportive. Also, the younger teachers were more inclined to integrate technology than the older ones. As such, teachers' demographic variables could be studied in relation to autonomy support to see whether such variables make any significant differences in their pedagogical practices.

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**Academic Failure: Unspoken Experiences by International Postgraduate Students  
in a Malaysian University**

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### **Abstract**

Malaysia aspires to become a regional and international hub of higher education through an international student mobility initiative. Existing scholarly work on international students is skewed towards understanding the general challenges faced by international students, but limited work has been conducted in exploring the impact of severe supervision challenges on international postgraduate students' experiences in a Malaysian research university. Hence, this paper explores the evidence of academic failure experienced by international postgraduate students by drawing on semi-structured interviews with 33 international postgraduate students. Academic failure experiences were faced by international postgraduate students as a result of two major challenges: supervision issues, and faculty mismanagement. The experience of academic failure has impacted the students' enthusiasm, motivation and inspiration in progressing in their research work and has also impacted them psychologically. The implications for developing significant and profound strategies to assist international postgraduate students in achieving positive educational outcomes are also discussed.

*Keywords:* academic failure, International postgraduate students, Malaysia

Malaysia has aspired to become a regional and international hub of higher education by 2020 and this aspiration has been supported through attracting international students from around the globe. Singh et al. (2012) observed that the success of international education is stereotypically evaluated according to growth in international student numbers. Against this indicator, according to the latest statistics in 2018, there were 170,898 international students (undergraduate and postgraduate) studying in public and private universities in Malaysia (Ministry of Education, 2019). In 2017, 32,042 were international postgraduate students, of whom 21,170 were enrolled at public universities and 10,872 enrolled at private universities (Ministry of Higher Education, 2018). A recent study by Singh et al. (2014) found that international postgraduate students had chosen Malaysia for their studies because of its safe environment (its political stability), shared cultural values and language (especially for students from ASEAN countries such as Cambodia and Indonesia), its relatively low tuition fees and cost of living, “proximity to the students’ home country as well as access to culturally important items such as *halal* and other dietary requirements” (p. 463). In strengthening the numbers of such international students, Malaysian higher education institutions need to provide academic and social support services to them so that they have a positive, engaging international experience studying in Malaysia.

In the main, factors leading to academic success (Singh, 2018), as well as the academic and social adjustment challenges encountered by international students (Asgari & Borzooei, 2014; Desa et al., 2012; Sidhu et al., 2014) have been widely studied. However, understanding how severe supervision-related challenges contribute to academic failure experiences by international postgraduate students in Malaysia has received very little attention (da Silva & Ravindran, 2016). This paper therefore investigates several challenges that are involved in leading to academic failure experiences of international postgraduate students studying at one of the top Malaysian research universities. The paper takes one of the first steps in offering a complete picture of the academic experiences of international students in Malaysia.

### Literature Review

Astin (1976) and other researchers (Ayán & García, 2008; Zhou et al., 2014) have generally measured student outcomes by way of indicators such as completion of the degree and academic grades. However, international postgraduate students in Singh and Jack’s (2018) study understood their academic success as the development of personal and professional skills as well as their contribution to their home country on return. Singh (2018) further revealed institutional services, such as workshops, financial and library services, together with individual characteristics, especially self-discipline attributes, and a quality supervision process, were the main factors contributing to achieving academic success of international postgraduate students. Other factors articulated by postgraduate students in Malaysia have included supervisor commitment to the research project and supervisees, and the frequency of consultations between supervisors and supervisees (Mohamed et al., 2012).

On the other side of the coin, scholars who have studied academic failure of undergraduate students, such as Ajjawi et al. (2019a), have defined the “failure” concept as students obtaining a fail grade for one or more subjects during their studies. Scholars such as Helfer and Drew (2019), however, refer to academic failure experiences of postgraduate students as “unhappy, discouraged or disappointed” (p. 512), stressed, exhausted and burn out (Cornér et al., 2017) or experiencing low satisfaction and engagement levels (Löfström & Pyhältö, 2014) due to an ineffective supervision process and other related issues pertaining to international postgraduate students. The most common challenge faced by international postgraduate students is limited

English proficiency skills in writing, reading and speaking (Alsaifi & Shin, 2017; Li et al., 2018). Thus, international postgraduate students in Malaysia acknowledged that they might take up to three hours to read and understand one journal article because the vocabulary and terminologies used in some academic journals created complications for them in comprehending key arguments of the article (Kaur & Sidhu, 2009). Postgraduate students in Malaysia have also reported that they were unable to write research papers effectively in English because they had insufficient knowledge of discourse patterns common to academic articles and this hindered their meaning-making process for writing purposes (Kaur & Sidhu, 2009).

Principally, international students experience difficulties in establishing good academic and social relationships with lecturers due to the inadequacy of their language skills (Kim, 2007). This leads to communication tensions because English language limitations interfere with their social and academic communication: a lack of grammar hinders them from articulating their ideas in English, thus impacting the relationship between students and lecturers/supervisors (Kim, 2007). In addition to language incompetence, Korean students in a United States-based study by Kim (2007) acknowledged several interaction challenges, such as discrepancies between the style of guidance or supervision from the supervisors or lecturers and the students' expectations, student passivity in discussion and supervisor unavailability.

Critical to international postgraduate students' academic success is their ability to use library services for a variety of academic and research tasks of reading-to-writing, such as writing research papers, theses, assignments and scientific papers (Mu, 2007). International students mainly face challenges in using such services due to their low level of familiarity with library systems and resources (Mu, 2007), which may differ from those in their previous educational background. As a result, international postgraduate students in a New Zealand-based study (Mu, 2007) expressed concerns about accessing online databases and catalogues for books, journals and other reading materials, print indexes, library classification systems, locating books, information retrieval skills and citing information (Harmon & Wales, 1999). These challenging experiences then contribute to non-completion of the degree program or non-timely completion, as well as hindering the research growth of postgraduate students.

There are, too, multiple supervision challenges that contribute to research failure experiences of international postgraduate students (Gao, 2019; Khozaei et al., 2015; Mohamed et al., 2012). For example, one of the most common breakdowns in supervision is the supervisor's varied roles in the institution. The supervisor's main role is to provide substantial time to guide a student in the chosen research project. However, as they themselves are active researchers and have other academic priorities, such as teaching and administrative loads, supervisors tend to neglect supervision time (Gao, 2019). In Gao's (2019) study, an international postgraduate student was excited to be associated with an internationally renowned scholar in his field; however, by the time of enrolment the supervisor had started a collaborative research project with a university in the United States, leaving this student alone on the supervision journey, which eventually impacted research progress severely. Alternatively, supervisor lack of research expertise or knowledge (Khozaei et al., 2015) in a specific discipline has led students experiencing research failure: for example, postgraduate students in Khozaei et al.'s (2015) study pointed out that, by not having a supervisor who had in-depth knowledge on statistical analyses, understanding of the whole research proposal was jeopardised. Gube et al. (2017) found that postgraduate students do value discipline-expert supervisors because the latter speed up research progress by "connecting [students] with appropriate literature and contacts in the field" (p. 7). As a result, "the role of supervisors has been often cited as an important

contributing factor to the success of graduate students” (Khozaei et al., 2015, p. 449) and supervisors neglecting their responsibilities as supervisors can be a major interruption to their students’ research progress.

Supervision issues mainly reported in Malaysia include individual behavior or personality clashes between students and supervisors (Sidhu et al., 2014) due to differences in academic culture. For instance, Al-Zubaidi and Recharads (2010) have explained how students from some countries are taught to express their opinions directly and assertively and yet there are also students who are educated to state their ideas indirectly in supervisory discussions. Both of these can result in offensive or unpleasant relationship outcomes for both parties. Sidhu et al.’s (2014) study further found that Malaysian supervisors may speak abruptly to international students when they fail to comprehend a supervisor’s expectations. As a result, international students felt discouraged, scared of supervisors and lacked confidence in timely completion (Sidhu et al., 2014). According to Ismail and Abiddin (2009), a high attrition rate is apparent among PhD students in Malaysia and there are also many cases of non-timely completion of PhD studies.

Other literature commonly relates supervision issues to a supervisor’s busy schedule (Abiddin & West, 2007), the differing levels of expectation between the supervisor and students (Ismail & Abiddin, 2009), communication issues (Ismail et al., 2013) and lack of clear guidance and feedback (Wang & Li, 2008). International postgraduate students in Khozaei et al.’s (2015) study also stated that repeated harsh feedback received from supervisors hampered their research growth and contributed to their low confidence levels. When these supervision issues reach severe levels, supervision ethical issues enter the discussion. According to Löfström and Pyhältö (2020), “ethics is comprised of general, normative principles concerning what is acceptable and what is not” (p. 537). Further, “ethics refers to expectations regarding moral positions, integrity refers to acting upon those moral positions” (Löfström & Pyhältö, 2020, p. 537) and therefore the term “supervision ethics” is used in this paper to understand the degree of moral behaviour of supervisors from the perspective of postgraduate students. As such, supervision ethical issues are seen as dereliction of a supervisor’s responsibility towards supervisees (Löfström & Pyhältö, 2017). For instance, Middle Eastern postgraduate students studying in one South East Asian university experienced research hindrance due to the supervisor’s unavailability and the lack of commitment shown towards assisting students (Khozaei et al., 2015). Davis (2019) further posits that a supervisor’s hectic roster impacts on students negatively, “leading to discomfort, loss of self-esteem and finally, all too often, peril” (p. 454). The extent of a supervisor’s busy schedule and lack of feedback provision have led to fidelity issues in terms of supervision abandonment and inadequate supervision (Löfström & Pyhältö, 2017) and have huge negative implications for international students’ academic success.

Although Davis (2019) argues that fundamental challenges of supervision include supervisory expertise, time-related qualities and feedback, realistically these challenges are intertwined. The challenges discussed in this section are entirely difficulties faced by international postgraduate students without further understanding the impact of these obstacles on international students’ academic failure experiences in Malaysia. The research question of this paper is therefore “What are the critical supervision challenges faced by international postgraduate students that have significant influence on their academic failure experiences?”

## Research Design and Methodology

The empirical data in this paper originated from a PhD project that explored academic success experiences of international postgraduate students at a Malaysian research university. Hermeneutic phenomenology was developed by Heidegger (1889-1976) and has both elements of lived experiences (phenomenology) and of interpretation (hermeneutic) for understanding; here the research participants' academic failure experiences (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the lived human experience and "addresses experience from the perspectives of meanings, understandings and interpretations" (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010, p. 1056). Its main focus as a method is on understanding the meaning of experiences by searching for themes and engagement with the data interpretively with a less importance on the essence of the experience (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). It offers researchers the opportunity to explore, understand and interpret experiences.

### Participants

Data were collected from 33 international postgraduate students (21 males, 12 females) at a research university in Malaysia. Participants were invited using a purposive sampling method: the author made an initial contact with the elected international postgraduate ambassadors through their publicly available contact details via the Student Ambassador Program (SAP) website. Participants were also selected using the snowball sampling technique when the initial participants from the SAP identified further candidates (Minichiello et al., 2008). Notices to recruit participants were also posted on notice boards in the postgraduate lounge, library and International House (accommodation). Table 1 illustrates the demographic details of international postgraduate students who participated.

Table 1: Demographic details of international postgraduate students

	Information	Number of IS
Gender	Male	21
	Female	12
Nationality	India	4
	Iraq	4
	Iran	4
	Yemen	3
	Nigeria	3
	China	3
	Indonesia	3
	Sri Lanka	2
	Pakistan	2
	Palestine	2
	Cambodia	1
	Bangladesh	1
	Somalia	1
	Faculty	Pharmacy
Education		5
Communication		4
Humanities		3
Computer Science		3
Architecture		3
Biology		2
Management		2

	Language	2
	Industrial Technology	1
	Physics	1
	Mathematics	1
	Business	1
Degree	PhD	23
	Masters	10
Length of Candidature	0 – 11 months	8
	1st year	10
	2nd year	4
	3rd year	5
	4th year	3
	5th year	1
	Graduated	2

Pseudonyms are used to preserve the identity of participants. In reporting, qualitative comments, the following convention is used: IS for international postgraduate student, interview number (i.e. IS 1, IS 2, etc.).

### Data Collection

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in English for between 30 and 60 minutes at a Malaysian university and were audio-taped with a digital voice recorder with the permission from the participants to ensure that all their perspectives were captured accurately. The main ideas addressed in the interviews included experiences of academic success and failure, challenges that contributed to these experiences, strategies employed to overcome challenges, and factors that enhanced academic success. Interviews were subsequently transcribed by the author. Students were mostly interviewed in the University Postgraduate Lounge.

### Data Analysis

This study sought to interpret the participants' social lived experiences by analysing the information they provided using thematic analysis. Van Manen's (1990) method was adopted because it is one of the most complete and popular hermeneutic methods that focuses on "understanding the meaning of experience (by searching for themes) with greater interpretative engagement with the data" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 109). Van Manen describes the method's base as built on three approaches: holistic reading to achieve a holistic understanding of the phenomenon; selective reading, highlighting significant statements to formulate meanings; and detailed or line-by-line reading to consider every sentence. The author used holistic and selective reading to analyse the data, because this would "result in a good balance between part and whole reading and less likelihood of idiosyncratic interpretations that are beyond the data" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 124). Techniques proposed by Boyatzis (1998), Braun and Clarke (2006) and Creswell (2008) were also adopted to complement van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which is less prescriptive and guided more by the relationship between the text and the researcher.

An inductive approach was adopted. Data analysis began with coding, collating codes into possible themes and generating a thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The author manually selected the shortest transcript and assigned key words or phrases that described what participants meant (Tesch, 1990). At this stage, the author used van Manen's second approach, selective reading or highlighting, to see which phrases represented the phenomenon under investigation. While doing the coding, the author asked "What statement(s) or phrases(s) seem

particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?” (van Manen, 1990, p. 93) in order to formulate the meanings.

The next step was to group similar codes and redundant codes and reduce the list to a smaller, more manageable number (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2008). The process of thematic analysis is an iterative one (Braun & Clarke, 2006): the author revisited the list and data to see if any new codes emerged (Creswell, 2008). Quotes that supported the codes were highlighted (Tesch, 1990) and the list reduced to establish themes that answered the research question.

## Findings

### Supervision Issues

The lack of support from the supervisor in terms of insufficient provision of feedback on research work and communication breakdown due to the supervisor’s busy schedule were the main reasons for an Iranian Master’s student experiencing academic failure: the student from the Communication Faculty was left for months to find her own footing in her research work due to her supervisor’s extreme busy schedule; working on her research proposal for nearly a year on her own, she was deprived of constructive feedback. At this stage of candidature, she is frustrated; she is yet to present her proposal to the panel so that she can move on to the next stage of her project:

*I really had difficulty finding my supervisor. He was really busy with different things, inside or outside Malaysia. Most of the time he is not around. I haven’t presented my proposal yet, and my proposal is completely ready, but he has not read it yet. I am waiting for his comments. I have sent more than 10 emails in one week to him, trying to call him, even going to his office, but I cannot find him. For example, when I want to meet him, I go to his office to set an appointment. About 1 month later I get an appointment and in this one-month period, he may postpone or cancel the meeting two or three times. And it will take another two months to meet him. It should be our meeting but it won’t last more than 15 minutes, as he will be talking on the phone, talking to people. (IS 10)*

Several other PhD students indicated the same issues with their supervisors: they feel very tired of “chasing after” their supervisors. An Indonesian student said her supervisor tended to misplace her thesis chapters due to the supervisor’s busy schedule. As a result, she had to reprint her chapters several times for comment:

*My supervisor is very busy. I pass my chapters to her and then she needs a lot of time to read and to give the feedback. Sometimes I pass on the chapters, and then she said, ‘I lost it somewhere, I don’t know where I put it’, so I need to reprint again, and pass it to her again... Sometimes I cry, but [there is] nothing to be done [about it]. So that’s the big challenge for me. (IS 6)*

Two PhD students and one Master’s student claimed that they had challenges in meeting regularly with supervisors and receiving constructive feedback on draft chapters:

*I submitted my third draft one and half months ago. I am still waiting for comments. I emailed and I have given a printout copy, I am still waiting for comments. It’s only 23 pages. (IS 21)*



*He was very busy, and at the same time he doesn't have time to edit or to see, to talk, [he was] travelling, meeting, lecturing in other places. (IS 23)*

*There is no communication between me and her. I feel very tired with her. Every time I make contact to see her, she said "Ok". I go and wait for her for 1-2 hours, [but] I couldn't find her. Later I feel very sad. (IS 12)*

As a result of these disappointments, a Master's student said that she just wants to finish her Masters and pursue her PhD degree in another Faculty or even in other countries such as Australia or New Zealand. This student, however, went on to work with her supervisor:

*I really want to get rid of it [the Masters]...But for sure I won't start a PhD in this [Faculty]... maybe in another [Faculty]... and maybe in another country... [I am] thinking about Australia or New Zealand... I don't want to have this challenge again... It was not a good experience for me. (IS 10)*

For other students, one of the main strategies adopted was to change supervisors because of bad supervision experiences. For example, a Master's student from Iraq decided to change her supervisor due to limited support in the research project. Wisker and Robinson (2013) argue that changing supervisors influences research progress because students then might take more time to complete their research. However, this student was determined to change her supervisor because she wanted to feel comfortable in completing her studies and found herself in an unpleasant supervision situation:

*I decided to change my supervisor. I found it is ok to be late, but it is better to feel comfortable than just take the degree and don't feel comfortable with it. (IS 12)*

Another challenge experienced at this research university was the supervisor's limited expert knowledge on the topic. A Palestinian PhD student pointed out:

*Sometimes supervisors are not very specialised in that field. Sometimes you feel your supervisor is disconnected from your field or on what you are going to do or what you are thinking. You feel you didn't make progress or you fail in making progress. This makes me think that I didn't make progress and I feel depressed. (IS 8)*

A PhD student from China claimed that his supervisors seem to lack knowledge relevant to his research field. As a result, they were unable to provide meaningful guidance in his research discipline and the student felt disconnected from his supervisors:

*For the PhD level, sometimes I find the supervision is not very nice, because my research is Chinese cinema, so all the supervisors here are mostly Malay, and they have no such background. (IS 3)*

These findings do not add to the list of supervision challenges widely acknowledged in scholarly research, but they are serious, authentic reports associated with the spectrum of academic failure experiences felt by international students at this Malaysian university. Based on these findings, supervision commitment is being clearly breached because supervisors are

too busy to provide feedback and this then has negative implications on the students' research work and their research success.

### **Faculty Mismanagement**

Ajjawi et al. (2019b) argue that students generally want to be connected to and supported by the university and academic staff members in order to excel in their studies. However, a fourth-year Management PhD student from Iran expressed his disbelief on the inappropriate treatment he received from the Faculty's management once his supervisor left the university:

*My supervisor left and nobody wants to help me and [the faculty members] gave me a lot of corrections based on my proposal defense. I haven't had access to the EG machine which was my main equipment to do my research. The management sent the machine to [another branch campus]. (IS 24)*

This particular student described his academic failure experience thus: "everything is reverse, no happy life, boring life, no acknowledgement, no scholarship, no admiration by others" when his supportive supervisor left the university. He received insufficient support from his Faculty's management in terms of accessibility to vital equipment. Other academics from the Faculty were reluctant to supervise his research project because the research was different from the typical management research conducted in the Faculty. He was asked to change his topic after three years' working on the initial research which he had been so passionate about. His grief is captured thus:

*Writing a new proposal after three years, I have changed my lovely thesis and do the stupid stuff in the field and do the questionnaire, typical management research which I don't like, but I am forced to do... [It is a] boring...boring life... when you are forced to do this. It means you are forced to do... I don't have a choice right now... This is not my field, this is not my passion. (IS 24)*

The student feels he has been left with no choice about his research change.

## **Discussion**

The main purpose of this paper is to explore diagnostic supervision challenges experienced by international postgraduate students that significantly influenced their academic failure experiences. The results have highlighted two main supervision challenges that contributed to academic failure incidents in a Malaysian university. The first main challenge surrounds supervision. Good supervision is essential in research students' educational journeys but students at this Malaysian university reported supervision issues arising from lack of constructive feedback by academic staff due to busy staff schedules and supervisor unfamiliarity with the students' research topics. Although et al. (2007) highlighted that a positive supervisory relationship is primary in ensuring that students are guided and empowered to be independent learners in gaining a Masters or PhD degree, lack of constructive feedback and communication breakdown reported here influenced students' research performance because they were unable to revise their writing in good time without helpful comments from their supervisors. As a result, students experienced delay in completing their research on time and in developing constructive communication on research work with their supervisors.

Cornér et al. (2017) argue that frequency of supervision is a fundamental element of students' satisfaction with the supervision process and it reduces the risk of dropping out. However, for postgraduate international students in this study, lack of timely guidance and feedback discouraged them to move on in their projects. As a consequence, students experienced academic failure in the sense that there was limited progress in their research. Postgraduate students in Löfström and Pyhältö's (2014) study also experienced inadequate supervision because supervisors were too busy to provide research direction and had too many supervisees. Such incompetent, abandonment and inadequate supervision is categorised as an ethical issue, according to Goodyear, Crego and Johnston (1992).

Postgraduate students in Gube et al.'s (2017) study argued that discipline-expert supervisors were appreciated because they were strongly connected with the discipline context and therefore "provide[ed] support in relation to research direction and content-specific feedback" (p. 10). This is a sharp contrast to experiences reported here, where some students did not receive positive or clear feedback from the supervisor because the supervisor lacked relevant knowledge. This is a dishonesty on the part of the supervisor and this then impacts not only students' research success but also students' well-being in terms of their experiencing psychological distress such as depression for not progressing in their research work. As a consequence, lack of guidance does impede international students' completion of research and studies within a stipulated timeframe. Although the Malaysian Internationalisation Policy document (Ministry of Higher Education, 2011) strongly recommends that it is the responsibility of universities to provide positive learning experiences to international students, these supervision challenges obstruct the national strategy that wishes to promote student engagement and experience.

The second main challenge is mismanagement at Faculty level. The Faculty management failed to acknowledge that postgraduate research program is indeed a vibrant body of research, as argued by Wisker et al. (2003). The management clearly neglected to accommodate, facilitate and manage a student's research when his supervisor suddenly left: the PhD student was left "hanging" or an "orphan", in Wisker and Robinson's (2013) terms. As a consequence, the student was devastated by the whole situation, resulting in limited passion and enthusiasm to carry on with his new research topic which to him was not challenging enough compared to his first topic. Yet this student is resilient: he wants to persevere with his PhD studies (although not within the completion timeline), which also aligns with established literature that international students have an "edge" in striving, thriving and demonstrating resilience in their studies (Nguyen, 2013).

International postgraduate students in this study have adopted several varied strategies to overcome supervision challenges. Some had the mindset of going along with the supervisors' timeline, because too much time and effort had been invested in the research and also in the supervisory relationship – there was no turning back. Nonetheless, after these negative experiences, students may not want to persevere or engage with the supervisors for further educational opportunities. Others took a drastic step in changing their supervisors because they were just uncomfortable with the situation.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The findings of this paper reveal not only new but unique findings on the international postgraduate students' academic failure experiences at one of the research universities in Malaysia. A spectrum of academic failure experiences was experienced by international

postgraduate students due to various supervision challenges. Students felt that they were not valued or admired; they were unhappy, demotivated, depressed, disappointed, tired and frustrated.

Two main supervision challenges that were themselves unethical were also observed. Firstly, management at the Faculty level was unethical in “taking away” research equipment of an international student while this student was still collecting data for his PhD study. In addition, due to his supervisor leaving the university, this student was asked to change his research topic in his third year of study, which is wrong to do if the ground is that the research area is unique and yet no academic is interested in that topic. Ethically and morally, PhD students need specific guidance and feedback in their research project, even though independent learning is vital and is asked for from students. But, in this situation, guidance was not provided nor was genuine assistance offered to this student to pursue his research.

Secondly, inadequate supervision has contributed to international postgraduate students experiencing not only academic failure but also undergoing psychological distress. In particular, receiving unclear feedback or none at all from the supervisor due to the latter’s busy schedule, lack of discipline expertise or lack of research support is unacceptable, because it has breached the supervision code of ethics. Students are left stressed, demotivated and unsure of their research direction in their project, which subsequently impacts their research growth.

These findings contribute to the non-Western literature on academic failure experiences, particularly for valuable and vulnerable stakeholders – the international students at this prestigious research university. In practical terms, these findings have not only exposed serious academic and research problems, they also have implications for students’ academic failure experiences. Singh and Jack (2018) reported that international postgraduate students seek international education to achieve academic success, build knowledge and skills, and contribute to their home country on return. However, if these benefits are abridged by research or academic issues, international student numbers may dwindle in Malaysia.

Recent scholars (Brimble, 2016; Löfström et al., 2015; McCrohon & Nyland, 2016) have suggested that there is a lack of institutional guidance and support in place for academic staff members to adhere to research integrity practices and procedures. However, many Western universities, particularly Australian universities, have taken initiatives to build online modules on research integrity, informative websites on research integrity, and conduct training and development workshops and forums for faculty staff members (Devlin, 2006; East, 2016; Zangenehmadar et al., 2015). Since Malaysia is a new contender in attracting international students, such ethical guidelines and policy concerning supervision and management support need to be put in place to minimise and then eradicate challenges experienced by international postgraduate students. Such guidelines and policy will also generate positive experiences of international students’ academic success in Malaysia.

Like many other research studies, this study has its limitations. This research was based on semi-structured interviews from one single research university in Malaysia, which limits the generalizability of these findings. Further research could overcome this limitation by conducting mix-methods research design with supervisors, as well as with domestic students, from public and private universities in Malaysia and beyond.

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**An Issue of Urban/Rural Division? Examining Mongolian Language Education  
in the IMAR**

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### Abstract

Against the backdrop of the increasing disparities in urban and rural areas in China nowadays, this qualitative study explores trilingual education in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR), with a focus on the Mongolian language programme. Through a field trip to five primary and secondary schools, interviews and class observations reveal that students are highly motivated in conducting their primary and lower secondary schooling through Mongolian, due to the high utilitarian value associated with Mongolian. Preferential policies make it possible to maximise the chance of academic advancement, career prospects and possible social upward mobility for learners of Mongolian. However, the dominant positions of Putonghua as the national common language, and English as a lingua franca in schools with admirable academic quality, restrict the ability to convert the linguistic capital of Mongolian into other forms of capital outside of Inner Mongolia. The study reveals that the problems and difficulties of Mongolian language education in compact ethnic minority regions tend to be the same as those faced by other Chinese rural schools. The marginalisation of a minority language is examined in relation to fast-paced urbanisation; changes would require institutional support to enhance the symbolic value of the ethnic minority language.

*Keywords:* ethnic minorities, language policy, Mongolian, trilingual education, urbanisation,

Trilingual education has been the de facto norm for ethnic minority schools in China since the 2002 introduction of English in Year 3 of the elementary curriculum (Feng & Adamson, 2018). Putonghua (the national common language, also known as Mandarin Chinese), the ethnic minority language, and English co-exist in the schooling system. In the case of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR), the Mongolian language is offered together with Putonghua and English.

The IMAR is a long, narrow strip in the northwest of China. It shares borders with Russia and Mongolia (Dong et al., 2015). While Han is the dominant ethnicity in the region, the Mongols are the main ethnic minority. According to the 2010 national census (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012), in that year there were 19.65 million Han, an increase of 4.39% since 2000, and 4.22 million Mongols, with a similar increase of 4.89%. More than 70% of the total number of Mongols in the whole country (5.98 million; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011) reside in the IMAR.

Despite this population growth, there seems to be a decrease in the level of interest in the Mongolian language (Gao, 2011). Indeed, there is greater demand for Putonghua due to its being “the language of power and access to economic well-being” (Tsung & Cruickshank, 2009, p. 550), as well as for English, owing to the forces of globalisation and future personal development (Yi & Adamson, 2017a). The Outline of Mid- and Long-term Educational Reforms and Developmental Plan for the IMAR (2010-2020) puts a joint emphasis on Mongolian and Putonghua, in order to achieve the goal of bilingualism (Ministry of Education of the PRC, 2011). This study sought to investigate whether Mongolian can survive and thrive, bearing in mind the social and commercial advantages of Putonghua and English.

Against the backdrop of rapid economic development in China, there has also been fast-paced urbanisation, leading to widening gaps between the urban and rural, as well as between largely urbanised and less urbanised regions. The impact of regional economic disparities on trilingual education has been pointed out in previous research (Feng & Adamson, 2018; Gao, 2011; Zhang & Yang, 2017, 2018), which leads to the question of the role of these wide gaps in regional wealth in the implementation of trilingual education, especially for minority language education, which faces declining interest among younger generations. In these circumstances, the current study entailed visiting five schools in Inner Mongolia in order to gain an in-depth understanding of Mongolian language education against the backdrop of trilingual education policies and China’s urbanisation.

### **Trilingual Education Movements in Inner Mongolia**

Although Chinese official discourse in policies and documents still refers to bilingual education, Mongol students have access to three languages: Putonghua, Mongolian and English. Long before English was introduced to formal schooling in the early 2000s, Mongolian and Putonghua bilingualism was practised in Inner Mongolia. Ma and Pan (1988) conducted a survey of 2,089 households in 1985, involving both agricultural and pastoral regions in Chifeng, the area where the field trip for this study was carried out. Over 90% of Mongols spoke fluent Putonghua, while a substantial number of them no longer spoke Mongolian. By comparison, around 47% of Han Chinese spoke at least some Mongolian, and more than 70% of Mongols had mastered both languages (Ma & Pan, 1988).

The 1990s witnessed decreasing interest in Mongolian, particular in urban areas. The main reason was economic reform and nationwide marketisation, which contributed to the superior

status of Putonghua and English being overwhelmingly dominant in terms of social mobility (Burjgin & Bilik, 2015). Government financial support for Mongolian education was also gradually withdrawn, since the education sector was to be managed according to market forces (Bilik, 1998).

By 1995, the number of Mongolian primary schools had been reduced by 1,409 and the number of Mongolian secondary schools had been reduced by 142 (Jin & Chen, 2010). In 1996-1997, the number of primary school pupils instructed in Mongolian fell by 23,256 (Jin & Chen, 2010). This pattern of reduction extended from major cities and banners – an administrative unit in IMAR – to small towns and pastureland (Tan & Jin, 2017). Statistics published by the IMAR Education Bureau in 1997 show the decreasing number of Mongol students learning Mongolian (Su, 2005, see Figure 1).

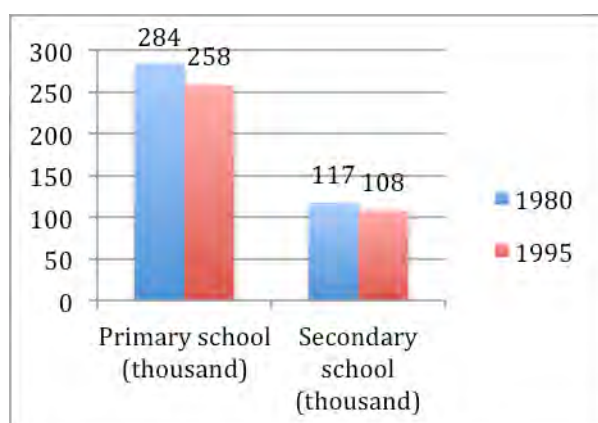


Figure 1: The decline in the number of Mongol students learning Mongolian

Moving into the 2000s, and according to a survey of three secondary schools in Hohhot, Chifeng and Tongliao, a large number of Mongol students reported code switching between Mongolian and Putonghua, even when communicating with family members and among themselves (Jin & Chen, 2010). A 2013 study confirmed that it was a common phenomenon for Mongol students not to study Mongolian (Jin, 2014). The marginalisation of Mongolian seemed to be underway across the IMAR (Yi & Adamson, 2017b).

Top-down measurements have been introduced to promote Putonghua and at the same time encourage the study of Mongolian. The principle of separate schooling for Han and Mongol children was adopted and promoted in the 1950s in order to allow Mongol students to benefit from learning both their own language and Putonghua (Su, 2005, pp. 92–93). These schools are named Mongolian National Schools (MNS).

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the elementary school curriculum was changed to bring Putonghua education forward from Grade 5 to Grade 3 and increase teaching hours (Su, 2005, pp. 92–94). The Mode of Instruction (MoI) was also shifted from Mongolian to Putonghua from Year 3 of junior high school. Specifically, there were two modes of classes at elementary level and three modes at secondary level, according to the MoI they employed (*ibid.*, pp. 95; see Table 1).

Table 1: Different modes of teaching according to MoI in late 1950s – early 1960s  
(adapted from Su, 2005, p. 95)

	Mode A	Mode B	Mode C
Elementary schools	Mongolian as MoI with Putonghua as a subject	Putonghua as MoI with Mongolian as a subject	N/A
Secondary schools	Except Putonghua, all other subjects use Mongolian as MoI	Except Mongolian, all other subjects use Putonghua as MoI	Some subjects (e.g. Maths, Physics, Chemistry) use Putonghua as MoI, some (e.g. History, Geography, Biology) use Mongolian as MoI

Based on the modes of teaching in the 1950s, the Regulations of the IMAR for Ethnic Education (The IMAR News, 2016) outlines that there are two modes of bilingual education in the MNS nowadays. Mode A uses Mongolian as the MoI for all subjects, with Putonghua as a language subject from Grade 2 at elementary level. Mode B uses Putonghua as the MoI and delivers Mongolian as a language subject. Therefore, Mode B differs from other Han Chinese schools only in offering Mongolian as a subject. MNS usually adopt Mode A, while also offering classes in Mode B. Mode C in Table 1 is no longer in practice. Both modes introduce English from Grade 3, as suggested by the central government.

Interestingly, Mode A schools are almost all Mongolian ethnic students from remote areas who are boarders at the school, whereas Mode B schools are usually in cities and towns consisting of Mongol, Han Chinese and other ethnic students. The closer a school is to an urban city “where the geographical and living conditions are more influenced by the majority Chinese culture” (Dong et al., 2015), the more likely that Mongolian is in a deteriorating position. In other words, the urbanisation of a region seems to lead to the marginalisation of its ethnic language (Dong et al., 2015; Yi & Adamson, 2017a, 2017b).

The current study entailed a field trip to five MNS in May 2018. Of the five schools, one is a Mongolian ethnic primary school and one is a Mongolian secondary school. The other three are MNS with Grade 1-6 at the elementary level and Grade 7-9 at the junior secondary level. These schools offer nine different levels of teaching because of the nine years of compulsory education in China. They are also called “nine-year education” schools.

Interviews with teachers, school leaders and local government officials, as well as class observations, were carried out in the field study in order to scrutinise the motivations and difficulties faced by students in the Mongolian language programme, with reference to rural/urban division. The purpose of this data was to address the question as to whether Mongolian can survive and thrive in light of the social and commercial advantages of Putonghua and English and increased urbanisation.

### **Field Trip to Five Ethnic Minority Schools**

The field trip took place in Chifeng, where previous research had been conducted (Jin & Chen, 2010; Ma & Pan, 1988), in order to answer the research question regarding the implementation

and development Mongolian language education in IMAR against the backdrop of urbanisation. Chifeng is in the east of the IMAR, one of the twelve sub-divisions of the IMAR (see Figure 2). With an area of around 90 thousand square kilometres, Chifeng consists of three districts, seven banners and two towns (Chifeng Government website, 2018). It has the largest population of all cities and banners (*ibid.*). Of its approximately 4.64 million people, 940,000 are Mongols (Chifeng Government website, 2018).

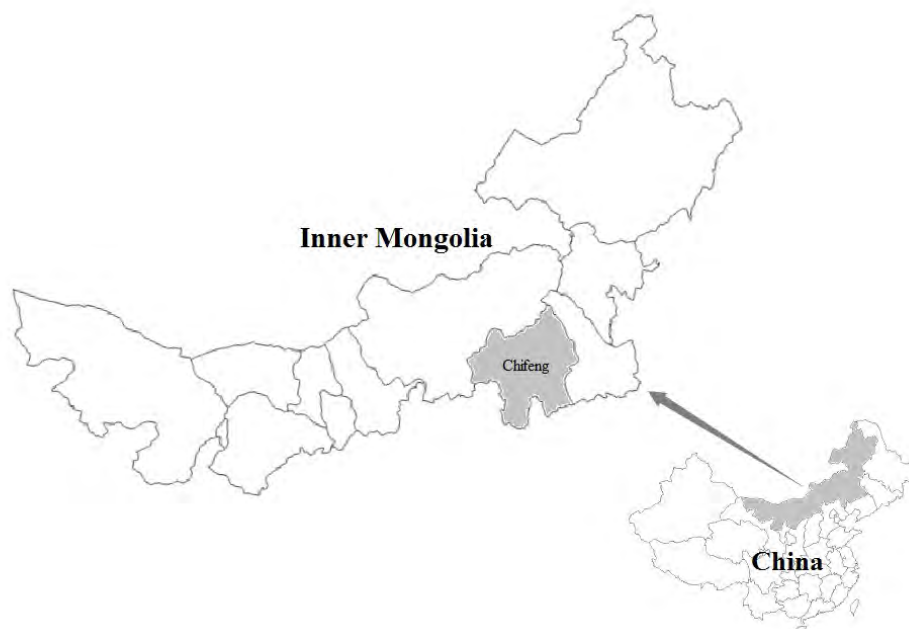


Figure 2: The location of Chifeng in the IMAR

The sheer size of Chifeng makes it impossible to visit all MNS. As a result, five Mongolian ethnic schools were selected, including both elementary and secondary levels. Two schools, Xianjin Primary and Secondary, are in developed urban areas, whereas the other three are in remote small towns or villages.

Table 2 below shows the number of interview participants in the current study. “School leaders” refers to staff who have a leading administrative role in a school, that is, headmaster. For the purpose of strict anonymity, the term “school leader” is used rather than the exact job title. All teachers interviewed are ethnic Mongols and native speakers of Mongolian. They were educated in Mongolian in Mode A or B in their childhood. They teach Mongolian, Putonghua or other subjects including English, Maths and Physics. Their teaching experience ranges from over four years to more than thirty years. Two officials from the local authorities were also invited for interviews, in order to gain an understanding of the development of bilingual education from a government perspective. Again, to protect anonymity, their job titles and departments are not specified.

Table 2: Study participants and manner of participation

School name	Participants	Number	Participation in the study	Observation
Xianjin Primary School	School leaders	1	Interview	
	School teachers	3	Interview and observation of teaching	Two classes (Mongolian in Mode A & B)
Xianjin Secondary School	School leaders	1	Interview	
	School teachers	2	Interview and observation of teaching	Two classes (Mongolian in Mode A & B)
Shengli Mongolian National School	School teachers	2	Interview and observation of teaching	One class (Mongolian in Mode B)
Hongqi Mongolian National School	School leaders	1	Interview	
	School teachers	6	Interview and observation of teaching	Two classes (Mongolian and English in Mode A)
Meihao Secondary School	School leaders	1	Interview	
	School teachers	6	Interview and observation of teaching	One class (Mongolian in Mode A)
Local government	Government officials	2	Interview	

Since MNS differ from Han Chinese schools in teaching and learning Mongolian, the teaching observations were mainly of Mongolian classes and an English class was observed in one Secondary School. The visit to each school was carried out in a similar format, starting with a general conversation with the school leader followed by class observations, and then conducting interviews with teachers, including those who had given classes earlier, followed by interviews with school leaders. This paper focuses on the results from the interviews, drawing information from in-class practice and language policies wherever necessary. Since all MNS implement bilingual education in two modes, classes in both Mode A and B were observed. The data below mainly present the common findings from both modes of class, with the differences between them highlighted later. In total, ten semi-structure interviews and five class observations were conducted. The average length of each interview is 113.6 minutes, which generates totally 135,921 words transcription. Each class lasted 40 minutes and therefore 200 minutes of classroom observations were also completed.

### Data Analysis

This study employs Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital to explicate the study of Mongolian in five MNS. As Bourdieu (1991) points out, linguistic utterances or expressions can possess a certain value which is endowed with the contexts or markets where these linguistic products are used. Moreover, the value associated with linguistic products varies (Bourdieu, 1991). A

person's linguistic capital refers to their practical competence and ability to produce linguistic expressions “which are highly valued on the markets concerned” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 18).

Linguistic capital is associated with, and can be converted to, other forms of capital, such as economic capital in the form of material wealth, cultural capital as exemplified by educational qualifications, and social capital as defined as the aggregate of an individual's group memberships and social connections (Bourdieu, 1986, 1991; Sunuodula & Cao, 2015). Finally, symbolic capital, as in accumulated prestige or honour, is a credit that derives from other forms of capital as long as they are perceived and recognised as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1989). Each form of capital has exchange value, and people may also participate in maintaining or altering the distribution of different forms in the market. For instance, the mastery of a language (linguistic capital) may mean a good education (cultural capital) that can generate a well-paid job (economic capital) and contribute to upward social mobility (social capital), in order to gain prestige in the long term (symbolic capital). The current study examines the linguistic capital associated with Mongolian, Putonghua and English. It probes the reasons for the falling interest in the minority language from the perspective of conversions of different forms of capital on the linguistic market.

Since Putonghua is the common language among all interviewees and researchers, it was employed for the interviews. However, one of the researchers is a native Mongolian speaker and can communicate fluently in Mongolian with interviewees. Greetings were usually in Mongolian and the Mongol researcher translated a few words and sentences for the research team when interviewees preferred to speak in their mother tongue.

The interviews were transcribed by one researcher and read in detail by two researchers independently, to identify general themes across an entire set of interviews. Two researchers later manually categorised and coded the interview transcriptions for thematic analysis. Instead of frequency of occurrence, the occurrence of common themes was outlined and the themes are discussed below. The quotations from interviewees presented were translated into English by one researcher and then back-translated into Chinese by the second researcher, in order to make sure the English translation accurately captures the meaning.

### **Academic advancement from learning Mongolian**

Contrary to the decreasing interest in learning Mongolian discussed earlier, primary and junior high school leaders and teachers said that parents liked their children to have Mongolian language education, for the pursuit of academic advancement.

*They [parents] are happy to send their children to our [MNS] school, since it will be easier to get into university in the future [compared to attending a Han school]. Every student receives 10 extra points if their ethnicity is recorded as Mongol. However, students [in Mode A and B] can enter a university with a lower mark [than Mongol students in Han schools with 10 extra points]. [Interviewee No. 7, female, age 39]*

This comment from a teacher exemplifies that students are apparently motivated to learn Mongolian in order to gain better access to higher education. In fact, all teachers from Shengli and Meihao schools sent their own children to attend an MSN, for this reason. There is a favourable admission policy for ethnic minorities, which entails adding 10 points to the overall university entry exam score. However, this policy is applicable to all Mongol students, regardless of whether they study through Mongolian or not. In contrast, lower entry mark



requirements and separate admission quotas are provided to students of Mongolian language (IMAR Government, 2016; IMAR Government Office, 2015). Each Chinese university has an admission plan assigning different quotas to different regions for various majors. A separate quota is usually set aside for students of Mongolian, making the university entry exam less competitive for these students and with lower entry requirements based on exam results. This means that an ethnic Mongol who studies through Mongolian can take advantage of both 10 extra points and lower entry point requirements.

*Our Mongolian class has better teaching quality. Because the school values Mongolian language education, very good and experienced teaching staff in various subjects, like Maths and English, are assigned to our class. In addition, the class size is relatively small, around 30 students compared to 40-plus students in a normal Mandarin class. So each student can be better attended to. All these contribute to an overall good learning ambience. [Interviewee No. 6, female, age 38]*

This teacher mentioned that they promote the Mongolian language programme by outlining these benefits to parents. In other words, aspirations for academic development through Mongolian language education are shown not only in the pursuit of a positive university entry exam outcome, but also in the pursuit of better teaching and learning quality. Mongol students and their parents are well aware of the conversion of linguistic capital into cultural capital in the pursuit of good educational qualifications. Academic prospects, through either the high university admission rate or the enhanced study experience, contribute to deciding between a Mongolian or a Putonghua education.

### **Enhanced Job Prospects**

Another main reason for learning through Mongolian that emerged in the interviews is employment opportunity. Teachers, school leaders and government officials all repeatedly mentioned one regulation – the IMAR government prescribes that 15% of staff must be bilingual in Mongolian and Putonghua, a quota which applies to all public sector posts (see also IMAR Government, 2016). Recruitment is not based merely on the ethnicity specified on an individual's official identity documents. There are written exams and oral interviews to ensure that an applicant is indeed a fluent speaker of Mongolian (IMAR Government Office, 2015). Interestingly, all the teachers we interviewed are beneficiaries of this policy.

*... the regulation in the IMAR is that the ratio of ethnic minority civil servants to Han civil servants should not fall below the overall ratio in the IMAR. Besides, there are written exams and oral interviews to ensure that an applicant is indeed a fluent speaker of Mongolian. In fact, IMAR government recruitment policies specify that at least 15% of vacancies during annual public sector recruitment should be reserved for university graduates taught through Mongolian. [Interviewee No. 20, male, age 42]*

Indeed, the 2010 census also shows that Mongols (N=4,933) ranked right below Han Chinese (N=1.21 million) as the second largest group of people with leading roles in the public sector, public institutions and enterprises, Communist Party organisations and other parties (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). To some extent, Mongolian language education guarantees job market value for graduates, demonstrating its social capital and the possibility of converting it into economic capital.

### Difficulties of Mongolian Language Education

The above two sections seem to draw a different picture to that of a declining interest in Mongolian. Therefore, questions were asked during interviews about the contradiction between the decline in the number of students learning Mongolian and the pragmatic motivations to study it. The two reasons typically given are exemplified below:

*When students progress to senior high school, they are assigned to different schools based on their exam results. Those with Mongolian language can enter prestigious schools if they perform well in the exam. These prestigious schools usually do not offer Mongolian. So a number of high-achieving students of Mongolian have to drop the language at senior high school level. [Interviewee No.4, female, age 48]*

*It is hard for Mongolian to compete with Putonghua and English, since parents and students see little pragmatic value in it. There has been always a need to learn Putonghua. Since English was introduced into Grade 3 at elementary level in 2003, English has received a lot of attention from parents and students. They tend to think Mongolian is of 'no use' to their future career. [Interviewee No. 5, male, age 54]*

There is an entry exam to progress to senior secondary school, at the end of Year 3 of junior secondary. Students are allocated to different schools according to their results. Obviously, high-achieving students are assigned to prestigious schools – usually Han Chinese schools not offering Mongolian language programme – with a much better university admission rate, excellent teaching quality and good facilities. Although the pragmatic aspect of Mongolian language education is employed to motivate language learning, it also affects the continuity of Mongolian language study. Students seem to have no hesitation about replacing Mongolian with other languages strongly associated with convertible capital.

Furthermore, when the study of Mongolian is driven by good chances for academic excellence, this also affects teaching content even if students stay in MNS. In order to lead to high achievement in the competitive university entry exam, class content tends to be exam-oriented, either focusing on the grammar and vocabulary needed in the exam, or on studying questions that have appeared on previous exam papers. Two of the classes we observed spent the entire class explaining one or two grammatical concepts on an exam paper from the previous year.

Another difficulty of Mongolian language education is in relation to the differences between Mode A and Mode B. A government official mentioned that there has been a decrease in the number of students enrolling in Mode B. As the following quote reveals, one of the main reasons for this may be the method of calculating the Mongolian language score on the university entry exam for Mode B (see also Table 3).

*The scores of Mongolian and English have been combined and recognised as the result of one subject in the university entry exam since English was introduced into the curriculum in 2003. The split between Mongolian and English was initially 8:2 and then 7:3. In 2007, the weighting of Mongolian was lowered further and the split became 5:5. The consequence is a significant drop in interest in Mongolian. In 2017, the proportion of Mongolian was brought up with a split of 7:3 [between Mongolian and English]. This may not be ideal, as we hope Mongolian can be recognised as a stand-alone subject in the university entry*

*exam. But hopefully the increased weighting of Mongolian will have a positive impact on student intake.* [Interviewee No. 20, male, age 42]

Consistent with the interview data, available official documents confirm that the weighting of Mongolian in the university exam has been changing since 2000 (IMAR Government, 2016; The IMAR Education Bureau, 2000).

Table 3: The changing weighting of Mongolian in the university entry exam

	2001-2004	2004-2005	2006-2007	2008-2016	2017-
Mode A	The higher score of the two	A combination of Mandarin and English			
		8:2	7:3	5:5	7:3
Mode B	The higher score of the two	A combination of Mongolian and English			
		8:2	7:3	5:5	7:3

Unlike Mode A, which combines two prestigious languages – Putonghua and English – students of Mode B study towards a subject combining two languages with significantly different linguistic capital. When the split was 5:5 between Mongolian and English in Mode B, students may have felt there was no need to work hard on Mongolian, as working hard on English instead compensated for this in terms of the overall result – and English is a language more useful for individual advancement, in terms of both academic performance at tertiary level and better employment opportunities. Comparing the benefits of learning English with the efforts made to study both English and Mongolian, it is not surprising that students prefer to devote their attention to English. In other words, minority language education seems to entail prudent planning by students and parents, aimed at maximising the ability to convert linguistic capital into other types of capital.

### Differences Between Urban and Rural MNS Schools

The contrasting information received from urban and rural schools highlights one aspect of this: access to and availability of teaching resources.

*There are a variety of training opportunities for us each year offered by the Education Bureau of the IMAR, Chifeng city or the county. The training involves class observations and reviews, studying the new curriculum standards, pedagogy, etc. We are also required to write a short essay of 400-500 words after a training session to reflect on what we have learned.*

Interviewee in an urban MNS [Interviewee No. 12, female, age 30]

*We look forward to training opportunities. There are indeed one or two chances [for training] each year provided by the IMAR or in Chifang city. However, there are around twenty teachers in our school. Each teacher is given a heavy teaching load and so we can only afford to send one teacher per year for training. You can imagine, it takes more than twenty years for a person to get his/her turn.*

Interviewee in a rural MNS [Interviewee No. 15, female, age 25]

Class observations indeed show that the teaching process is still predominantly the traditional “present, practise and produce”, which usually involves presenting a grammatical concept and showing its usage to students, before asking them to produce it on their own. Previous research

(Ma, 2009; Zhang & Yang, 2017) also finds poor training provision for rural schoolteachers as a result of the heavy workload. In addition to their teaching responsibilities, rural teachers have to take on a substantial amount of non-teaching duties, one of which is related to the large number of “left-behind” children and the poor regional economy in rural areas.

*There are a large number of left-behind children in our school. Their parents migrate to work in cities and so they are left behind. There are generally at least three to five children whose parents are not with them and so are looked after by grandparents [or other relatives]. If we count children with either their father or mother not with them, that would be countless [too many to know the exact number of children]. [Interviewee No. 13, male, age 36]*

*The left-behind children need extra attention from our teachers. These children tend to have issues with academic study and in life, or even develop psychological problems. When a teacher notices something not right or not normal, we need to look into it. [Interviewee No. 14, female, age 37]*

These comments indicate both the profile of left-behind children and the concerns surrounding them. A few recent studies have revealed the problems resulting from children being left behind, and their well-being has become a pressing issue (Chang et al., 2017; Guo & Zhang, 2018; Huang et al., 2018). In these circumstances, a government document – “Opinions towards Strengthening the Care and Protection for the Left-behind Children in Rural Areas” – was issued in 2016 to emphasise the roles of different entities, including schools, in the service system providing care to left-behind children (State Council, 2016).

On the one hand, rural school teachers need to take on extra work in order to better observe the development of these children and offer help when needed. On the other hand, teacher recruitment for rural schools may not be easy, for two reasons. One reason, mentioned by school leaders and one government official, is the low quota for teaching staff, which is usually set by the IMAR Education Bureau according to the ratio of students to teachers. It is difficult to argue for a higher quota for teacher recruitment with the declining enrolment in Mongolian language programmes. The other reason is that rural regions – being economically backward – are not an attractive destination for university graduates in Mongolian. Nowadays, “*It is easy to lose the language in the rapid urbanisation,*” said one government official.

## **Discussion**

It is generally evident in other studies that the main reason students partake in minority language education is the “desire to maximise the benefits” they can gain from favourable policies such as high university admission rates and enhanced job prospects (Zhang, 2018, p. 10). In relation to ethnic minority students in rural regions, there is indeed a generally low university admission rate, as shown in the study of Huang (2018). In these circumstances, the possibility of enhanced academic experience and high academic achievement underpins the incentives for Mongolian language study. This also affects the approach to daily academic practices, such as the course content.

The pragmatically oriented value of the minority language programme is associated not only with academic advancement in the short term, but also with upward social mobility in the long term. Better access to higher education usually indicates better opportunities after graduation. Importantly, an annual quota of at least 15% of civil servant vacancies is available for

university graduates in Mongolian. This preferential employment policy in the IMAR is employed to encourage enrolment in Mongolian language education. Though not all learners of Mongolian will be willing to apply for a job in the public sector, or be successful in doing so, bilingual education in Putonghua and Mongolian certainly increases their life opportunities and provides a positive vision of a privileged position in society. This pragmatic aspect appears to outweigh the symbolic importance of the minority language.

Nevertheless, the high utilitarian value of the Mongolian language programme is a double-edged sword. Students seem to be motivated to study the Mongolian language when they are able to trade its linguistic capital for other forms of capital. As soon as there are other better opportunities for enhanced learning experiences and life opportunities, students do not hesitate to switch to the Putonghua programme or devalue the study of Mongolian. This can be seen in the loss of high-achieving students in MNS schools at senior secondary level and the Mode B drop-out rate. In other words, the pragmatic perception of Mongolian language education can be easily deconstructed.

Favourable university admission policies have been used as a bargaining tool by schoolteachers and leaders to encourage the study of Mongolian, and in this respect previous research has probed the low admission rate into top universities among minority schools in rural areas (Huang, 2018). The reasons for this include regional economic backwardness, shortage of teaching staff, loss of high-achieving students, outdated teaching pedagogy and school management, and poor quality of primary and junior secondary education.

In fact, these factors can be found in most rural schools, rather than specifically in rural minority schools. Therefore, the obstacles and problems that minority language education faces nowadays are de facto connected with the regional economy – a key contextual element influencing the implementation of bilingual education (Feng & Adamson, 2018) – and essentially lie in the linguistic capital associated with the minority language. With growing contact with Han Chinese and international society in real life and in the virtual world, Putonghua and English undoubtedly represent strong linguistic capital that can be converted into economic gain and/or symbolic power. There is also a diminishing need for the use of Mongolian in students' immediate milieu, especially with the “changes in the way of life of former nomadic herders” (Burjgin & Bilik, 2015) in the context of urbanisation. With the shrinking of rural or pastureland in the IMAR, the linguistic exchanges in Mongolian that can take place have been significantly restricted.

Furthermore, a 2001 government document – “Decisions Regarding Basic Education Reforms and Development” – proposed merging and reducing the number of rural schools (State Council, 2001), in order to “optimise education resources” in terms of “school building renovation, standardising the education system, urbanisation development, migration and relocation” (Article 13 of State Council, 2001, paras. 33–34). Between 2001 and 2010, approximately 220,000 rural schools in China were closed down, with the vast majority of their students enrolled in urban boarding schools instead, and the IMAR is no exception (Li, 2006; Yuan, 2014). Instead of sending urban children to pastureland for Mongolian language improvement, as suggested by Su (2005), Mongol children from pastureland and rural regions lost the opportunity to gain exposure to the ethnic language when they began attending urban boarding schools. As Yi and Adamson (2017b, 2017a) point out, Mongolian is slowly giving way to Putonghua and English, which may accelerate the pace of marginalisation.

Indeed, this study illustrates that favourable policies, including enhanced opportunities for

continued education and future career, make possible the conversion of Mongolian linguistic capital into economic, cultural or social capital, at least within the IMAR. In return, different types of capital transferred from the linguistic capital also stimulate minority language study. There seems to be an ecological flow back and forth between the study of the language and personal development, motivated by regional preferential policies. Nonetheless, closer examination reveals that this superficially healthy circulation in a restricted linguistic space cannot be translated into a larger society, a fact which to a large extent limits the ability of the language to “empower”.

As Wu and He (2018) state, two competing forces influence ethnic socio-economic disparities. One is state preferential treatment policies aimed at reducing the gap between ethnic minorities and Han Chinese; the other is that the market tends to enlarge this gap. Urbanisation can be perceived as “a manifestation of the capitalist mode of production in that cities are constructions of capital accumulation that exacerbate existing inequalities” (Iossifova et al., 2018, p. 2). Linguistic capital should not be excluded from the interpretation of capital accumulation and social disparities in the process of urbanisation. The urban/rural division results in, for instance, large-scale migration, which pushes people to carry out linguistic exchanges in a wider society and raises awareness of the poor economic significance of the minority language. That is to say, the lack of provision to convert the linguistic capital of the minority language into other forms of capital aggravates its marginal status.

In addition, the symbolic importance of Mongolian has not been fully exploited for the promotion of minority language education. In the battle of capital accumulation, the symbolic value of a language, or language variety or variation, competes with other forms of capital, and can quickly give way to economic gain. Yi and Adamson (2017a) indicated that a sense of pride in Mongolian ethnic identity should be nurtured and encouraged to be aligned with Chinese citizenship. This needs institutional support from “mass media, [... and] social, legal and administrative services in Mongolian” to “provide the language with status” (Yi & Adamson, 2017b, p. 161). However, the enrichment of the symbolic power of Mongolian should not be left only to teaching staff, who already have limited access to teaching resources and extra workload. There is certainly an opportunity here for top-down policies to support the spread of Mongolian traditions, culture, literature, history, etc., while maintaining a balance between ethnolinguistic vitality and national integration.

### **Conclusion**

The current study examines the development of trilingual education in the IMAR and reports on a field trip to five minority schools in the IMAR, highlighting the current practices of trilingual education and perceptions of the minority language programme in the region. Through data from interviews and class observation, this article reports on the motivations for learning Mongolian and the difficulties of student retention, as well as the impact of the urban/rural division on minority language education. In the context of fast-paced urbanisation, the linguistic capital associated with a language can be quickly realised, examined and exchanged in the linguistic market. Although the ethnic affirmative policies in the IMAR enhance the linguistic capital of Mongolian and highlight its pragmatic value, student interest in the minority language programme is still affected by the relatively poor provision for converting the linguistic capital of Mongolian into other forms of capital. Importantly, the lack of economic significance of Mongolian is market-operated and thus difficult to change, whereas the symbolic importance of the minority language can be underlined “through coordinated and coherent policies” (Yi & Adamson, 2017a, p. 334).

Instead of analysing minority language education on its own, the current study has situated this against the backdrop of urbanisation. This approach demonstrates that trilingual education in minority regions confronts the difficulties caused by urban/rural division, which may shed light on the development of language programmes in China in general. It should be pointed out that the current study entailed a field trip to five schools in the Chifeng area, just one of twelve regions within the IMAR. It is indeed difficult to travel to every part of Inner Mongolia, which is vast. It is recommended that future research expand the field trip area, in order to gain a better overview of trilingual education practice in the IMAR. In addition, the current study focuses primarily on the school context. It would be worthwhile for future studies to also examine the Mongolian language programme in higher education institutions in the IMAR, in relation to the career prospects of Mongolian language graduates.

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**Pedagogical Praxis: Muslim-Filipino Madrasah Teachers' Conceptuality of Instructional Process**

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore and analyze the conceptuality of Muslim-Filipino Madrasah teachers or the *Asatidz* on instructional processes anchored in their pedagogical praxis. This study employed a qualitative research design using a transcendental phenomenological approach. In-depth interviews were initiated to understand the essence of the participants' lived experiences. The author used purposive sampling with five research participants who implement the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education program in selected schools in the Philippines. There were four major themes identified in the study: pedagogical amalgamation of traditional and non-traditional teaching practices; collaborative learning practices; effective classroom management; and reflective practice in teaching. The results of the study provide a clear description of Madrasah teachers' conceptualization of instructional processes especially in teaching and learning. However, the study is limited to five selected *Asatidz*. These results may be useful in guiding education stakeholders in evidence-based policymaking particularly, in the field of teacher development, which seeks to create comprehensive and well-thought pedagogical programs for the *Asatidz*. These programs should better suit and complement Madrasah teachers' pedagogical needs anchored to their pedagogical praxis. The results provide baseline data for instructional and educational enrichment among Filipino Madrasah teachers.

*Keywords:* ALIVE program, Filipino-Muslim, Madrasah education, Madrasah teacher, Philippines

Teacher's pedagogical practice is one of the most important factors to consider in the teaching and learning process. Teachers with a good grasp of instructional processes are able to improve and enrich educational experiences of their learners (Darling-Hammond, 2006). In this study, instructional process refers to the interplay of the instructional model, strategies, methods, techniques, and tactics as reflected in the pedagogical practices of the Madrasah teachers. Praxis pedagogy provides the opportunities for educational issues to be shared and explored deeply (Arnold & Mundy, 2020) and through this approach teachers are able to reflect on the practice of schools and the curriculum. In the Philippines, the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education (ALIVE) program of the Department of Education (DepEd) requires well-trained and competent Madrasah teachers or *Asatidz* to be the main implementers of the ALIVE program (Sali & Marasigan, 2020).

The *Asatidz* are responsible for teaching an additional two subjects on top of the regular basic education curriculum. However, most *Asatidz* implementing the ALIVE program are not regular teachers and are not necessarily graduates of a professional education course in higher education. Conversely, the *Asatidz* are expected to be curriculum planners, designers, implementers, and evaluators with awareness of pedagogical practices and content knowledge (Sali & Marasigan, 2020). In general, educators are products of completed educational experiences who went through practical pedagogical training in their formative years. These experiences helped shape pedagogical practices, especially their teaching styles and instructional strategies. The purpose of this paper is to explore and analyze the conceptuality of Muslim-Filipino Madrasah teachers on instructional processes anchored in their pedagogical praxis. The concept of self-reflection among teachers provides realization in conceptualizing effective pedagogical practices in teaching and learning.

Despite the extensive studies conducted on pedagogical practices of Madrasah teachers as evident in the professional literature, there are few studies on Madrasah teachers' conceptualization of instructional processes in the Philippines (Sali & Marasigan, 2020). The results of this study will therefore benefit major educational stakeholders in understanding the pedagogical praxis underlying the various practices of Filipino-Muslim Madrasah teachers in implementing the ALIVE program. This study provides evidence-based research that will enrich the existing dearth of literature on pedagogical practices of Madrasah teachers in the Philippines. In addition, Fang (1994) discussed the significance in understanding the "missing paradigm" (p. 50) in line with teacher's conceptualization that focuses on teacher's perspective in teaching and learning. Hence, this study sought to explore and analyze the conceptuality of *Asatidz*' instructional process in selected ALIVE schools in Metro Manila. More specifically, it will answer the following question:

How do Filipino-Madrasah Teachers [*Asatidz*] conceptualize their pedagogical practices in the teaching and learning process?

### Literature Review

According to Kemmis (2012), praxis is part of the self-formation of a person, as it gives valuable benefit to one's self at the same time that it purports good in the human community – "creating the good society by acting for the good of society" (p. 87). In the context of education, Freire's (1978) adoption of praxis as imperative to transforming the world as reflected in pedagogical practices became unprecedented (Mayo, 2016). In addition, the dialectical relationship between consciousness and the world is inevitable in terms of understanding various experiences, relationships, and complexities, including teachers' conceptuality of

instructional processes. The word praxis has been defined and interpreted in many ways in professional literature. However, in this study, praxis is employed as the synthesis of theories exploring the conceptuality of instructional processes through the relevant reflections of Madrasah teachers in the teaching and learning process, particularly “on their material surroundings and reflect upon them with a view to transforming them” (Mayo, 2016, p. 2). Furthermore, teachers are “acting within an educational paradigm formed and differentiated by knowledge and dispositions which give rise to different kinds of actions and ethics” (Edwards-Groves et al., 2018, p. 141).

Edwards-Groves et al. (2018) note that educators should be concerned with pedagogical praxis in their contemporary times. In understanding the pedagogical praxis of teaching and learning, it is imperative for educators to examine actual instructional practices (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2017; Memon, 2011; Sali & Marasigan, 2020; Sirotová, 2016;) as well as the interplay of pedagogical theories (Edwards-Groves et al., 2018; Freire, 1987; Kemmis, 2012). In practice, teachers are guided by their choices, knowledge, and dispositions “acting within an educational paradigm” (Edwards-Groves et al., 2018, p. 141). With regard to this, several researchers have investigated the effects of teachers’ beliefs in teaching and learning. Nespor (1987) highlighted that beliefs are entrenched in one’s personal history, and thus unlearning is arduous. Moreover, beliefs influence the teacher’s thinking in creating sound pedagogical choices and guides their behavior in actual practice. Within this praxis, Edwards-Groves et al. (2018) discussed four disposition-action couplings (adapted from Kemmis, 2012) of praxis-oriented educators. Primarily, these dispositions “directs us to the interplay, reciprocity, and delineation” (p. 142) between the following classes of actions: theoretical perspective; technical perspective; practical perspective; and critical perspective.

According to Miranda and Damico (2013), the relationship between belief and behavior makes the study of teacher beliefs consequently critical. In addition, Schachter (2017) conducted phenomenological research aimed at understanding early childhood teachers’ pedagogical reasoning or beliefs in language and literacy instruction. Their findings suggested the need for teachers to better understand how to prioritize their knowledge for use in practice. Furthermore, Chikasanda et al. (2012) conducted a qualitative analysis of the teachers’ journey through the phases of professional development. They argued that teacher’s conceptualization of learning in technology is still fragile at this point. Several researchers have also acknowledged the importance of teacher beliefs in the realization of education reform (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Fang, 1996; Miranda & Damico, 2013). Lastly, Fang (1994) discussed the significance of understanding the “missing paradigm” (p. 50) in line with a teacher’s conceptualization that focuses on the teacher’s perspective in teaching and learning. Overall, it thus appears that pedagogical reasoning from various sources of knowledge is pivotal for teachers in making choices about their actions and practices in teaching (Schachter, 2017).

### **On the Pedagogical Praxis of Madrasah Teachers**

Van Sledright (2010) proposes that there are two important factors which unify the course of teaching and learning. The first one is the teacher’s cognitive understanding or simply the content knowledge, and the other is the pedagogical knowledge or the art of presenting information through pedagogical skills. Moreover, by uniting these two vital factors, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is initiated. In 1986, Shulman and a group of researchers introduced the concept of PCK which focuses on the broader perspective to further understand teaching and learning. According to Shulman (1987), PCK included an “understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, presented, and adapted to diverse interests and abilities of the learners and presented for instruction” (p.8).



Teachers are expected to create meaningful and relevant experiences in the classroom. As instructional leaders, the teacher should exemplify pedagogical competence (Pekkarinen & Hirtso, 2017). In practice, teachers execute different methods and strategies anchored to different instructional models to perform efficient academic tasks (Trigwell & Prosser, 2004): for instance, how to effectively and efficiently translate competencies embedded in the curriculum during actual teaching, execute classroom management, and incorporate student-centered approach to learning among others. In general, pedagogical practices of Madrasah teachers can be best understood when based on the different factors that influence their overall practices to include the following: self-efficacy (Abdullah, 2018; Alotaibi, 2014; Amri et al., 2017; Barni et al., 2019; Faizuddin, 2016; Hussin et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2018); educational background including Islamic education (Halstead, 2004; Hasyim, 2016; Memon, 2011; Sabki & Hardaker, 2013; 2015; 2018; Tengku Kasim & Abdurajak, 2018); trainings and seminars attended during their pre-service or in-service (Alwadai, 2014; Sali & Marasigan, 2020); and even peer mentoring (Solaiman, 2017). Pedagogical praxis as a form of experience-based professional learning allows the teacher to improve their professional as well as personal competencies (Sirotová, 2016).

Through the interplay of different factors during their formative years, and the progress of their PCK through time, an amalgam is created for the development of teaching styles and the ability to discern one's pedagogical choices. This praxis enables the check and balance of the Madrasah teacher's awareness of self-knowledge and self-evaluation in understanding pedagogical practices in a deeper sense. In addition, teachers' self-reflection of instructional processes is vital to assess themselves: it articulates their own inquiry based on the real issues from teaching and learning experiences (Arnold & Mundy, 2020). The different factors mentioned influence the conceptualization of the Madrasah teacher's pedagogical orientation and foundation in actual practice. This translation of the teacher's knowledge into practice and self-preparedness is crucial to the outcomes of classroom teaching. According to Faizuddin (2016), Islamic teachers who showed creative instructional strategies during the teaching and learning process enabled students to experience a wider variety of classroom activities. In this respect a teacher's creativity appears to serve as a crucial factor in translating competencies through instruction.

Furthermore, a study by Amri et al. (2017) showed how the educational background of Islamic teachers can also affect the learning interests of students. In their study, Islamic teachers who possessed intercultural competence showed greater awareness of their students' diverse needs in the classroom. Thus, Islamic teachers are able to use intercultural competence to enrich the classroom interaction, activities, and management of the class. Tengku Kasim and Abdurajak (2018), also explored, in a qualitative research study, the pedagogical practices of novice Islamic education teachers, where the results showed diversity on their teaching methodologies. The Islamic teachers employed 21st century teaching methods as opposed to the traditional method of purely lecture. However, in a qualitative study conducted by Ishomuddin and Bin Mokhtar (2017) that studied the teaching methods of Islamic teachers who graduated from Middle Eastern countries, the results showed that the traditional method of teaching such as lectures is a way to provide more knowledge than using other teaching methods.

Lastly, Hussin et al. (2014) have shown that diversification of pedagogical approaches identifies three significant themes regarding the teaching practices of Islamic teachers: a material-resource centered theme; a teacher-centered theme; and a student-centered teaching method of religious subject. Significantly, Islamic teachers' well-organized pedagogical

practices spell difference in guiding the students' learning. As such, mastery of the subject and well-initiated classroom activities and teaching methodologies are sought. Therefore, Madrasah teachers who aim to maximize their pedagogical practices will prepare themselves efficiently through enriched classroom interaction and over-all management of the class.

### **The ALIVE Program: Madrasah teachers' Pedagogical Practices**

The DepEd Order (DO) No. 41, series of 2017 or "Policy Guidelines on Madrasah Education in the K to 12 Basic Education Program" provides the latest implementation guidelines. The program gives appropriate and relevant educational opportunities to the Muslim learners in the Philippines. The DepEd order mentioned is enacted across accredited public schools in the country. It adds two subjects to the regular basic education curriculum: Arabic Language, and Islamic Values. Significantly, the *Asatidz* play an important role in the over-all success of the program (Sali & Marasigan, 2020). However, most *Asatidz* or Madrasah teachers are not regular teachers and are not necessarily graduates of an education course in higher education and some *Asatidz* didn't have significant teaching experiences before applying to the program.

However, the DepEd offers several programs before *Asatidz* are deployed as part of its professionalization measures. The aspiring *Asatidz* must pass the Qualifying Exam in Arabic Language and Islamic Studies (QEALIS) and undergo Language Enhancement and Pedagogy (LEaP). It is a training prototype provided to build English proficiency and the beginning of mastery of lesson planning, teaching, and assessment for Madrasah teachers. LEaP becomes one of the major first-hand pedagogical trainings of the accepted *Asatidz*, learning fundamental concepts in teaching pedagogy before actual deployment (Sali & Marasigan, 2020). Albeit, results of some related studies to *Asatidz*' pedagogical practices indicated recurring challenges: existing structures and support systems for effective pedagogy; further relevant training on teaching strategies; and translation of competencies into actual practice and assessment (Final Report of Muslim Education Initiatives, 2014; Marasigan, 2019a; Review Report on the Three Years Implementation of ALIVE Program, 2018; ). Also, Solaiman (2017) in his descriptive research on the implementation of ALIVE in Marawi City, showed infrequent monitoring of the program including classroom observation of the *Asatidz* were also noted.

Conversely, in an exploratory study of Sali and Marasigan (2020), the seminars and enrichment activities attended by the *Asatidz* in ALIVE selected schools in Quezon City, "showed diversity on their teaching strategies and understanding of the concepts in pedagogy" (p. 209) as observed in their actual classroom teaching. This study serves as a clear indication of the interplay of pedagogical theories and actual practices among Madrasah teachers. The *Asatidz* narrated the importance of the training in teaching and learning process, specifically how to use strategies and methods of teaching, how to create lesson plans and correct objectives, and how to fill out promotional reports and forms among others.

Remarkably, the pedagogical practices of the *Asatidz* in the Philippines are both influenced by secular and non-secular orientations. As part of the professional development of the *Asatidz*, the Madrasah teachers are regularly invited to join different seminars and trainings conducted by DepEd and their respective schools. These different pedagogical trainings are congruent to Philippine secular education orientation – a mix of philosophical tenets from realism (essentialism), progressivism (pragmatism), existentialist humanism and social reconstructionism (Muslim Education Initiatives Final Report, 2014).

### Conceptual Framework

Primarily, the framework for the current investigation is anchored to Freire's (1978) adoption of praxis as reflected in the *Asatidz'* conceptuality of instructional process being manifested in their pedagogical practices, as seen in the teaching and learning process. This social lens purports that self-reflection towards pedagogical practices is imperative to the teacher's understanding towards transformational education. This allows teachers to grasp theory into practice in developing teaching styles that brings change in the school environment to include learner's relevant experiences in the educative process.

In this study, the conceptual flow as represented in Figure 1 will be analyzed to examine the important relationships among the different factors that affect and influence the conceptuality of a Madrasah teacher's instructional process anchored to their pedagogical praxis. This is intended to identify a pedagogical praxis designed to create space for verifying the theoretical knowledge, methods, and procedures in real conditions of an educational process (Sirotová, 2016). The three-way interaction that occurs in this space is viewed as influencing the practices of the *Asatidz'* that will be explored through their relevant pedagogical reflections, and will be used to identify the relevant "essence" of the phenomenon.

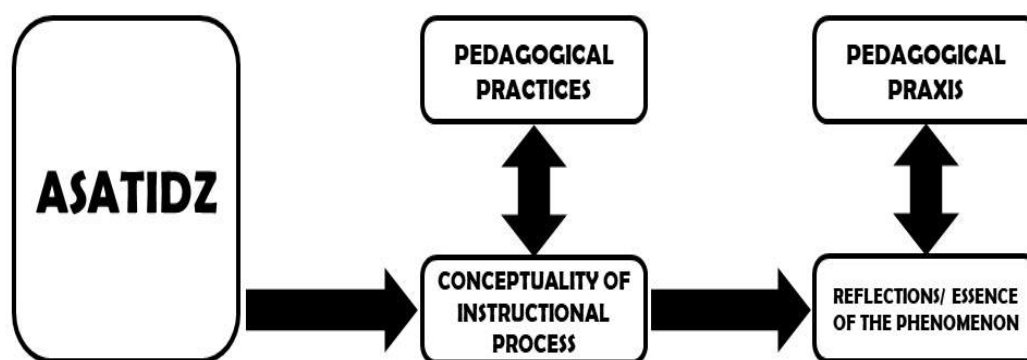


Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework

### Methodology

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994, as adapted from Husserl, 1931), was employed in this study. The qualitative design gathered an in-depth understanding of the participants' description of their lived experiences to generate an "essence" (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the essence of the *Asatidz'* conceptuality of instructional processes, as manifested in their pedagogical practices during teaching and learning, was explored based on their reflections. The study described the commonalities of the participants' experience and explored relevant themes. In the Philippines, the study of the Madrasah Education Program, especially in the implementation of the ALIVE program in public schools, is unprecedented, thus highlighting the ability of this research to address a relevant gap in our understanding of teaching praxis. From this perspective Sali and Marasigan (2020) point out the current dearth of research outputs in the professional literature, especially on describing the lived experiences and understanding the nature of reality and knowledge of the grassroots implementers.

Therefore, a qualitative research design allowed the researcher to understand the meaning of a certain phenomenon of the participant's perspective or *emic* (Merriam, 2009) in a naturalistic

setting without any manipulation in the environment. This description suits the researcher's intention as it sought to explore and analyze the conceptuality of instructional process of the *Asatidz* anchored in their pedagogical praxis. The participants were five Madrasah teachers or *Asatidz* from selected ALIVE public schools in Metro Manila in National Capital Region. A minimum size for phenomenological study is 5 to 25 individuals, as suggested by Creswell (1998).

The participants must have at least five years or beyond in service and teaching experience who had attended various professional development of DepEd for at least three years. The validated semi-structured interview method was employed and the interview questions had undergone a pilot study for appropriateness prior to the actual data gathering. The participants' consent was secured and the participants were not coerced to participate in the study. The study employed non-probability purposive sampling (Creswell, 1998), through a qualitative method of analysis. The generalizability of these findings to the population is thus limited, because the sample size may not be the representative of the *Asatidz* in the entire Metro Manila or elsewhere. The sample is described more fully on Table 1.

Table 1: Basic Profile of the Sample

Characteristics	Indicators	No. of Participants
Gender	Female	4
	Male	1
Age	21-30	1
	31-40	0
	41-50	1
	>51	3
	Length of Service	5 years
	6-10 years	0
	11-15 years	3
Professional Development	Attended DepEd in-service teacher workshops and seminars	5

Furthermore, qualitative data gathered from the participants was initiated through their long interviews ranged from one to two hours until data saturation (Creswell, 1998) were recorded and were transcribed in verbatim. Horizontalization was then instigated to give equal consideration to each statement of the participants, especially concerning how they experienced the phenomenon. Thematic analysis was also conducted, employing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the data, to search for common themes of the interview responses.

The transcriptions, after being coded, were run through *Nvivo 12*, considering the rich data generated from the interviews. The most frequent words were considered in initial coding. A validity assumption was made that each participant provided truthful answers to the questions presented. To verify the accuracy of the participant's responses, respondent validation was made. The researcher's role in the study was the observer.

The *Asatidz*' average years of service in the implementation of ALIVE program are ten years. The participants underwent professional development including the DepEd pre-service and in-service workshop and training on pedagogy enrichment before and during deployment to schools as soon as they were employed. Furthermore, four out of five had attended formal schooling for an education course and graduated with a degree and the remaining participant didn't. Also, all of the participants are proficient in Arabic language.

## Results and Discussion

The findings of this study were used to explore and analyze the conceptuality of instructional process of the *Asatidz*, as anchored in teachers' pedagogical praxis. The study was limited, with five ALIVE schools and the sample size of five participants during the course of the study. The study was conducted in three school divisions in major cities in the National Capital Region. Thematic analysis was initiated employing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the data. During the data analysis, four major themes emerged: pedagogical amalgamation of traditional and non-traditional teaching practices; collaborative learning practices; effective classroom management; and reflective practice in teaching. Each of the themes is discussed below.

### Pedagogical Amalgamation of Traditional and Non-Traditional Practices

Most of the participants understood the concept of teaching as a two-way process between learners and a teacher in an actual classroom instruction. Remarkably, some *Asatidz* reflected on the differences of the instruction employed by their former Islamic teachers or mentors which were traditionalist in orientation as opposed to the current teaching strategies performed in a contemporary classroom. The experiences based on their exposure to traditional teaching methodologies such as rote learning and direct instruction support the study of Sabki and Hardaker (2003) that a teacher's pedagogical strategy "facilitates the interplay between orality, memorisation and the sacred text in spiritually forming the human person" (p.77) *with respect* to Islamic pedagogy. The conceptualization of the traditional teaching methodologies and practices of their previous teachers provided them with clear distinctions between traditional and contemporary pedagogical approaches. The findings suggested interplay in pedagogical theories and actual instructional practice which guides the *Asatidz* to choose what pedagogical practices to employ and how to better execute these practices in the classroom. In relation to praxis-oriented educators as discussed in the four disposition-action couplings of Edwards-Groves et al. (2018, as adapted from Kemmis, 2012), these dispositions were evident in *Asatidz*' pedagogical amalgamation which directs them "to the interplay, reciprocity, and delineation" (p. 142) of their pedagogical practices.

The participants adapt contemporary teaching as part of their pedagogical practices in enriching relevant learning experiences in the classroom (Amri et al., 2017; Faizuddin, 2016; Tengku Kasim & Abdurajak, 2018) with respect to the findings of Ishomuddin and Bin Mokhtar (2017), demonstrating that the traditional method of teaching can provide more knowledge than using other teaching methods. In the case of the selected Filipino-Muslim Madrasah teachers, their conceptuality concerning instructional process indicated similar results with the 2014 Muslim Education Initiatives Final Report. Most of the *Asatidz*' pedagogical practices reflected different philosophical tenets anchored from realism, progressivism, existentialist humanism and social reconstructionism.

In contemporary education, a more socio-constructivist thinking anchored to differentiated practices are being employed in the classroom, and the traditional methodologies in teaching

provides support for the foundational concepts needed to understand complex concepts. Significantly, the combination of these two practices is being implemented by the *Asatidz*. Based on their reflections, the pedagogical practices they generally used are mostly a combination of traditional and contemporary approaches to teaching and learning. With these qualities and practices, an understanding of the essential interplay of these two pedagogical approaches (traditional and contemporary teaching strategies) is combined to suggest a pedagogical amalgamation. This interplay shows distinction as shared pedagogic qualities and practices of the *Asatidz* in the Philippines as part of the diverse sites of Islamic education around the world (Alkouatli, 2018).

According to the participants, these pedagogical practices and employing various instructional methods anchored to contemporary teaching (e.g. games, role playing, demonstration, using technological devices for learning, and cooperative learning groups) are essential; especially on the actual implementation of learning competencies embedded in the Refined Elementary Madrasah Curriculum (REMC). In addition, according to the participants, these different practices are very much highlighted in the classroom, as evident in the following statements:

*“I usually group [for collaborative activity] my pupils. Grouping the pupils is very important so that they can learn from each other. Also, they can mentor one another” – P1.*

*“I employ visual aids [during classroom instruction]. I also let my pupils perform demonstration by group. For example, how to perform prayer...” – P2.*

*“There were times I used my laptop. Unfortunately, we don’t have projector. I show some pictures and videos. [...] I usually play videos from YouTube such as the story of the Prophets” – P3.*

*“For example you also use show cards! Especially when you utilize laptop it will be very effective for them [learners]” – P4.*

*“The learners should develop 21<sup>st</sup> century [skills]. They [learners] love games, group competition [as part of the pedagogical practices], and [movement] using their psychomotor skills” – P5.*

### **Collaborative Learning Practices**

The *Asatidz*, agreed about the importance of collaborative learning practices being initiated during classroom instruction. There are two main reasons why interaction between learners and teacher is imperative for the over-all learning of the pupils as explained by some of the participants: (development of learners’ social skills, and emotional support for shy learners during classroom interaction. In support, according to Akdeniz (2016), interactive instruction relies heavily on discussion and sharing among participants. This will develop social skills and abilities, to organize thoughts, and to develop rational arguments (p. 70). The *Asatidz* knew that learners must be exposed to a variety of classroom interventions and opportunities to learn from each other. Among the instructional methods the *Asatidz* mentioned that they used for learners to interact during class discussion were small group conversation, and learner pairs. Some of the *Asatidz* shared why they incorporate different collaborative activities in their classroom instruction:

*“I always practice doing group activity. There are some learners who are too shy [to interact]. During the activity, they will join especially when there is a leader assigned” – P5.*

*“By doing the group activity, the learners are encouraged to develop their [social] skills” – P3.*

*“The learners have different ideas. They may have better ideas to share. That is what grouping all about. Aside from that they have to perform [such as role play] in the class” – P1.*

According to Hussin et al. (2014), there were three significant themes identified on teaching practices of Islamic teachers: material-resource centered; teacher-centered; and student-centered teaching method of religious subject. Similar to the results of Hussin et al. (2014), the *Asatidz* understood the importance of well-organized pedagogical practices in guiding the students to learn. Most of these participants preferred well-initiated collaborative classroom activities and teaching methodologies. The selected Filipino-Muslim Madrasah teachers anchored their teaching practices on a student-centered approach to enrich classroom interaction and relevant experiences. The *Asatidz*' pedagogical reasoning is guided with their understanding on the importance of seeking various sources of knowledge in making choices about their actions and practices in teaching.

In relation to Schachter's (2017) findings, the knowledge that teachers hold about children's learning is imperative to teacher practices. Consistent with the findings of this study, *Asatidz*' pedagogical practices are influenced by their pedagogical praxis in making sure the learners are able to maximize relevant classroom experiences through collaborative learning practices. In addition, according to Sirotová (2016), “the acquirement of professional competencies begins during the pre-gradual preparation and they are further developed in a real educational praxis” (p. 530). In the case of the participants, the influence of their formative years in teaching and learning especially the involvements of their previous mentors was evident.

The participants shared that choosing instructional methods and materials suited for the learners is a demanding task, yet an essential one nonetheless. Most of the *Asatidz* were aware of the concept of different learning styles, and some of them ascribed to do more interactive and collaborative activities rather than to be complaisant in following traditional teaching practices in their instruction. The *Asatidz* shared their beliefs in creating a conducive environment for their learners by focusing on student-oriented practices such as establishing instructional tactics in the classroom. Instructional tactic refers to a way on how to enhance learning which has a narrower scope than instructional strategies (Akdeniz, 2016). Most of the participants were aware of their learners' own learning styles and strategies to cope with different subjects in the ALIVE program implementation. According to Bishop and Berryman (2009), “relationships and interactions between teachers and students in the classroom are keys to effective teaching of students” (p. 27).

### **Effective Classroom Management**

Most of the participants discussed the importance of establishing classroom management especially with diverse learners enrolled in the ALIVE program. According to Akdeniz (2016), “effective teaching and learning cannot take place if classroom management is not applied sufficiently” (p. 249). The classroom management according to the *Asatidz* helps provide structure in order to create a non-threatening and a democratic learning environment where

learners can freely share their ideas, beliefs, and opinions which are validated with respect (Marasigan, 2019b). The *Asatidz* shared their different classroom management in order to facilitate meaningful learning. For the participants, gaining the attention of the learners through classroom management is crucial to the teaching and learning process. These pedagogical reflections of the *Asatidz* emphasized the significance of pedagogical competence (Pekkarinen & Hirtso, 2017) in performing efficient academic tasks (Trigwell & Prosser, 2004). In these findings, the *Asatidz* create a space for verifying the theoretical knowledge, methods, and procedures in real conditions of an educational process (Sirotová, 2016) based on their conception that relevant learning with the learners emanates in a well-established classroom.

Some of the *Asatidz* established rules in the classroom by performing the following instructional tactics: use of meta-cards to answer questions; assigning a student leader during collaborative learning activities; teacher cues such as prayers, greetings and songs before formally starting the class; positive reinforcement; raising of hands; and class segregation of male and female learners. Interestingly, for higher levels, *Asatidz* follows sex-based segregation for male and female learners. This practice is mostly attributed to the religious belief that males and females should maintain distance from members of the opposite sex who are not immediate family members. According to the participants, these different classroom management tactics are essential during the teaching and learning process, as evident in the following statements:

*“First, we have to attend training and seminar on pedagogy [...] especially on the different [teaching] strategies and techniques and how to implement classroom management.”* – P1.

*“In my part, my [teaching] style first the classroom management. If you don't have classroom management inside your classroom you will not be able to concentrate [during classroom teaching]”* – P4.

Most of the *Asatidz* teachers also discussed the particular importance of classroom management in relation to diverse learners enrolled in the ALIVE program. According to Akdeniz (2016), “effective teaching and learning cannot take place if classroom management is not applied sufficiently” (p. 249). The classroom management of the *Asatidz* helps provide structure to the class in order to create a non-threatening democratic learning environment where learners can feel that their ideas, beliefs, and opinions are validated with respect to each other.

### **Reflective Practice in Teaching**

Motivation acts as a reflection of teachers' condition and level for growth and improvement. Most of the participants practice self-evaluation, especially on self-development in improving their pedagogical practices in general. The *Asatidz* awareness for growth and development in terms of enriching pedagogical practices is unprecedented. All of the participants agreed that training and development during their formative years and in-service seminars conducted by DepEd and their respective schools helped them to improve their over-all performance as a Madrasah teacher. These results confirmed the study conducted by Sali and Marasigan (2020) on selected *Asatidz* in Quezon City where diversity on their teaching strategies and general grasp of pedagogical concepts were evident. According to Liu et al. (2018), teachers' motivation for self-development plays an important role in the formation process of their professional autonomy.



According to Kemmis (2012), praxis is part of self-formation of a person as it gives valuable benefit to one's self at the same time good in human community. The reflective practices of the *Asatidz* as mirrored through their pedagogical practices Edwards-Groves et al., 2018 ; (Freire, 1978; Mayo, 2016) were bulwark in their pursuit for self-development to provide relevant experiences to their learners, particularly “on their material surroundings and reflect upon them with a view to transforming them” (Mayo, 2016, p. 2). However, self-development is more than the result of teaching as what teachers are expected to perform.

The teacher's conscientiousness and reflective practices allow the *Asatidz* to be aware of their roles and obligations as expected of them being part of the school community and to their learners. As evident in these findings, pedagogical praxis enables *Asatidz* to constantly practice self-evaluation for self-development particularly in the enrichment of their pedagogical practices. Thereby, reflective practice in teaching enables the *Asatidz* to develop and implement new concepts relevant to teaching and learning. As supported by Kemmis (2012), educators are guided by their praxis anchored to different dispositions to include theoretical, technical, practical, and critical perspectives which were evident in this study.

More than the expectation, the participants explained the essence of understanding oneself to be effective and efficient in teaching and learning process. Also, the reflective practice allows teachers to understand the interplay of “what” (theories learned) and “how” (practice applied) in the teaching and learning process. Barni et al. (2019) argued that values under certain motivational conditions are “precious resources to improve the quality of teaching experience for teachers and indirectly for their students” (p. 5). Therefore, motivated teachers seem to make teaching more meaningful, which can facilitate and create meaningful and transformational educational experiences for their learners. The *Asatidz* explained their reflective practices on self-development:

*“At first, I find it hard to teach. I thought to myself, this is how teaching work? However, when I joined the in-service training, especially when we had attended the LEaP training for 23 days [learned how to improve pedagogical practices]” – P4.*

*“The most important thing in teaching is sincerity. That should also be part of our commitment as a teacher. If you do things [self-improvement] seriously, the learners will feel it [commitment to teaching]” – P1.*

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to five ALIVE schools and the sample size of five participants during the course of the study conducted in three school divisions, including the cities of Manila, Quezon, and Pasay in the National Capital Region. Other limitations are enumerated in the succeeding discussion. First, the emergent themes may be applied only to selected ALIVE schools in Metro Manila and not to any private or traditional *madaris* since the respondent schools were all accredited as DepEd-affiliated schools. Second, ALIVE schools in the country may have different program implementation and practices depending on the region, province, and district. In addition, *Asatidz* from different places in the country may have different educational backgrounds, self-efficacy, professional development, and mentoring that affect their pedagogical practices compared to the selected participants. Third, the researcher used purely qualitative design and methods in data collection through in-depth interviews because he believed that these methods are the best way to explore and analyze the conceptuality of instructional process anchored in the participants' pedagogical praxis.

## Conclusion, Implications, and Further Research

The results of the study identified salient themes of the *Asatidz*' conceptuality of instructional process as anchored to their pedagogical praxis. The generalizability of these findings to the population was limited because the sample size is unlikely to be representative of the *Asatidz* in the entire Metro Manila. Thematic analysis was initiated employing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the data. There were four major themes identified in the study: pedagogical amalgamation of traditional and non-traditional teaching practices; collaborative learning practices; effective classroom management; and reflective practice in teaching. The pedagogical reflections of selected Madrasah teachers implementing the ALIVE program in the Philippines are multifaceted and dynamic. The awareness of the participants on the different aspects of instructional process including instructional models, methods, strategies, techniques, and tactics are unprecedented. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to identify the interplay of theories and practice in their teaching and learning. As evident in the results of the study, pedagogical praxis enables *Asatidz* to constantly practice self-evaluation for self-development, particularly in the enrichment of their pedagogical practices. This, in turn, creates a space for verifying the theoretical knowledge, methods, and procedures within the real conditions of a particular educational process (Sirotová, 2016).

Further studies are encouraged in exploring actual practices of the *Asatidz* in the classroom, in relation to their pedagogical praxis and identify essential factors that influence their teaching performance. However, the results of the current study are useful in guiding education stakeholders in relation to evidence-based policymaking, to further improve the implementation of the ALIVE program, particularly in terms of teacher development for Madrasah teachers seeking to create comprehensive and well-thought pedagogical programs that better suit and complement their pedagogical praxis – as a baseline for further instructional and educational enrichment. In addition, the results could help ALIVE schools to provide more enhancement programs toward quality education through teacher development, to ensure the continuity and relevance of Madrasah Education Program implementation. As mentioned, it is imperative to consider the significance of *Asatidz* as the prime implementers of Madrasah education in ALIVE schools within their respective communities. Lastly, this study provides additional knowledge and its enrichment to the existing literature on pedagogical practices, as well as a general conceptualization of the instructional processes of selected Madrasah teachers as grassroots implementers of the ALIVE program in the Philippines.

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**How do Principals of High Performing Schools Achieve  
Sustained Improvement Results?**

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### Abstract

Education systems across the globe have enacted national testing regimes to monitor and report student achievement progress as an outcome of teaching performance. This paper reports on an investigation of strategies that Principals of high achieving schools use to achieve school results, based on NAPLAN reports (the National Assessment Program in Australia) and interpreted via the Alignment, Capability and Engagement (ACE) model of organisational readiness. Our findings identified specific Principal behaviours, actions and attitudes as necessary for effective school-wide improvement programs, as well as the existence of commonly shared strategies and approaches that help to explain why these particular Principals have been successful in their pursuit of school improvement. These include a shared vision for improvement, use of data-driven decision making, and building positive, “transparent” relationships to encourage teacher buy-in. Importantly, these findings identified “organisational readiness”, a foundational principle of the ACE model, as a fundamental requisite to effective school improvement.

*Keywords:* ACE Model, organisational readiness, principal leadership, school achievement, school leadership



## Introduction

Education systems across the globe place a premium on the teaching performance of their schools and have enacted various national testing regimes to monitor and report on student achievement progress as an outcome of this performance (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2013; 2010a; 2010b; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011). In Australia this regime is known as the *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) (National Assessment Program [NAP], 2019), and school Principals are required to respond to reported NAPLAN outcomes by enacting improvement programs (Buckingham, 2013). This paper reports on the behaviours of 16 Principals who made significant and sustained improvement in the NAPLAN results of their school when compared to “similar schools” during the reporting period 2016 to 2018. The findings make an essential contribution to our understanding of effective school improvement because the paper documents a range of behaviours taken by these Principals to achieve such outcomes and aligns them to a transformational model of leadership. We begin by providing an outline of NAPLAN.

## Literature Review

### NAPLAN

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAP, 2019) is an annual testing regime created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). NAPLAN is a set of standardised tests that evaluate competency in reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy. These tests have been administered annually since 2008, to Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 throughout Australia. Following administration, schools receive a NAPLAN achievement profile for each student as well as overall cohort data. An essential function of these results is to provide comparative NAPLAN data for the achievement levels of each school. Schools can also compare achievement levels to the National average and to “similar schools”, based on like scores from the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), which was developed to enable fair and meaningful comparisons to be made on the basis of the performance of students in literacy and numeracy as reported by the NAPLAN (ACARA, 2013). The ICSEA employs a multi-level regression model to reflect the combined influence of the student and school’s cohort Socio-Educational Advantage (SEA) components on NAPLAN performance, based on the following formula:

$$\text{ICSEA (student)} = \text{SEA [student]} + \text{student Indigenous status} + \text{SEA [school cohort]} + \text{percent Indigenous enrolment} + \text{remoteness} \text{ (ACARA, 2013).}$$

NAPLAN results can also serve as a proxy to compare teaching performance across schools (ACARA, 2018), and the use of NAPLAN results in this way is essential for the current investigation because there is significant research that links positive teaching performance to effective school leadership (e.g., Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Lachat & Smith, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Shen & Cooley, 2008). From this perspective, we will now explore the impact of school leadership on student achievement, mediated through its impact on teacher performance.

### Impact of School Leadership

There has been an enduring focus within education on identifying what school leaders can do to improve student achievement (Hattie, 2009; 2012; Lakomski & Evers, 2016). In a meta-analysis of over 5,000 studies measuring the behaviours of school leaders, Marzano et al. (2005) found 69 studies from the previous 35 years that had examined “the quantitative

relationship between building school leadership and the academic achievement of students” (p. 6). They found that “Principals can have a profound effect on the achievement of students in their schools”, and while not able to produce “any straightforward explanations” (p. 38), they defined 21 leadership responsibilities “important to effective leadership in schools” (p. 64). More specifically, in a meta-analysis of research on school leadership and student outcomes, Robinson et al., (2009) found five leadership dimensions that impacted on student outcomes as follows (effect size): establishing goals and expectations (0.42); resourcing strategically (0.31); planning to coordinate and evaluate teaching and the curriculum (0.42); promoting and participating in teacher learning and development (0.84), and; ensuring an orderly and supporting environment (0.27) (p. 656).

Reflecting on an extensive review of the literature concerning effective school leadership, Leithwood et al. (2008) made a similar claim that: “leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning” (p. 28); “almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices” (p. 29), and; “school leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions” (p. 32). Furthermore, Leithwood et al. (2008) stated, “there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership” (p. 29).

The overwhelming conclusion to be drawn from these prior studies is that school leaders have a clear impact on student outcomes. However, of interest to the current investigation is that the focus for these prior studies has been on highlighting general dimensions, factors, responsibilities or strategies by which school leaders have been able to influence student outcomes overall in relation to school improvement. In contrast to these approaches, our study has sought to determine the specific behaviours, attitudes and actions of Principals in relation to school improvement, with a particular focus on leading teachers to prepare for the change agenda relating to school improvement, and from the perspective of transformational leadership, to which we now turn.

### **Transformational Leadership: The ACE Model**

The current study seeks to uniquely contribute to this area of research by using the Alignment, Capability and Engagement (ACE) Model of transformational leadership (Schiemann, 2006) to interpret the responses of 16 Principals as they reported on how they led successful school improvement programs. The ACE model represents a transformational model of leadership that focuses on how leaders optimise effective change via three dimensions:

- Alignment: the degree to which leaders align staff to the vision, mission and goals of a change program
- Capabilities: the degree to which leaders ensure that staff have access to the relevant resources, skill sets, and professional learning required to enact the change program
- Engagement: the degree to which leaders can inspire and motivate staff to engage in the change program.

This model is transformational in that it “emphasises leaders” developing a compelling vision, providing individualized support, and intellectual stimulation to staff, and engaging them in the achievement of shared goals” (Sun & Leithwood, 2015, p. 500). Importantly, this model can provide a framework to contextualise research in educational leadership through the lens of Alignment, Capabilities and Engagement, which can be linked to prior research in the area of leadership impact as follows:

- Leithwood (2013) found *aligning* teachers by “direction setting practices” and *building their capabilities* by “developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the instructional program” (p. 636) were useful strategies employed by successful leaders.
- Specific to transformational leadership, Hattie et al. (2014) found that teachers preferred transformational leaders who developed *engagement* through high levels of interpersonal skills such as trust and *aligned* their staff by placing a premium on student achievement.
- Behaviours which impacted most on student learning were those resulting in what Marzano et al. (2005) referred to as “second-order change” (p. 113). These included *aligning* through ideals and beliefs, *capability building* by intellectual stimulation, and *engaging staff* by way of affirmation.
- The Principal’s role is to ensure teachers are *aligned* and *engaged* by bureaucratic structures that promote teacher autonomy through “open and innovative-stimulating (vision-building, intellectual stimulation) actions” (Buske, 2018, p. 274).
- Notably in the research of Robinson et al. (2009), the dimension with the most substantial effect, “promoting and participating in teacher learning and development,” involves school leaders participating *in* and *with* teacher learning and development, which is considered an essential aspect of Schiemann’s (2014) conceptualisation of *organisational readiness*. This notion sits at the heart of the ACE model and proposes that school leaders who are able to transform and direct Alignment, Capabilities and Engagement in support of the change agenda surrounding a school improvement initiative, are better able to enact positive improvement outcomes.

Our use of the ACE model is part of ongoing research on the part of the authors, in terms of investigating ways to frame specific practices and strategies employed by Principals to promote readiness in their schools (Yeigh & Lynch, 2019; Lynch et al., 2019). In this respect, our application of the ACE model is echoed by Macklin and Zbar (2017), who argue that school improvement, and therefore student learning outcomes, “stands or falls on school leadership and what it does” (p. xx). At a conceptual level, the ACE model can be viewed as a representation of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which suggests an explicit relationship exists between attitudes, intentions and behavioural engagement (e.g., Ajzen, 1991; Armitage & Conner, 2001; Lamorte, 2018).

The current study seeks to build on this research by using the ACE model’s notion of organisational readiness to explain why specific leadership attributes and behaviours are effective in the pursuit of improved student achievement outcomes. The primary focus of this report, therefore, is to investigate how the attitudes, intentions and behaviours of successful school Principals act to implicitly operationalise organisational readiness as a fundamental factor in preparing for successful school improvement. Working from this position and accepting that school leadership has a significant indirect impact on student achievement, the question of primary interest for this particular report is as follows. To what degree do specific leadership behaviours of successful improvement-leading Principals correspond to the notion of organisational readiness as a means of effecting consistent transformative change in education settings?

## Methods

The research team, after receiving ethics approval from the university, accessed national NAPLAN school achievement data for the reporting period 2016-2018 under licence from

ACARA. We then undertook a review process that identified 20 schools that were among the most improved in terms of overall NAPLAN results that moved from being equal to, or below the results of “similar schools” in 2016, to be higher than the results of “similar schools” in 2018. Figure 1 provides an indicative example of a school with high-NAPLAN-gains in Writing for a cohort from Year 3 (2016), and Year 5 (2018).

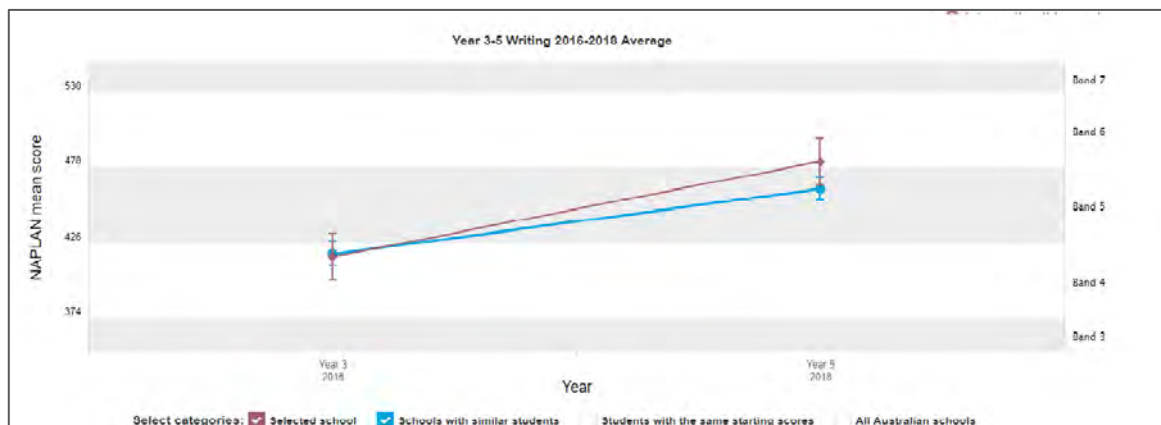


Figure 1: Example graph showing a “high” student gain outcome for NAPLAN

From these 20 highest ranked schools, 16 Principals from 14 schools (one school had multiple Principals during the relevant NAPLAN reporting period) accepted an invitation to participate in the study and took part in semi-structured interviews that yielded five questions of interest for this report. These interviews took between 60 to 90 minutes and were audio-recorded, with the interviewer also taking detailed notes. It is important to note that no reference, mention, wording or allusion was made to the ACE model, nor the notion of organisational readiness, the work of Schiemann (2006, 2014), or the idea of transformational leadership at any time prior to or during these interviews or the course of this investigation. This was necessary in order to ensure against biasing the responses of these Principals in any way, shape or form during the investigation. Our aim in this respect was to allow the Principals to speak for themselves, using their own words and articulating their own concepts and principles. Thematic analysis was then used to inductively identify meaningful patterns from the audio-recordings and interview notes; and were followed by group discussions using comparative analysis techniques (Creswell, 2002; Moss, 2001) to inform this paper.

## Findings

### Demographics

Of the 14 schools, seven were primary schools and seven were combined primary and secondary schools, eight were state sector schools, and six non-state sector schools and the locations of these schools were 4 from major cities, 4 from inner regional, 4 from outer regional, and 2 from remote areas. Overall, these schools represented all Australian states and territory education jurisdictions. The schools were all co-educational, with student populations ranging from 152 to 1141 students, and with an average of 476 students. The rounded full-time equivalent teacher to student ratios ranged from 1:90 to 1:20, with an average of 1:15. The ICSEA scores of these schools ranged from 981 to 1038, that is, within a single standard deviation of the national median ICSEA value of 1000, allowing for meaningful comparisons to be made between the schools. In terms of age, one Principal was aged 30-39 years, six were aged 40-49, eight were aged 50-59 and one was aged 60-69. With respect to gender, nine identified as male and seven identified as female. Fifteen Principals had at least one prior

Principalship and at least ten years of experience as a Principal. The Principals had a mix of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications, with the majority having completed a Master's degree.

Following are the findings presented within each of the questions that served to frame the semi-structured interviews. The relationship between the findings and the ACE model will be summarised in the discussion section.

**Question 1: Describe your overall approach to leading your school.**

Principals' responses were markedly similar in stating that building positive relationships with teachers was a central focus of their school improvement agenda. Principals emphasised engaging teachers through various modes of collaboration, including staff meetings to air grievances, and to discuss and decide strategic and operational issues. Principals also built the capacity of teaching teams via specific coaching and mentoring arrangements. The use of student performance data to make decisions was also a key point made by each Principal.

These Principals expressed the importance of teachers being active participants in a continuous teaching improvement agenda. A clear theme was that the Principals were relentlessly focused on teaching improvement and used the development of a shared and agreed vision to align staff with this. These responses resonate with findings from Hallinger and Heck (2011) that successful school improvements are an outcome of the collective efforts of leaders and teachers, shaped by collaboration and activated by the embracing of mutual influence. Presented in Table 1 are quotes that typify how Principals led their schools.

Table 1: Quotes from Principals regarding how they led their schools

Participant	Quotes
1	My role is to empower others ... you know inspiring them, building their capacity as teachers. I want them to meet the outcomes that we agree we are seeking; data becomes our reference. But at the end of the day, if they don't do their part, you know to improve, then I do work to performance manage them.
8	We have a shared and agreed vision in our school and use data to see how we're going.
12	It's not all about me. Relationships are fundamental. I step in and out as required. I play the key role, I make sure we stay focused, but as I say, I strive to build capacity in others to also lead.
16	Building relationships (with teachers) is hugely important because then you build trust and rapport, and people are then willing to go with you on a change journey.

Presented in Table 2 are two main themes that emerged from how Principals' responses to how they led their schools. As is the case for this table and similar tables to follow, the ACE mapping is to demonstrate linkage to this model of transformation leadership (Schiemann, 2006).

Table 2: Main themes regarding how Principals led their schools

Theme	Description	ACE
1	Enacting a clear and agreed vision with teachers	
	• A vision focused on improvement metrics	A
	• Using data to make informed decisions	C
	• Clear intents	A
2	Empowering staff through collaboration and capacity building	
	• A focus on building capacity via targeted professional learning	C
	• Supporting people to improve	C
	• Teaming; working together to solve problems and create capacity	C
	• Involving teachers in decision making	E
	• Providing opportunities to improve, e.g. coaching, mentoring arrangements.	C

*Note.* ACE refers to Alignment, Capability and Engagements, see Schiemann (2006).

Furthermore, regarding Theme 2, “empower” came to mean ensuring teachers had the requisite knowledge, skills and confidence to undertake the task ahead, and opportunities to be actively involved. “Collaboration” meant providing opportunities to work with other teachers, and “capacity building” referred to making structural changes, that is, resource allocations, designed to enable teachers to do what was required.

### **Question 2: What are the fundamental principles which inform your work as a school leader?**

A common theme was the Principal being “visible” in their school. Participants clarified visibility as being involved in teaching and learning functions and being viewed as the “lead teacher” rather than solely as the “lead administrator”. They claimed that leading teaching and learning in their schools was imperative, with the operational management of their school a distant second and often delegated to others. All participants also indicated they undertook formal and informal coaching and mentoring arrangements with teachers and contributed to all critical teaching decisions. They used every occasion to share how the school’s vision and associated plans were unfolding, and let teachers know that their efforts and expertise were valued, encouraging a culture where teachers sought assistance to meet their challenges. Presented in Table 3 are quotes from Principals that typify the fundamental principles of their work as a school leader.

Table 3: Quotes that typify the fundamental principles of the work of a school leader

Participant	Response
2	Empowering. [This is] the overarching principle of my leadership approach. I suppose it is like the coaching philosophy in the sporting view. My role is to get the best out of people so they can be the best they can. I lead by being around.
3	Building solid relationships. It's about trust and about me being visible. I am, I guess you could say, the lead teacher, not just the problem-solving manager who sits in his office and I let them know its teaching and learning that's important here.

Presented in Table 4 are the five main principles that came to represent the fundamentals of the work of a school leader.

Table 4: Fundamental principles of the work of a school leader

Principle	Description	ACE
1	Being visible in the core business	A
2	A relentless focus on teaching and learning	E
3	The importance of building and maintaining positive working relationships	E
4	Having and espousing high expectations	A
5	Working towards establishing shared values and agreed outcomes	E

*Note.* ACE refers to Alignment, Capability and Engagements, see Schiemann (2006).

These responses agree with Seashore Louis et al., (2010), in that the two most important ways to impact student learning are to do so directly through instructional leadership and indirectly by supporting teachers in professional communities. Being visible in this way, establishing shared values and vision, and building positive working relationships are all also inherent characteristics of organisational readiness, in that they all contribute to positive preparation for school improvement at the social level of Alignment and Engagement.

**Question 3: Your school has shown significant improvement in NAPLAN results during the reporting period 2016 to 2018. What do you attribute this to?**

In their responses to this question, the Principals often described themselves as being the conductor of an orchestra or the coach of a sporting team. More broadly, they indicated they worked to focus, enable and motivate their teachers to embrace continual improvement. Of interest was that it became evident that their approach had been explained many times before, that it was alive in their current thinking and that they had developed a personal model to explain their plans. This was often referred to as stemming from the work of researchers, most notably Hattie's Visible Learning (Hattie, 2009; 2012).

While referencing research appeared to afford a certain sense of confidence in their approach, the Principals also cited improvements in student performance data as central reference points for their plan, as well as being vital indicators of their success. We interpret this to mean that these Principals felt confident in knowing how to undertake the whole of a school improvement

program. They espoused a clear sense of what needed to be done to improve their school and regularly revisited their plans in consultation with teachers and other stakeholders. These responses revealed a core theme concerning school improvement, where a focus was placed sequentially on what Hirsh et al. (2014) have referred to as a Cycle of Improvement. This cycle involved: a) reviewing data, b) enrolling teachers to a change agenda, c) working to build the required capacities, both organisationally and capability wise, d) enacting a common school-wide approach to the problem area and e) reviewing progress with data. In accordance with this, the Principals also revealed that their ultimate intent was to enact teaching change by improving what teachers did in their classrooms. Presented in Table 5 are quotes that typify what Principals attributed to significant improvements in NAPLAN results.

Table 5: What Principals attributed to significant improvements in NAPLAN results

Participant	Response
5	I had a range of professional experience; you know I started at the bottom and worked my way up. These gave me a sense of everything, what I had to do, and I guess I could perfect the technical things, but it was working with effective leaders that helped me. They gave me guidance on what to do and why. They showed me what was effective and what I should be learning and let me know in no uncertain terms when I messed up.
10	Watching how successful people work, you know working in a coaching type situation.

Presented in Table 6 are three strategies Principals attributed to improvements in NAPLAN results.

Table 6: Strategies Principals attributed to improving NAPLAN results

Strategy	Description	ACE
1	Use data-informed practices	C, E
2	Build teacher capacities based on evidence	C
3	Relentlessly focus on the core purpose of improving student learning	E

*Note.* ACE refers to Alignment, Capability and Engagements, see Schiemann (2006).

The Principals' main attribution for NAPLAN success was that they sought to generate certainty through their intentional use of data as evidence. Generative questions such as "what is the data telling us" were used to focus teachers on analysing their teaching practice and ensuring that their practices were focused on successful student outcomes. This accords with the ACE component relating to Capabilities, in that it ensures that staff have access to the relevant resources and skillsets needed to prepare for and then engage with the school improvement change agenda.

#### **Question 4: What are the required conditions for you to successfully enact a teaching improvement program?**

While Question 3 sought to elicit the perceived causes of their success, Question 4, asked Principals to reflect on their school improvement journey, to reveal how they prepared teachers for change. Once again, positive relationships, as well as an imperative to have all teachers "on-board", were pre-requisites to school improvement. Principals spoke at length about how



they used conversations around data to encourage teachers to embark on a program of school improvement, that is, using “like school metrics” as a comparison tool to establish an agreed need for change, through to conversations about individual students and the teacher’s personalised learning needs.

Concerning personalised learning, the Principals identified targeted professional learning as necessary to ensure teachers had the requisite skills to undertake the improvement program. “Targeted” was explained as meaning customising learning experiences to meet the range of teachers’ learning needs. From this perspective, the main theme around perceived successful conditions appeared to be for Principals to demystify school data, present it as a positive tool for improvement, and then use it as a reference point for targeted teacher learning. Presented in Table 7 are quotes that typify the conditions Principal’s required to enact a successful teaching improvement program.

Table 7: Quotes regarding conditions required for successful teaching improvement programs

Participant	Response
13	Building relationships. It’s about trust and working together. I certainly set high expectations, but I’m in there with them. Teaching is hard work, so we all roll up our sleeves, and I’m in it too.
2	Review data and convey this to teachers. Give them a sense of how we’re going.

Presented in Table 8 are the three main conditions required to generate teaching improvement.

Table 8: Required conditions to generate teaching improvement

Required Condition	Description	ACE
1	Build positive relationships	A, E
2	Share understanding of how to collect and use data	C
3	Have a strong focus on building school-wide willingness to collaborate on a solution.	A, E

*Note.* ACE refers to Alignment, Capability and Engagements, see Schiemann (2006).

### **Question 5: How do you prepare your teachers for whole school teaching improvement?**

Principals positioned teachers for whole school improvement by structuring a combination of information sharing sessions and professional learning (PL) opportunities, aimed at providing teachers with requisite skills and understandings. This was articulated as “positioning teachers for success” and was supported by establishing a clear understanding of the improvement agenda, building positive relationships and negotiating agreed improvement strategies. These findings are similar to Thoonen et al., (2012), who found successful school leaders were those who initiated vision-building processes, were empathetic to the emotional needs of teachers and stimulated these teachers to pursue school improvement-aligned professional learning activities. In this sense, positioning was a strategic step through which the teachers came to trust each other and the Principal, and where information transparency was valued. Presented in Table 9 is a quote typical of how principals went about preparing teachers for whole school teaching improvement.

Table 9: A quote typifying how Principals prepared teachers for teaching improvement

Participant	Response
2	The first step is to review the data. Understand our current performance. Work with teachers to diagnose; you know why this is with teachers. Then, guest presenters and using them as motivators, to share views on things. I follow this up with looking at research to deal with such areas. Connecting approaches to the school context. Creating structures is a key consideration, but it's not first up. This is to ensure the capacity to do what's required. Then it's into teams. Getting teachers together really helped out here. Of course, as we progress I had to bring in required teaching capacities as you start to see what is missing, you know what talent I suppose is required.

The findings from participants responses to Question 5 build on their responses to Question 4, in that, preparing teachers for change requires certain conditions to also be positioned. Continuing with this realisation, we then found that the responses to Question 5 provided a way to operationalise the conditions established through the analysis of Question 4. Therefore, presented in Table 10 are strategies Principals used to prepare teachers for whole school teaching improvement, and these are grouped by “required conditions” of Question 4.

Table 10: Strategies used to prepare teachers for whole school teaching improvement.

Required Condition <sup>a</sup>	Description	ACE
1	Build positive relationships	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency, share the whole story, share all data</li> </ul>	A
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage conversations and talk about how it impacts each other</li> </ul>	C, E
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personalise the message for change</li> </ul>	A
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on wellbeing as we change, focus on pastoral care</li> </ul>	A, E
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable teachers to create teams and collaborate on ideas and solutions</li> </ul>	E
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be involved with teachers, challenge them to think differently</li> </ul>	C, E
2	Share understanding of the data and the message conveyed	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having good data sets from various sources</li> </ul>	A
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explaining what the data is telling us</li> </ul>	C
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping teachers to understand the data</li> </ul>	C
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using data to create a sense of urgency for change</li> </ul>	A, E
3	Have a strong focus on building school-wide willingness to collaborate on a solution	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear vision of what is focused on and why</li> </ul>	A
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable teachers to collaborate and seek evidence-based solutions</li> </ul>	E
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use data to monitor outcomes</li> </ul>	A
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solution-orientated teams</li> </ul>	E
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to the task as Principal</li> </ul>	A

*Note.* ACE refers to Alignment, Capability and Engagements, see Schiemann (2006).

<sup>a</sup>“Required conditions” are from Table 8.

## Discussion

We know from prior research that Principals have a pivotal role to play in assisting teachers to improve their performance, particularly in terms of increasing student learning outcomes. The specific attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of Principals and teachers have been explored to some extent by previous research investigating school leadership. However, this research has generally sought to understand the roles and functions of school leaders within frames of reference that are more generalised and categorical. In contrast, the current study employed an interview protocol to elicit information from Principals with a proven track record of successful school improvement, concerning their specific leadership behaviours, actions and attitudes aimed at leading for school improvement, and with a distinct focus on how they lead teacher preparation for school improvement.

As was signalled at the outset of this article, we now reflect on these findings through the lens of the ACE model of transformational leadership, in particular, how the Principals embedded the concept of readiness for change. In this sense, a key point of inquiry for the current investigation was to investigate the degree to which the actual strategies of Principals compare to the ACE model of school readiness, as a particular approach to preparing for improvement change.

The analysis of responses gained through our investigation has shown that the Principals shared many behavioural and attitudinal characteristics in their approaches to change-focused leadership. Common themes included the need to develop an agreed vision, empowering staff through collaboration and customised professional learning, leading by example, using data to both motivate and guide change, and building positive, “transparent” relationships to encourage teacher buy-in.

In this regard, all the Principals espoused the importance of *Alignment* and *Capability* building through clear, agreed on school vision for improvement, based on teacher empowerment through the use of collaboration which provides opportunities to learn new skills. This was evidenced through Principals’ focus on the fundamental precepts for changing being notions of systematic coaching and mentoring, and the need for a clear plan that directed continual school improvement. As an example, Principals sought to mentor teachers into relevant skillsets around data, engaging teachers in “similar school” data comparisons and using this data to focus teachers’ professional learning.

Principals also manifested ACE components of *Capability* and *Engagement* by identifying positive relationships as the typical basis for achieving staff willingness to collaborate and enact improvement solutions, galvanising teaching staff to their improvement agenda first, and then using collaborative processes, systematic coaching and mentoring to support these teachers in delivering school improvement.

Furthermore, associated with the ACE components of *Alignment* and *Engagement*, the Principals directed teacher activity and structured support mechanisms for their engagement through precise planning and systematic mentoring. The use of data-driven analysis as the basis for monitoring and evaluating school improvement was another common element of success amongst these Principals. The vehicle for this was the Principals’ use of direct conversational engagement, and we note that this approach – using data to both engage and motivate teachers – can also be seen as an overall theme for the ACE model.

## **Conclusion**

This report found specific behaviours, actions and attitudes that Principals reported as necessary to engage in school-wide improvement programs. We examined these behaviours, actions and attitudes through the lens of the ACE Model, which focuses on how leaders ready their organisations for change. This focus was necessary as the specific behaviours, actions and attitudes required to ready a school for improvement change have not been a significant subject of preceding research, which has largely focused on what school leaders do during a school improvement initiative.

In this respect, a distinctive contribution of the current investigation has been its comparative analysis of specific leadership behaviours and attitudes in relation to the ACE model notion of organisational readiness, also informing us of what school leaders do to prepare for school improvement and linking these behaviours to how they then continue the improvement over time. This analysis has highlighted the existence of many commonly shared strategies and approaches that help to explain why organisational readiness is important to the pursuit of school improvement. We wish to share this information more broadly, in order to help delineate what may be involved in the preparation phase of a successful school improvement initiative.

### **Implications of the Research**

A valuable subsequent study would be to interview Principals of established low-performing schools to investigate if there are different types of activities undertaken by these school leaders in relation to improvement change and the ACE model. As supported by May et al., (2012), there may be differences between the two sets of Principals explained by context-driven priorities, that is, Principals needing to be more hands-on and reactive in lower-performing schools, and more strategic and proactive in higher-performing schools. Examining the other side of the coin in this way could, therefore, help to clarify the distinctiveness of these current findings.

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**Recreating Discourse Community for Appropriating HOCs in Law Undergraduates'  
Academic Writing**

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### Abstract

Like any other discipline, academic writing is equally crucial for law undergraduates to master. Project reports, argumentative essay writing on current socio-legal affairs and research paper writing comprise requisites in academia for law learners. Students' appropriation of higher order concerns in academic writing is a major challenge for teachers, as the physical classroom discourse community is typically passive and does not give enough opportunities to students to think critically about their writing processes. The teacher is expected to provide feedback to students on their writing, which often leads to the creation of only one feedback centre, restriction of the scope for varied perceptions and formation of multiple small discourses where the teacher is the central point of reference in every discourse. Consequentially, students can fail to develop self/peer-critiques in the ongoing discourse. The present paper has its focus on the recreation of discourse communities using a learning management system at the Law School, Bennett University, India, to promote peer-to-peer learning for honing higher order concerns in academic writing. The paper investigates how law students behave whilst interacting in a recreated online discourse community, benefit through peer feedback, and enhance their knowledge of the academic writing genre of argumentative essays, its subject matter and rhetoric involved. The methodological triangulation of pre-test/post-test analysis, student survey and conceptual content analysis of students' interaction transcripts support recreation of online discourse communities in academic writing instruction.

*Keywords:* academic writing, argumentative essay writing, discourse community, higher order concerns, law undergraduates

Law undergraduates, like students of any other discipline, are expected to have already acquired certain basic proficiency in writing in terms of expression and lower order concerns (LOCs) when they commence university education so that they can have a smooth transition into the world of academic writing – argumentative essays, project reports, and research papers among other forms of writing – across disciplines and contexts (Cumming, 1989; Griggs, 1996; Knight et al., 2018; Paltridge, 2018; Wingate et al., 2011 ). Writing instructors at law school expect students to understand what “specificity”, “precision” and “concision” in academic writing are and also to understand the distinction between relevant and irrelevant knowledge in a context and to supply discretionary information in an academic writing context (Bacha & Bahous 2008; Horowitz 1986; Street, 2004; Wilkes et al., 2015). Academic writing involves recursive processes, comprising modifications and refinements at every stage of the writing process, with a major focus on higher order concerns (HOCs) in writing. These modifications are a result of continuous change in thought processes complying with feedback and self-analysis. A peer and self-feedback mechanism is thus integral to academic writing (DeJarnatt, 2001; Guasch et al., 2013; Huisman et al., 2018; Hyland, 2013; Magno & Amarles, 2011; Topping et al., 2000), and students usually participate in this through various interactions happening within what is referred to as the discourse community (DC) they are part of. Sometimes, however, either due to curricular constraints or being too teacher-centric, the mechanism of interaction in a classroom DC can become hindered. When this happens, students do not get opportunities to get involved in critical thinking concerning their writing processes and thus fail to refine the HOCs involved in their writing. These difficulties necessitate recreation of a classroom DC to incorporate new mechanisms of feedback and to fulfil the requirements of an academic writing course in terms of making students active contributors to the writing processes of not only their own, but also of their peers’, writing. This also underpins a fundamental aim of higher education, to inculcate critical thinking habits amongst college students (Andrews, 2015; Bezanilla et al, 2019; Ghanizadeh, 2017; Liu et al., 2016) – acknowledging what others think, looking beyond and understanding how to internalise and refine thoughts, expression and writing.

It is also important to note that creation, recreation, and maintenance of DCs in academic writing classrooms require proper considerations by the instructor. DeJarnatt (2001) suggests integration of speech and writing for law undergraduates and advocates creation of a new DC where “they can talk to each other about their writing” (p. 489). To ensure that the writing process is meaningfully active within a DC, the instructor needs to understand key features of a DC. For the current study, the researcher aimed to recreate an active DC where students can work collaboratively for appropriation of their academic writing within the course of English II for law undergraduates. The academic writing in law as a discipline involves specific registers, writing process, formats, and contexts. These specific requirements of the discipline also demand a recreated DC where there could be special attention on specific goals, genres, writing conventions, formats, and writing style (Melzer, 2020). The current researcher selected the genre of argumentative essay writing, as the transferability and relevance of this genre to both law undergraduates and lawyers in their career is high. Moreover, this genre works on HOCs: a clear thesis with strong claims and supports in the form of reasoning and evidences which are also central to other specified legal writing genres such as case comments or memos (Cragg, 1988).

The recreation of a DC in the present study also underlies the evolving nature of academia and pedagogy with technological advancements and needs (Swales, 2016). Physical classrooms can be easily supplemented and enriched with empowered online DCs on learning management systems (LMSs) or other free online platforms.

## Literature Review

### Discourse Community

Swales (1990) gives six features of a DC: a common public goal; a mechanism of intercommunication; use of its mechanisms primarily to provide feedback and information; use of any genre/s for continuation of the communication; use of a lexis pertaining to a particular discipline; and a minimum number of members, with some required level knowledge pertaining to the area of that DC. Subsequent research by Swales (2016) emphasised re-imagining the concept of a DC. With the evolving nature of academia and pedagogy, he added two more features to a DC: a DC develops shared understanding, which Swales (2016) quotes as “silential relations” (p. 16), and a DC also develops a close rapport among its members, which Swales (2016) refers to as “horizons of expectation” (p.16). These features align the components of traditional unities – writer, audience, and text – and Swales (2016) further explains that this addition makes it workable for all the three types (local, focal and flocal) of DCs. According to Swales (2016), the concept of a DC is useful in language classrooms with both academic and specific purposes. In addition, it also helps the educationists to impart oracy and literacy skills among students, which subsequently makes them capable of accomplishing many interdisciplinary academic tasks.

Research into DCs has shown it can also have further applications. For example, Martín (2003) cites the educational benefits of a DC as given by Swales, but adds that a DC may possess considerable distance among its members and the distance could be in terms of their background as well as place. Despite this, a DC can work on maintaining and extending knowledge collaboratively, as acknowledged by Duszak (1997), who stresses the socio-rhetorical aspect of DCs, and emphasises that a DC having its focus on verbal skills helps in co-creation of knowledge to a great extent, with additional benefits being freedom of time and space. Edens and Gallini (2000) experimented creating a DC in a technology-mediated environment, comprised of in-service and beginning preservice teachers of educational psychology, for constructive discussion and meaning-making that is not limited by space and time. Benz (1996) relied on creating a DC for eleven non-English speaking college students who were required to establish effective relationships with their teachers and their peers, to help manage their performances in content courses. Benz’s study also utilised a DC as a pedagogical tool for honing college level English as a second language. Similarly, Abdi et al. (2010) worked on creating an academic DC discourse community to benefit the multilingual members in the use of metadiscourse markers.

### A Discourse Community in Composition Classrooms

Beaufort (2008) gave a succinct definition of a DC while emphasising its importance in written communication, “a social group that communicates at least in part via written texts and shares common goals, values, and writing standards, a specialised vocabulary and specialised genres” (p.179). Borg (2003), while discussing the nuances of a DC, specifically conveys that DCs have significant pedagogical implications in teaching of writing and more importantly in writing genres of English for specific purposes. According to Pogner (2005), a DC that has developed from an interpretation community became popular in writing research mainly in technical writing among engineering academic and non-academic context. The involvement of individuals in the community is established by the individuals using text. This amounts to collaborative explanation of the issue/question/topic in hand and production of text around it. The medium of discourse for such written texts has been various online platforms. Martín (2003) also elaborates that a DC extends a group’s knowledge and writing of a text. The collaborative review of linguistic and textual features helps the group members to understand and imbibe how, as writers, they need to understand the importance of audience analysis.

Basturkmen and Bitchener (2014) examined the bearing of an academic discourse community on supervisors' feedback on draft dissertations and analysed their feedback comments on various aspects of writing. Duff (2010) talks of academic discourse communities helpful in language socialisation in classrooms and tells that DCs are "highly intertextual", "multimodal" and "multilingual" in contemporary contexts (p.169). He adds that language socialisation happening in a DC could be very transformative for a few individuals. Pogner (2003) tested a DC for writing tasks with Danish consulting engineers, with findings that suggest writing as a social action happens through feedback and revisions in a DC, as constructed by the collaborative work of its members. Li (2006) highlights the importance of a DC into the EAP classroom, where students enhance their awareness of epistemological features of disciplines and higher order thinking skills. Parkyn (1999) emphasised the importance of students learning from each other and that this learning could be done by creating discourse communities for facilitating collaborative engagement. Parkyn also suggests that teachers and students may make use of technology for computer-based assignments, as done in their study of writing for an electronic journal.

As teachers of academic writing at undergraduate level, teachers seek to shift the focus of their teaching from accuracy and expression (LOCs in writing) to rhetorical functions and to larger societal discourses (HOCs in writing). So, while addressing the concerns related to genre approach or process approach of writing, it is important that DCs are recreated to support such instructional shifts. University composition classes also need to focus on micro-genres such as framing an argument. If such DCs start focusing on writing genres, and specifically micro genres (Watanabe, 2016), they will gradually appropriate the macro-genres and the registers of the discipline. The teachers, thus, would be able to provide scaffolds to the students in the form of a DC that can be used to signal a focus on written texts, and where students can work toward appropriating texts.

### **Higher Order Concerns in Academic Writing**

In this respect a piece of academic writing is judged at two levels: higher order concerns (HOCs) and lower order concerns (LOCs) in writing. It is essential to differentiate between meaningful writing and accurate writing (Jacobs & Karliner, 1977). Introduction of academic writing to college undergraduates is done to engage them in critical thinking and make them work on their HOCs in writing (Ali, 2016; Min, 2016; Van den Bos & Tan, 2019; Winder et al., 2016). The recreated DC in the present study will allow students to contemplate and interact on specific aspects of HOCs: focus/thesis/purpose, audience, organisation, and content development; and of LOCs: grammar (sentence structure, punctuation, prepositions, articles, verb tense), word choice and spellings (cf. Purdue OWL, 2020).

### **Recreation of a Discourse Community**

English II offered at Bennett Law School focuses on academic writing skills of year-I law undergraduates. The present research has its basis in two difficulties that the instructor faced while delivering the course. Firstly, the removal of tutorial sessions from the course plan due to some curricular changes which resulted in negligible individualised attention and feedback on students' writing. Secondly, the habit of students to rely on the teacher as a panacea for their writing issues. These difficulties led the instructor to seek pedagogical changes aimed at addressing the difficulties and assisting students to increase their writing abilities. These changes also underpin the aim of higher education, which is to inculcate critical thinking habits among students: moving ahead and looking beyond, understanding more, and internalising and refining thinking process as an academic writer. Keeping this in mind, recreation of an online DC was done as a supplementary to the existing classroom DC.

The notion of recreation of discourse community is directly related to the basic features of a DC proposed by Swales (2016). The mechanism of intercommunication in a classroom DC found space on forums on “i-learn” LMS (based on Moodle). Students generated content/information by posting on the given topics and by giving feedback to each other. This recreation is not only just associated with changes in the components of basic features that constitute a DC but is also embedded in enhancing its dynamism and visibility.

The visibility of DCs could be even more obvious in a digital world. The integration of technology is common practice these days and is done to enhance the teaching and learning experience in the traditional regular education as well as distance education. Teaching writing skills at college needs a shift from “leading-children” to “leading-adults” in web-supported environments and peer-to-peer learning that is better known by the term “paragogy” (Bassendowski, 2016 Mulholland, 2019). Paragogy has the underlying principle of self-directed and anti-didactic learning process with ubiquitous web 2.0 (Alfuqaha, 2013; Corneli & Danoff, 2011). Recreation of a DC emphasises devising such new teaching methodologies for the introduction of self-directed and peer-to-peer learning, and for the integration of technology for increased collaboration that works on merging traditional skills and knowledge with digital working practices and can help building new recreated classroom DCs with enhanced dynamism and visibility. Swales (2016) also suggests that with the advancement in computers and computer-based communication, there is a need to rethink and revisit the features of a DC that he gave in 1990. He also mentions that there were some inherent flaws in those features like it was overly static and did not give much information about how members of the DC enter or leave a DC. Incorporating these ideas from Swales and others, the following features are discussed in relation to the recreated DC as used in the present study:

**Common goal.** The recreated DC in the present research involves the set of students who are collaborative learners on an online platform of “i-learn” LMS trying to appropriate the skill of argumentative essay writing.

**Intercommunication mechanism.** Swales (2016) emphasises the need to recognise new online modes of communication like blogs and emails and many others which can be helpful in creating a real dynamic community. The mechanism of intercommunication in the study is recreated online DC where written interaction happens.

**Participatory mechanisms.** A DC uses its mechanisms primarily to provide feedback and information. Students in a recreated DC generate content on the given argumentative topics and give feedback to each other. To manage the proper functioning of the DC, the course instructor works as a moderator who initiates the activity of written interaction by providing topics and guidelines.

**Genre.** The genre in the present research is argumentative writing on some relevant socio-legal issues. As Swales (2016) suggests, the genre in a DC is “performed, re-performed and refined” (p.15), students in the recreated DC also work towards appropriation of argumentative writing.

**Lexis.** For generating content on argumentative topics of socio-legal issues the registers are mostly sui generis which differ with different types of claims – fact, policy, cause and effect, and with different types of evidences – testimonial, physical, and anecdotal among others.

**Members and expertise.** In a DC, members often come as novices and they change, evolve, and attain appropriation. It is also true that there must be a ratio of beginners to experts for the community to exist, continue, and appropriate knowledge. In the present study, the instructor moderates the process of entry and progression in the online DC by creating access and moderating the interaction.

**Rapport and rhythm.** Once the instructor briefed students on their roles in a DC, the students were not reminded of the task of developing arguments with proper claims, reasons, and evidences, counterclaims, and rebuttal.

**Shared understanding.** After being briefed on the activity by the teacher, students moved into the flow and rhythm of the task and kept posting their content and feedback from time to time.

The recreation of an online DC as a supplement to classroom teaching is done to allow students to get engaged in critical thinking and get attentive to HOCs in writing. It is an attempt to recreate a dynamic DC and give indications on how an instructor can decide entry and exit form a DC meant for appropriation of any specific academic writing genre.

### Methodology

The research design for the present study is a quasi-experimental design - non-equivalent Control group design (NECG) with pre-test and post-test – and the sampling technique is consecutive sampling as in educational settings, as it is mostly impracticable to randomly allocate the participants (Fife-Schaw, 2006; Park & Han, 2018). A total of 80 active students participated in the study. These students were enrolled in English II course offered to first year undergraduates in the School of Law, Bennett University, India during even Semester 2019-20. The present research employs methodological triangulation – pre-test/post-test, content analysis and student survey – as multiple qualitative and quantitative methods (Ghahari & Farokhnia 2017). The study focuses on recreating a DC on the university LMS “i-learn” and analysing the impact of this pedagogical change from various standpoints.

### Research questions

The present study attempts to recreate an online DC as a supplementary to the physical classroom so that students can get involved in critical thinking process for appropriating argumentative essay writing. The study was designed to address three research questions:

- RQ1. Does the recreated online DC help students enhance their proficiency in HOCs of argumentative essay writing?
- RQ2. What is the nature of written interaction in the recreated online DC?
- RQ3. What are the students’ perceptions of the recreated online DC?

### Data Collection and Analysis

**Pre-test/post-test.** A total of five groups of 8 students each (total 40) were made parts of an online DC for the experimental group and 40 students of the control group continued with a physical classroom DC. Students in both the control and experimental groups were given topics to write argumentative essays individually, as pre-test and post-test components. The pre-test was conducted after teaching argumentative essay writing to both groups in the classroom. The post-test for the experimental group was conducted after they did written interaction in their online DC, while the control group’s post-test was conducted without any recreated DC treatment (figure 1).

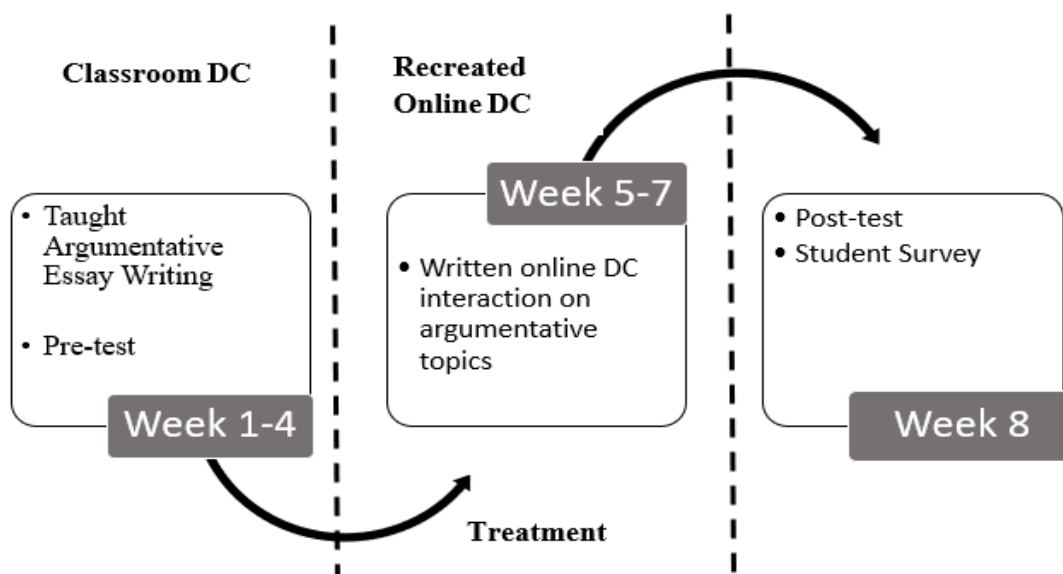


Figure 1. DC Recreation Timeline

An analytical rubric was designed to test the pre-test and post-test scores on 6 parameters of HOCs in argumentative writing (table 1). The rubric defined a range of levels from 0 to 3, with 0 (unacceptable), 1 (developing), 2 (accomplished) and 3 (exemplary) - for befitting completion of each component of an argumentative essay. The total number of items in the rubric is six, which sets the highest score for the marking rubric at 18. Three academic writing experts were used to check the validity and reliability of the rubric. These experts agreed on 78.33 % level of ratings. Cohen's Kappa Coefficient of reliability was .69 ( $p < .001$ ), which is a good level of inter-rater reliability.

Table 1: HOCs evaluation parameters for argumentative essays

S.no.	HOCs	Evaluation parameter for HOCs in an argumentative essay
1.	Analysing Audience	Attention getter/ rhetorical elements
2.	Thesis	Thesis/purpose statement
3.	Organisation and coherence	Use of cohesive devices
4.		Arrangement of paragraphs in the format of introduction, main body, and conclusion
5.		logical order of claims/counterclaims, reasons, and evidences
6.	Content development	Quality and quantity of Claims/counterclaims, reasons, evidences



Variables for the pre-test and post-test analysis were:

- The independent variable (IV): Discourse community (Classroom DC for the control group and Online DC for the experimental group)
- The dependent variable (DV): Argumentative essay writing achievement levels

**Online transcripts of DCs and content analysis.** Online transcripts of the written interaction of online DCs provided the data to analyse the nature of interaction process through conceptual content analysis: identifying and defining a concept and tallying its presence (Busch et al., n.d.). The students were given separate argumentative topics on contemporary socio-legal issues, with starting instructions regarding the content of their posts: focus on thesis statement, each thesis having at least three claims, and each claim further being supported by at least one evidence and reason each (figure 2). These are further enriched by counterclaims and rebuttals further supported by appropriate reasoning and evidence (figure 2). The given content guideline also served as the basis for coding the posts.

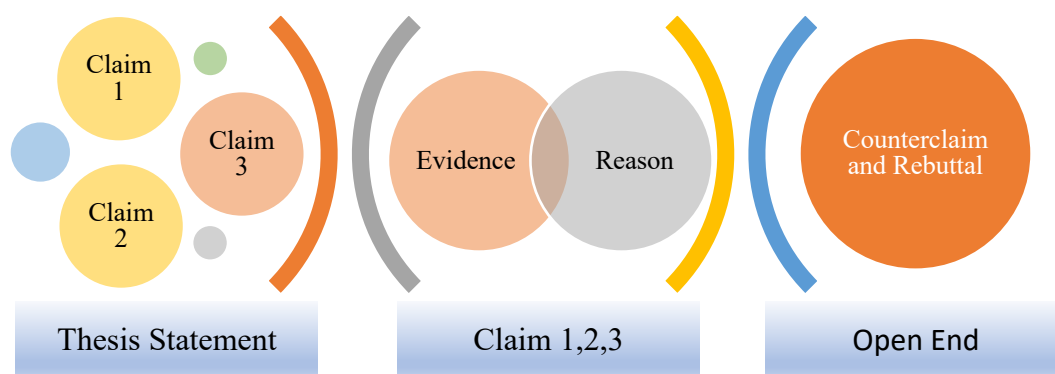


Figure 2: Content division and coding criteria for recreated online DC

The raters were asked to code the online DC transcripts such that:

- Each post is considered a unit
- Each post is identified on a single or multiple parameter: thesis, claims, evidences, reasoning, counterclaim, and rebuttal.

The kappa statistic for inter-rater reliability was 0.708 ( $p < 0.001$ ), which is a good level of inter-rater reliability. The transcripts of online DCs were coded following the content coding scheme (figure 2). If any content did not fit into any of the given coding criteria it was considered irrelevant.

**Student Survey.** For analysing students' experience of their participation in an online DC, a student survey was also conducted. The participation in the survey was voluntary and involved informed consent of the students ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Approval for the study and its publication was granted by the Dean, School of Law, Bennett University, and the Vice Chancellor. As the survey only focused on analysing the efficacy of an online recreated DC for better educational practice in the future, it did not cause any kind of physical, informational, or psychological harm to the students. The responses of the students were anonymised and numbered, thus, diminishing the possibility of leaking any personal information about them.

This survey included eleven closed-ended and four open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were framed to find if the online DC interaction helped the students to enhance HOCs in writing. All closed-ended questions were framed on five-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = disagree and 5 = strongly disagree. The open-ended section in the survey contained questions on beneficial factors, problems faced, improvement and other aspects the students wanted to share. The Chronbach's alpha reliability score for the survey was .89, which is considered good.

## Results and Discussion

### Pre-Test and Post-Test

Pre-test and post-test scores were analysed by performing descriptive and inferential statistics. The mean scores of the pre-test and post-test of experimental and control groups were analysed to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the argumentative essay writing performance of the students before and after the recreation of online DC. The descriptive statistics analysed the tests on the mean, standard deviation and percentages and finds out students' frequency shift for each of the six components of HOCs of argumentative essay. The inferential statistics analysed the difference in the mean gain scores of HOCs of argumentative essay writing of the students in the post-tests of experimental and control group.

**Descriptive statistics for HOCs.** The results show that on average students in the experimental group performed better in the post-test than pre-test for the composite scores of HOCs. In the composite scores of pre-test and post-test of the experimental group (table 2), the mean score for pre-test was 10.075 and 12.85 for the post-test. The percentage increase in the mean score for the experimental group is 27.54%. For the control group, the mean score of HOCs in pre-test was 9.975 and 10.45 for the post-test. The percentage change in the HOCs mean score was 4.75% which is much less than the percentage change of 27.54% for the experimental group.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for experimental and control group on HOCS

		Mean	Std. Deviation	% change
Experimental Group	Pre-test	10.075	2.795	27.54% increase in post-test score
	Post-test	12.85	3.453	
Control Group	Pre-test	9.975	2.645	4.75 % increase in post-test score
	Post-test	10.45	2.308	

Component wise frequency change analysis (table 3) shows that frequency shift of students' performance sets a trend from unacceptable (0) and initial level (1) to intermediate (2) and advanced level (3) in the experimental group. The '-' sign indicates a reduction in the number of students at the corresponding level of proficiency in HOCs; the '+' sign indicates that the number of students falling under that level of proficiency has increased and 'N' indicates no change.

Table 3: Component wise frequency shift of students in HOCs

HOCs	Experimental Group				Control Group			
	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Attention Grabber	-	+	-	+	N	-	+	N
Thesis Statement	-	-	+	+	N	+	-	N
Organisation and coherence	N	-	+	+	N	-	+	N
Content Development	-	-	+	+	N	N	N	N

Frequency shifts are very less and more stagnant in the control group's performance, suggesting that this group did not experience the dynamism experienced by the experimental, online DC group. The online DC thus resulted in improvement and a positive shift in the experimental group students' proficiency in HOCs of argumentative essay writing. Frequency shift for the control group's students to advanced level (table 3) is "no change" for all components of HOCs whereas, for the experimental group there is increase in students' proficiency for all components of HOCs.

**Inferential statistics for HOCs.** The research hypothesis for analysing pre-test and post-test results is:

$$H_1: \mu_{\text{experimental}} > \mu_{\text{control}}$$

The average score of HOCs for students who received the recreated online DC treatment is greater than the average score of students who did not receive the treatment.

The results from an independent samples t-test indicate that students who received the recreated online DC treatment (table 4) ( $M = 12.85$ ,  $SD = 3.453$ ,  $N = 40$ ) show that this group scored higher than students who did not receive the treatment ( $M = 10.45$ ,  $SD = 2.308$ ,  $N = 40$ ). Cohen's effect size value ( $d = 0.817$ ) suggested a "large" effect size and high practical significance.

Table 4: Group statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Test score	experimental group	40	12.85	3.453	.546	0.817
	control group	40	10.45	2.308	.365	

The Levene's test for equal variances yielded a p-value of .265. This means that the difference between the variances is statistically insignificant. Thus, the independent samples t-test (table 5), which showed that the difference in performance of students on HOCs of argumentative essay writing of experimental and control group, was statistically significant,  $t(78) = 3.654$ ,  $p = .0005$ , 95% CI (1.092, 3.707).

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test HOCs

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
HOC	Equal variances assumed	1.257	.265	3.654	78	.0005	2.400	.657	1.092	3.707
	Equal variances not assumed			3.654	68	.0005	2.400	.657	1.089	3.710

Inferential statistics shows that the magnitude of treatment is large for the components of HOCs in argumentative writing. It also implies that students who are engaged in a recreated online DC may improve significantly by shifting towards intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency in academic writing.

### Student Survey Results

The recreated online DC was well-received by students, and they agreed that it helped them to focus on HOCs in argumentative writing by being reflective, interactive, and explorative. They posted their claims, reasons, and evidences with more care. The online DC appeared to better support their higher order thinking skills, which got reflected in their arguments. Students agreed that incorporation of online DCs with other academic writing components would allow them to practice writing outside classroom boundaries. Descriptive statistics results (table 6) show mean values ranging from 1 - 2.5, which supports the positive perception of the students. Responses from students to open ended questions of the survey also support the results obtained on closed ended questions:

*“It made me focus on my points and frame them more appropriately”.*

*“Peer feedback has influenced my arguments as their points didn't necessarily match my points and I had arguments to prove them wrong or correct them whenever I feel that they are wrong”.*

*“I got to know their stand which was an advantage while forming my arguments”.*

*“Yes, by their feedback I was able to think in a different perspective which made my argument even stronger”.*

*“It made me understand that the reasoning and evidences should not deviate from the claim”.*

*“By contradiction and rebuttals, I could refine my thinking ability”.*

*“It has helped me in learning how to frame an answer and present it so that it remains relevant and adds on to the discussion”.*

Students also acknowledged the advantage of getting enough time to think, research and draft their arguments logically. They found peer feedback (Huisman et al., 2018; Guasch et al., 2013) to be highly beneficial. Through peer feedback they realised that the reasons and evidences should never deviate from their claims and that helped them to formulate stronger arguments.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for questions based on HOCs

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Recreated Online DC provided favourable environment for practising writing	40	1.97	.897
It led to increase in the genre and content knowledge	40	1.97	.695
It aided reflection in collaboration with readers	40	2.09	.856
It helped in recognising issues and asserting position	40	1.69	.535
It promoted dynamism in interaction and writing	40	2.09	.734
It worked on independent thinking with interdependence	40	1.81	.693
It facilitated adequate time to organise thoughts in a logical order	40	1.75	.762
It helped in evaluating and constructing strong arguments	40	2.03	.782
Peer feedback aided in self-reflection in argumentative writing	40	2.31	1.091
It helped in learning how to organise content coherently	40	2.09	.777
It helped in drafting well-organised argumentative essay	40	2.41	.979
Valid N (listwise)	40		

Students enjoyed the dynamism of online DCs and experienced a sense of achievement and fulfilment. Some students felt more comfortable as it was easier for them to write their views than to speak up in the class. Some students while acknowledging the usefulness of the online DC, gave suggestions to make online DC interaction more structured in the way that it clearly describes and restricts the format in which arguments had to be posted by each student along with maximum post criteria to ensure fair chance of participation by every member.

### Conceptual Content Analysis

Conceptual content analysis was conducted for the online DC transcripts by tallying the presence of the identified codes. It was observed that almost 75-85 percent of the interaction on argumentative topics was centred on content development in the form of reasons, evidences, and rebuttals (figure 3 and table 7) for all the four groups on the recreated online DC. Out of these three, formulation of reasons to support the proposed claims contributed to the maximum in majority of the groups. After reasoning, rebuttals were also abundantly posted, even in response to lower numbers of counterclaims.

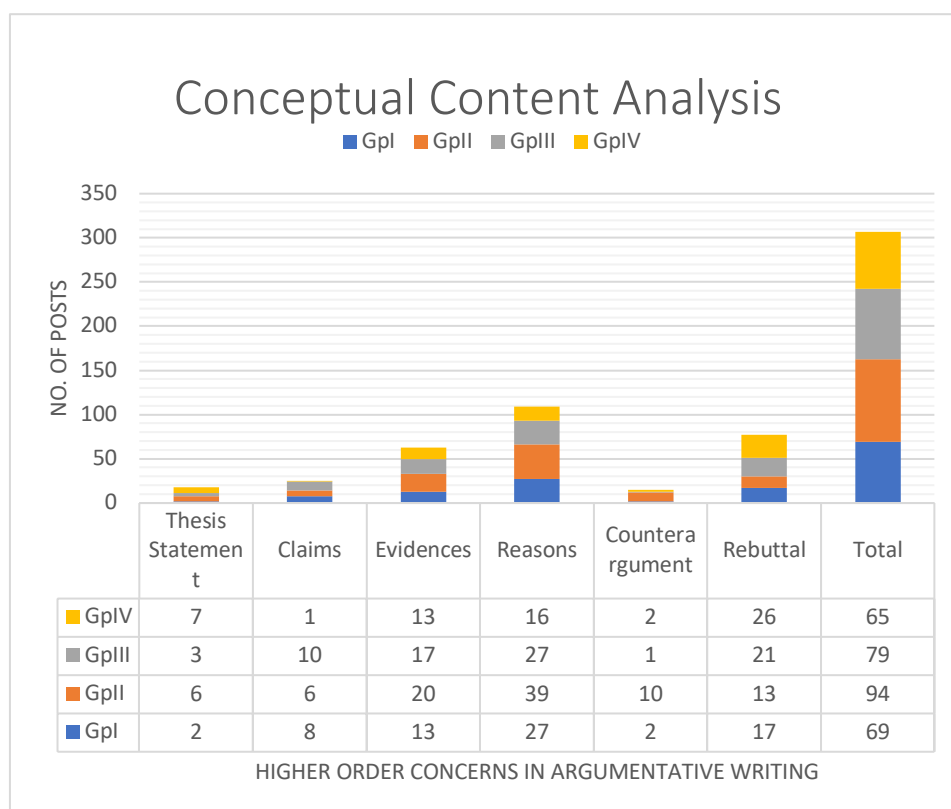


Figure 3: Conceptual content analysis of online DC transcripts

Table 7: Percentage contribution of posts related to reasons, evidences, and rebuttals

DC Group	Percentage Contribution
Group I	82.60% (reasons= 39.13%, evidences= 18.83%, rebuttals=24.64%)
Group II	76.59% (reasons= 41.48, evidences= 21.27%, rebuttals= 13.83%)
Group III	82.27% (reasons= 34.17, evidences= 21.52%, rebuttals= 26.58%)
Group IV	84.16% (reasons= 24.16%, evidences= 20%, rebuttals= 40%)

Lower number of posts relating to thesis, claim and counterclaim may suggest that once students decided their stand (for or against the argumentative topic), they focused more on proving their position with multiple perspectives, reasons and examples in the form of data, facts and testimonials. Students also developed a habit of acknowledging the sources of their evidences (figure 4). Being students of law, their evidence mostly comprised relevant sections, articles, and cases. For example, Group I was given the topic related to content censorship on internet and for proving their claims students referred to section 66(A) of IT Act 2008, Article 19(2), the case of Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (Writ Petition Criminal No.167 of 2012), the case of Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (Writ Petition Civil no. 1031 of 2019) among others.

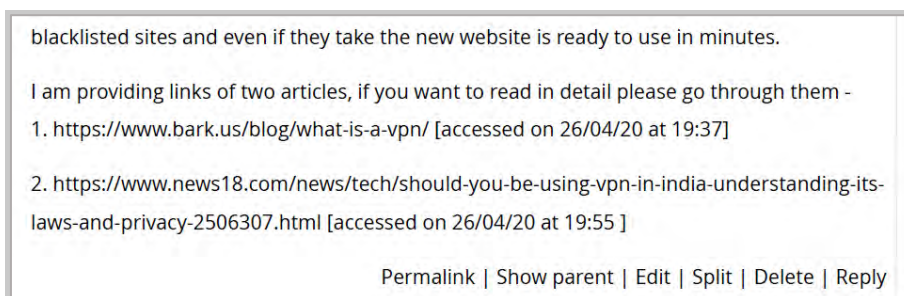


Figure 4: Source citation by group I on online DC

Students were also careful in maintaining coherence in their written interactions for the online DC. This was evident from the kind of words and phrases they used while interacting: “*It is true that...*”, “*I agree with...*”, “*I continue in support of...*”, “*firstly..., secondly...*”. Overall, conceptual content analysis results show that students experienced an enriching interaction as members of the online DC, and touched upon all aspects of HOCs, such as thesis, organisation and coherence, and content development. Audience analysis could not be witnessed much as they were instructed to have written interaction on argumentative topics and no real situation for composing a complete essay was given.

### Conclusion

In agreement with Watanabe (2016), the overall results of this methodologically triangulated research suggest that recreated online DCs can be highly effective in engaging students as active contributors to their own, as well as their peers’, appropriation of academic writing processes. DCs enabled them to engage in critical thinking and self-regulation that, consequently, positively influenced their performance in HOCs in writing. Pre-test and post-test results show significant improvement in HOCs in argumentative writing of law undergraduates and they gradually evolved in considerations of audience, thesis, organisation, coherence, and content development during the interaction process on online DC. They acknowledged the impact on their ability to understand coherence and strong and weak argument better than what they could imbibe in the classroom. Freedom of time and space on asynchronous mode of posts helped students in precise drafting of arguments with a lot of research and thinking on the topic. One very important element that was noticed in the conceptual content analysis of DC’s online transcripts was that the students focused more on justifying their positions through a lot of reasoning and ample legal instances. Counterclaims and rebuttals challenged them to come up with stronger reasons and evidence every time. The survey findings also supported the idea that the online DC helped them to realise that there is little scope for their arguments’ survival if they deviated in their reasons and evidences from the logic of their claim. In this respect a deviation from thesis and claims could prove to be disastrous to their arguments’ strength. Evasion of such nonconformity entailed a lot of reflection, self-regulation, peer review, and idea generation.

DCs have had high pedagogical relevance in academic writing classrooms (Watanabe, 2016) and if the instructors devise new ways of recreating DCs across disciplines and contexts utilising various online platforms as per the micro-genres of academic writing (Swales, 2016), students can certainly benefit from peer-feedbacks (Huisman et al., 2018), further hone their critical thinking (Bezanilla et al., 2019) and contribute original and innovative ideas. The results of this study suggest that participation in online DCs infuse confidence among students in ways that alleviate their apprehensions about academic writing. The study implies that students’ collaborative involvement in online DC interaction helps them to improve their

higher order thinking skills in general and in their writing more specifically. Writing instructors are thus encouraged to embrace variety in DC recreation, to focus on enhancing HOCs in academic writing of undergraduates across disciplines. Future research in this area should study the use of DCs and online DCs in other academic writing micro-genres, with a larger population and across multiple semesters, in order to investigate the impact of DCs on the development of HOCs and LOCs more widely.



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***Maṇḍala* in Architecture: Symbolism and Significance for Contemporary Design  
Education in India**

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### Abstract

This paper builds upon the understanding that the knowledge of traditional design concepts, particularly the *maṇḍala*, is relevant for contemporary design education. The significance of traditional principles and practices of design has been undermined by contemporary systems of education. The theory and practice of the philosophy of design are explained using textual references from the ancient treatises on architecture, and analysing buildings and sites of traditional and contemporary approaches to design. A specially devised framework of analytical indicators helps establish the relevance of traditional design concepts and processes for use in contemporary architecture education. An exploration into the current architecture pedagogy identifies the components of teaching structure where potential confluence zones are marked for the inclusion of traditional knowledge content. It is argued that the *vāstu puruṣa maṇḍala* is a philosophical vision and practical tool, which is readily applicable to design education because of its multi-dimensional qualities. A full and in-depth knowledge of the *maṇḍala* will provide value-addition to the critical history-theory and essential context-relevance strands of design education.

*Keywords:* architecture education, design concept, design philosophy, Indian architecture theory, *vāstu puruṣa maṇḍala*

## Introduction

In an Indian context, the traditional building knowledge is codified in the *Śāstras* – the ancient treatises on art and architecture. The Indian building traditions are thousands of years old, and these are explained in much depth in the canonical texts. *Sthapatis* and *Sompuras*, as they are known in southern and western parts of Indian sub-continent, are essentially master-builders who practise this knowledge system, and hand it down to the next generation in its full authenticity and integrity.

“*Vāstu Vidya* or the ancient Indian knowledge of architecture has its first textual reference in the *Rig Veda* and survives today as a continuing tradition, through its fragmentary application by astrologers, craftsmen, conservation architects and priests” (Chakrabarti, 1998, p. 1). In the contemporary practice of architecture, this knowledge, though uninformed and fragmentary, has still found some use. The paper argues that contemporary design education does not provide the desired emphasis on the traditional building philosophy, principles and practices.

The traditional principles of design and the traditional practices of building are both relevant and significant for architecture education. This claim may seem unfounded in the context of contemporary understanding of design, which is largely a by-product of the colonial occupation in the sub-continent and a direct descendant of modernity. The academic content and teaching methods are, to a great extent, drawn from the Western, or rather European, systems of teaching. However, the main central argument of this paper is built upon the idea that the traditional philosophy and methods of design need to be at the front and centre of design education in India.

The rationale behind this argument lies in the concern that though a solid bedrock of traditional building knowledge was available in the ancient Indian context, it was never acknowledged or considered for erecting the foundations of modern education in the colonial India. The knowledge of traditional design concepts needs to be disseminated widely, for it can be argued that a majority of academics and practitioners are either ignorant, or only partially aware, of the fundamental of traditional Indian theory of architecture.

## Methodology

The methodology deployed for the study includes an in-depth discussion on the concept of *maṇḍala* in relation to design thinking. The paper has been developed on an inductive approach, guided by qualitative understanding and analysis of the subject matter. It involves a critical inquiry into the two main strands of knowledge concepts, namely: traditional building knowledge and architecture education.

The exploration is based upon a critical insight into secondary sources such as books, journals, research theses and published papers. The observations are also derived from interactive sessions and interviews with traditional knowledge holders and contemporary design educators at building sites, traditional workshops and teaching institutions.

In addition to a critical theoretical context for the discussion, the study also illustrates design projects as cases in point to substantiate the main central argument of the paper.

## Literary Context

At the outset, it may be worth clarifying that the paper deals with highly subjective areas of mind and spirit. The discussion attempts to critically engage with the esoteric complexities of traditional philosophies and principles of design. Unlike the more technical and scientific themes of exploration, the traditional design concepts are drawn out using literature and personal interviews of traditional knowledge holders. There is a rather limited literary material available to present a critique.

The design thinkers, academics and practitioners have examined the domains of philosophy, education and practice in a considerable breadth and depth. It is argued that the roots of architecture education in India are in the solid bedrock of traditional knowledge systems, and not in the colonial sub-layer of imported education models. This argument finds resonance in the writings of eminent scholars in the field of architecture education (Chhaya, 2004; Ganju and Dengle, 2013; Mehta, 2001, 2006; Menon, 1998, 2000).

Ananth (1999) claims that the traditional building knowledge is losing its place in the contemporary design sensibility, and schools are churning out professionals who are trained in the Western traditions of aesthetics and art appreciation. Mehta (2006, p.1) suggests that, “while the professional attitude is a western import, the pedagogy requires the issues of a distinct cultural identity and the resolution of the tension between tradition and modern aspirations be integrally woven into the educational philosophy”.

There is work done, albeit limited, that examines the key traditional texts on architecture for their relevance in design practice in India. *Vāstu Śāstra* (ancient treatises on architecture) and *Vāstu Vidya* (traditional knowledge of architecture) are the key subjects of critical engagement and assessment. Acharya (1922) has done seminal work in reading, analyzing and interpreting the ancient treatises such as the *Mānasāra* and making these easily accessible to researchers and scholars working on this subject. His paper presents an overview of the branches of studies that are most essential for an architect to be familiar with.

Chakrabarti’s (1998) research on the Indian architectural theory illustrates the contemporary uses of traditional knowledge in architecture practice. Her work illustrates that a majority of the users of *Vāstu Vidya* apply it with a partial understanding. They choose to refer to only that aspect which serves their own purpose, and ignore the holistic nature of the original knowledge system which they pretend to “know”. This paper argues that whereas the design practice accepts the relevance and uses of traditional building knowledge in a partial and selective manner, the design education should be developed upon an understanding of its coherent nature and unified system.

## Discussion

The context of traditional building knowledge is defined primarily, by a critical and in-depth study of the *Mānasāra*, though other cognate texts are also referred. The oldest and most complete canonical group of ancient texts includes *Mayamata*, *Mānasāra*, *Samarāṅgana Sūtradhāra*, *Rajavallabha* and *Vishvakarma Praksha*. The paper considers the first three texts, covering a time period during 6th Century CE to 11th Century CE.

In terms of traditional building knowledge practitioners, the traditional master-builders or *sthapatis*, still continue to apply their age-old knowledge, experience and skills. In order to



gain an in-depth understanding of traditional design principles, structured interviews were conducted with *sthapatis*. Whilst the theory and practice of traditional building knowledge is available in the text, the philosophy of the theory of knowledge is understood in detail only by personal interactions with a *sthapati*. In Southern Indian context, a *sthapati* is entrusted with the conception, design, execution, consecration and conservation of a temple building.

Some of the key research questions are: What is the conceptual base of design in a traditional Indian context? In what way does the symbolism of *vāstu puruṣa maṇḍala* inform the theory and practice of the philosophy of design? What are the possibilities of integrating the traditional knowledge of *maṇḍala* in contemporary design education in India?

### ***Vāstu Vidya* as the Basis of the Philosophy of Design**

The discussion builds upon the theoretical underpinnings and practical application of the ancient concept of the *vāstu puruṣa maṇḍala*. According to *Vastu Vidya*, the fundamental aspect of the art and science of architecture is embedded in the “Spirit of the Site” – also known as *vāstu* (Acharya, 2010a; Dagen, 1994; Sharma, 2012). The three critical attributes of a design process are concept, rationale and tools; these are illustrated in what is known as a *vāstu maṇḍala* or a grid plan.

There are thirty-two types of *maṇḍalas* that could be applied to a site depending on the type, scale, function and complexity of a building. In each plan type, a specific place is assigned to the presiding deity who in turn dictates the function or use of that space in a building. This approach is applicable to both sacred and secular architecture.

The first is a site of one plot and is named *Sakala*. A plot could be square, rectangle, oval, polygonal or circular. A site of four plots is named *Paiśācha*, of nine plots is named *Pīṭha*, of sixteen plots is named *Mahāpīṭha*, of twenty-five plots is named *Upapīṭha* and so forth.

The principle of generating plots is:

$$s_x = p(x^2)$$

‘ $s_x$ ’ is the site nomenclature

‘ $p$ ’ is number of plots in that particular site type

For example:

$$s_1 = p(1^2) = p = 1 \text{ plot (Sakala)}$$

$$s_2 = p(2^2) = 4p = 4 \text{ plots (Paiśācha or Pechaka)}$$

$$s_3 = p(3^2) = 9p = 9 \text{ plots (Pīṭha)}$$

$$s_4 = p(4^2) = 16p = 16 \text{ plots (Mahāpīṭha)}$$

$$s_5 = p(5^2) = 25p = 25 \text{ plots (Upapīṭha)}$$

This classification of sites is prescribed until the thirty-second type which has one thousand and twenty-four plots and is named *Chandra-kānta*.

$$s_{32} = p(32^2) = 1024p = 1024 \text{ plots (Chandra-kānta)}$$

It is informative to understand the evolution of *vāstu maṇḍalas* or ground plans for the various types of sites and buildings. Each plan is recommended for a specific function and building type. For example, the *Sakala* plan (refer Figure 1) is proposed for “the worship of gods and preceptors, for sacrifices with fire, for the seat (sitting room) and daily dinner (i.e. dining room) of sages, and for the usual ancestral worship (e.g. *śrāddha*, etc.)” (Acharya, 2010a, p. 25).

Similarly, the *Pechaka* plan (refer Figure 2) is proposed for buildings “for domestic (public) worship and public bath” (Acharya, 2010a, p. 25).

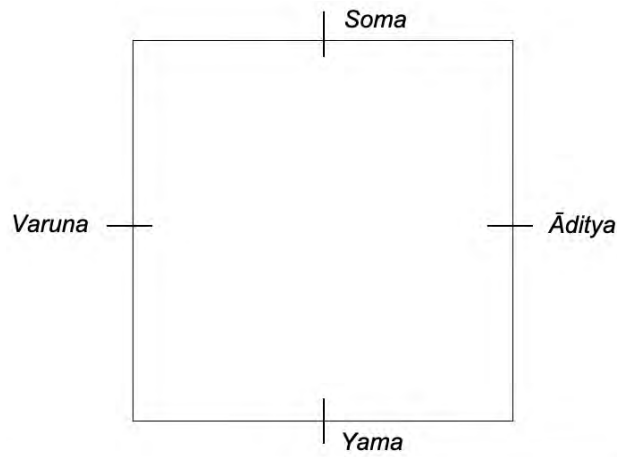


Figure 1: Site of one plot – *Sakala*

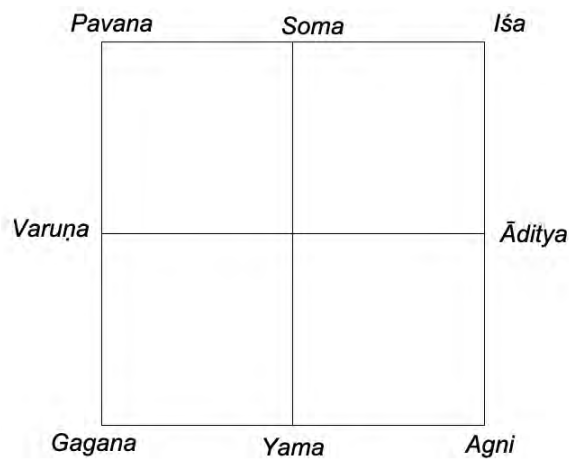


Figure 2: Site of four plots – *Pechaka*

<i>Pavana</i>	<i>Soma</i>	<i>Iśa</i>
<i>Varuṇa</i>	<i>Prithvi</i>	<i>Āditya</i>
<i>Gagana</i>	<i>Yama</i>	<i>Agni</i>

Figure 3: Site of nine plots - *Mahāpīṭha*

Maruta		Mukhya	Soma	Aditi			
		Śosa				Rudra	Budhara
Varuṇa	Mitra	Brahmā				Apavatsa	Jayanta
Pitr		Vivasvat	Savitra	Bhṛṣa			
		Bhṛṅga-rāja	Yama			Vitatha	Kṛśānu

Figure 4: Site of sixteen plots - *Upapīṭha*

Pavana	Mukhya	Soma	Aditi	Iśa
Śosa	Rudra	Budhara	Apavatsa	Javanta
Varuna	Mitra	Brahmā	Āryaka	Āditya
Sugriva	Indra	Vivasvat	Savitra	Bhṛṣa
Pitr	Bhṛṅga-rāja	Yama	Vitatha	Agni

Figure 5: Site of twenty-five plots - *Pīṭha*

(Figures 1-5 are adapted from Acharya, 2010b)

The figures shown above illustrate a few of the many ways in which a plot of site may be subdivided using the concept of *maṇḍala*. An architect could apply the principle of generating plots, as mentioned above, to develop a specific *maṇḍala* or grid plan for a specific site, use and typology of a building.

### The Symbolism of *Vāstu Puruṣa Maṇḍala*

The *Mānasāra* provides a conceptual base to conceive, design and develop the most useful and auspicious plan for a building type. In addition to these rather physical attributes, it also assigns a spiritual meaning to the ground plan or *maṇḍala* that is selected and adapted for a site. The presiding deities are assigned to the plots with *Brahmā* always at the centre of the plan; together these constitute what is known as the “Spirit of the site” or *vāstu puruṣa*.

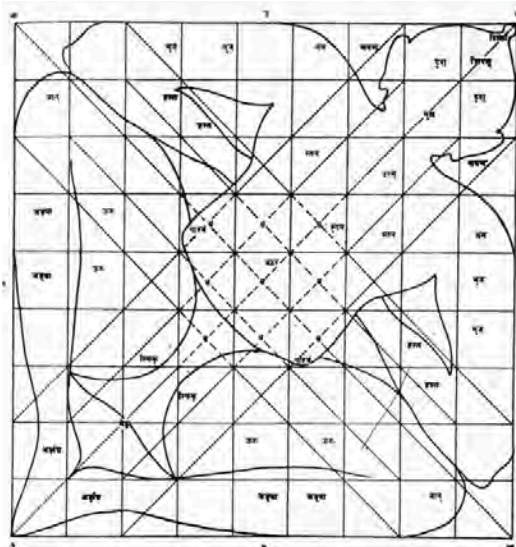


Figure 6: *Vāstu puruṣa maṇḍala*

(Kagak, C. (Ed.), 1986, *Vistāra - The Architecture of India, Catalogue of the Exhibition*  
Released into the public domain in 2012-13)

The *vāstu puruṣa maṇḍala* aligns a building site in relation to the four cardinal and four ordinal directions, namely: north, south, east, west, northeast, northwest, southeast and southwest. A site good for construction is always represented as a grid of squares with the *bindu* at the centre-most point. This point of reference is both the void and the soul of the site.

The form of the *vāstu puruṣa* or the “figure of Man” overlaid on a *maṇḍala* or the grid is “beyond form” (Vatsyayan, 1997, p. 99). The *Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradharā* explains this “figure of Man” as the “Spirit of the site”. The head of the *Puruṣa* is located in the northeast direction, whilst the feet go in the southwest direction. The knees and elbows signify the northwest and southeast directions. In the centre, and kept always clear, is the navel located at the intersection of the cardinal and ordinal directions.

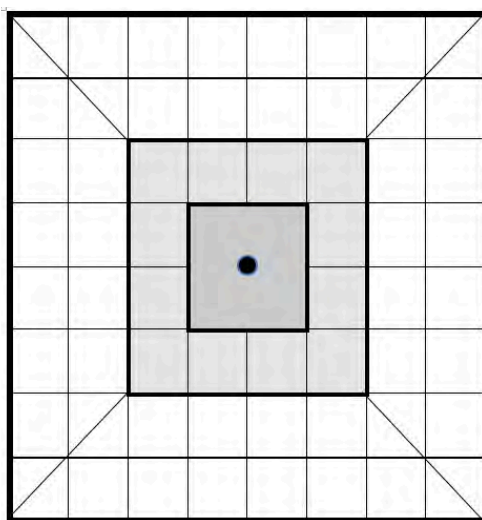


Figure 7: *Vāstu maṇḍala*

(Based upon discussion with Dr Narasimha)

A 64-square *maṇḍala*, known as the *chaṇḍita* (refer *Mānasāra*, chapter 7) is shown above. It is developed upon discussions with Dr Narasimha, a renowned *sthapati* (master-builder) and *silpachariar* (teacher) in Chennai. The centre-most part of the *maṇḍala* is called *Brahmabindu*, and it marks the source of all energy. It is also the centre of the cosmos and establishes the *genius loci* of the site. At this point and the immediate space around it is located the *Brahmam* – the Supreme Almighty; the *arupa* – the Formless, the Ultimate God or the Spirit of the place.

Vatsyayan (1986) explains the *vāstu puruṣa maṇḍala* as:

The *mandala* is not a plan; it represents an energy field. And, as in the case of the black holes of outer space, at the dead centre of the vortex is Nothing...which is Everything. It is both *shunya* (the Absolute Void) and *bindu* (the world seed and the source of all energy). In all *mandalas*, at this centre is located Brahman, the Supreme Principle.

### The Theory of the Philosophy of Design

The classical Indian philosophy of design is built upon the notions of the outer world and inner self, and the material desires and spiritual consciousness. The symbolism of *Puruṣa* is key to the understanding these interlinked notions of the macrocosm and microcosm: the whole and the part.

Vatsyayan has done considerable research on this subject and has traced the symbolism and significance of *vāstu puruṣa* and *maṇḍala* from the Vedic period through the later treatises on art, architecture and sculpture. Her critical and in-depth study of *Nāṭyaśāstra* suggests that the notion of *vāstu puruṣa* and the associated concepts of time, direction and space, were understood and applied in the field of performing arts, particularly theatre, much before they were used in architecture.

“In Bharata’s propitiation of the different directions and the deities of each of the direction, the establishment of a centre and main axis and the placing of pillars, one may receive remarkable correspondence with the imagery of the Upaniṣads and the ritual of the Brāhmaṇas. All establish the relationship of the physical with the psychical and the metaphysical” (Vatsyayan, 1997, p. 40).

This understanding of the relationship between the physical and the metaphysical, and the microcosm and the macrocosm provides a solid foundation and bedrock upon which traditional building knowledge has been erected.

In the ancient Indian design philosophy, the conceptual ideation of “form” deployed physical and spiritual processes. Some of the critical approaches include the use of: the human body or *Puruṣa* as a measure of design; the rituals and ceremonies as metaphoric links between the physical and metaphysical or the form and formless or the world order and the cosmic order; the assigning of directions and locations to Gods and presiding deities; and the establishment of the centre of a site and setting up of the *axis mundi* or *stambha* as a symbolic connection of the earth with the heavens, of the microcosm and the macrocosm or of the part and the whole.

It has been established that this knowledge existed in the Vedic times and was passed down over several millennia to medieval times. Arguably so, but it may not be incorrect to claim that certain aspects of this ancient knowledge continue to be applied even today by traditional master-builders.

A full and in-depth understanding of the concept of a *maṇḍala* is key to architecture as a creative design discipline within this tradition and as a meaningful building activity. Whilst the knowledge of the traditional concepts of design is codified in *sāstras* – the ancient texts, the understanding of this knowledge and its practice resides in *sthapatis* – the traditional master-builders. A tangible concrete expression of this traditional building knowledge takes the form of standing buildings - sacred and secular - in which these age-old knowledge systems are embedded.

### **The Practice of the Philosophy of Design**

The intention of establishing a correlation of architectural members in a building, particularly a temple, with the figure of Man or *Puruṣa* was to reinforce the symbolic connection between a finite structure and the infinite macrocosm. Further layers of symbolism were imbued in various building elements like plinth, ceiling, projection, entablature, decorative carving, sculpture, painting and so forth. Every architectural member of a building had symbolism or meaning imbued in its form, location and expression, such that the overall building design, in its entirety, was a true reflection of the larger whole or macrocosm.

In a building, particularly a temple, each component of its form and design relates to a specific aspect of the macrocosm and follows the consideration of the eight fundamental ingredients of the philosophy of *Vāstu Vidya*. These ingredients are: *bhūta* (material), *kāl* (time), *prakṛti* (nature), *diśās* (directions), *nakṣatras* (planets), *rasā* (experience), *yajna* (ritual) and *Puruṣa* (the self). Another critical element that is embodied in a building is “energy”.

Narasimha, in his explanation of temple design, lays a strong emphasis on the relationship between design and energy. “Design provides energy to the *lingam* and sanctum sanctorum or *garbhagrāhā*” (M. V. Narasimha Silpachariar, personal communication, February 2018)

The *maṇḍala* is not a mere diagram or a mathematical grid to be used as a base for the conceptual design and allocation of spaces and functions on a site. If understood fully and applied judiciously, a *maṇḍala* symbolises an energy field. It is this energy and its modulation that guides the design process. A *maṇḍala* is not a mere tool for design, it is the essence of design. This understanding forms a critical conceptual base for traditional design process.

It is important not to view a construction site as physical ground only, for the earth is a primary source of energy. The main objective of design is to engage with this energy through and around a building. The experience of this energy is not as much associated with the aspects of mass, as it concerns the attributes of life. The energy that is trapped in the deep core of the earth gets channelled up through the site and gets embodied in various parts of the building. This transmission of energy takes place through the process of design, construction and *yajña*.

“When an empty space is enclosed by four walls it becomes a living organism”, says Narasimha (M. V. Narasimha Silpachariar, personal communication, February 2018). A space in a designed enclosure is no longer a dead or empty space; it contains energy or life. It can be modulated and assigned a use as per design and requirement. The architecture of a building with its structure, sculpture and ornamentation renders this space alive, meaningful and powerful.

The design of a building and its various elements is extremely crucial. It has the potential to accentuate or undermine the impact of this energy at a metaphysical and experiential level.

Each element of design contributes to this phenomenon of multiplying energy, which is further augmented with proper recitation of the right *mantrās* and offerings by a temple priest.

“*Mantrā*, *Yantrā* and *Tantrā* – all three play an important role in temple design” (M. V. Narasimha Silpachariar, personal communication, February 2018). Here, *Mantrā* is recitation of hymns for the invocation of Gods, *Yantrā* is a temple plan based on the *Vāstupuruṣa maṇḍala*, and *Tantrā* is the ritualistic practice or methods for a divine experience.

There are innumerable examples of buildings and places, both in the traditional and contemporary Indian context, which exhibit the relevance and use of traditional building knowledge. These were designed on traditional principles of design, and constructed in conformity with traditional practices of building. We now discuss a couple of such examples to illustrate the concept of a *maṇḍala* in design.

### The Example of Shore temple, Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu

The Shore temple was constructed during the reign of King Narasimhavarmā II (AD 700-728) (Meister, 1999; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018). In 1984, the site was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List under the title “Group of Monuments, Mahaballipuram” (UNESCO, 2018). The other sites in the group of monuments include: rock-cut rathas, sculptured scenes on open rocks like Arjuna’s penance, the caves of Govardhanadhari and Mahishasuramardini, the Jala-Sayana Perumal temple... (Archaeological Survey of India, 2018). All these sites exhibit an outstanding quality of stone work; cutting, chiselling, masonry, rock-cut, surface relief, carving and ornamentation.



Figure 8: The Shore temple, Mamallapuram

The temple is a complex of three shrines: west facing – Viṣṇucchanda vimāna (the Rājasimhēśvara), east facing – Brahmachanda vimāna (the Ksatriyaśimhēśvara), and in between these two and east facing – Narapatisimha Pallava Viṣṇugṛha (Meister, 1999). Hardy (1995) introduces a profound idea concerning classical Indian temple architecture. He suggests

that the “architectural forms embody an Indian concept of manifestation, of the coming into concrete form of the divinity and, on a cosmic level, of the transmutation of the eternal and infinite into the shifting multiplicity of existence, and the reabsorption of all things into the limitless unity from which they have come” (p. 4).

Hardy’s suggestion forges an inextricable connection between the architectural form and faith, at a metaphysical level and between the built form and conceptual ideas, at a more tangible level. Built form is a manifestation of ideas, and the ideas give symbolism to form. This is an Indian approach to design thinking and practice and is one of the fundamental aspects of traditional building knowledge.

The understanding of the concept of manifestation is explored further by Kramrisch (1946, p. 165): “The temple is the concrete shape (*mūrti*) of the Essence; as such it is the residence and vesture of God”. A temple building, along with its form, space, composition, imagery and material is the tangible construct of the Spirit or the *Brahmam*. It is a concrete representation of the microcosm and macrocosm, of the man and universe, and of the cosmic Man and cosmos.

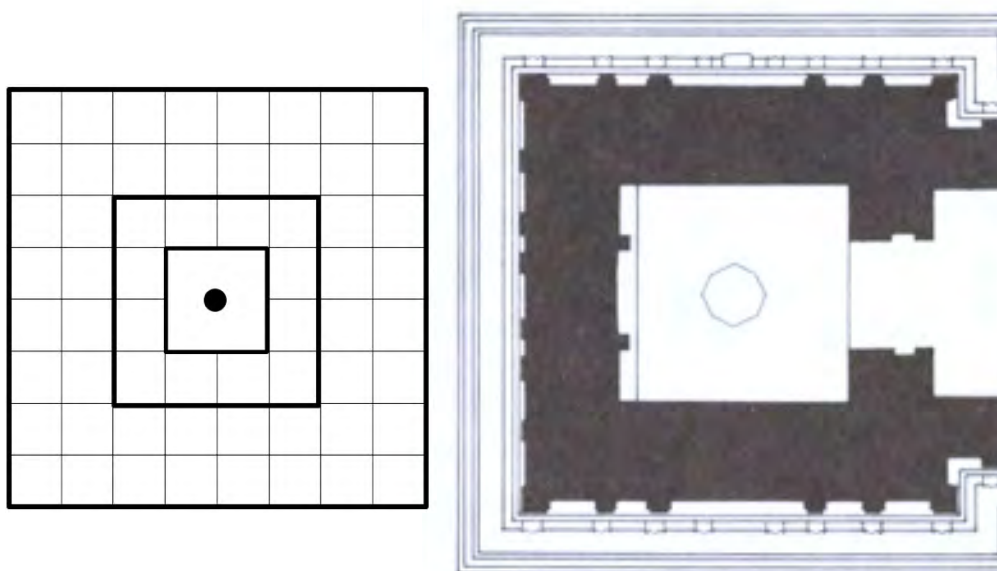


Figure 9: Sketch of a Maṇḍala in relation to the Plan of the *garbhagrha* of the Shore temple, Mamallapuram

(Adapted from Meister (Ed.), 1999)

Photo: American Institute of Indian Studies (Permission granted 19.11.20)

Architecture is perceived and experienced as a form of energy and movement; it is not a static form of expression. It has its own kinetics and dynamism, which might be more evident in one kind of architecture than in another. In the classical Indian temple buildings, it is one of the essential governing aspects of design, construction and experience. The most evident design element in a temple building that conveys the notion of movement or energy is the *vimāna*.

The energy is drawn from the inner depths of earth towards the central point of the *garbhagrha*, and from here it moves upwards and inwards. In architectural terms, the building mass expands from the centre of the *garbhagrha* in all directions in the horizontal plane. This mass with, its formal, decorative and other constituent elements, reduces to a point at the top-most level of



the superstructure. The formal treatment of the *garbhagrha* and the *vimāna* embody this dynamism or transmission of energy.

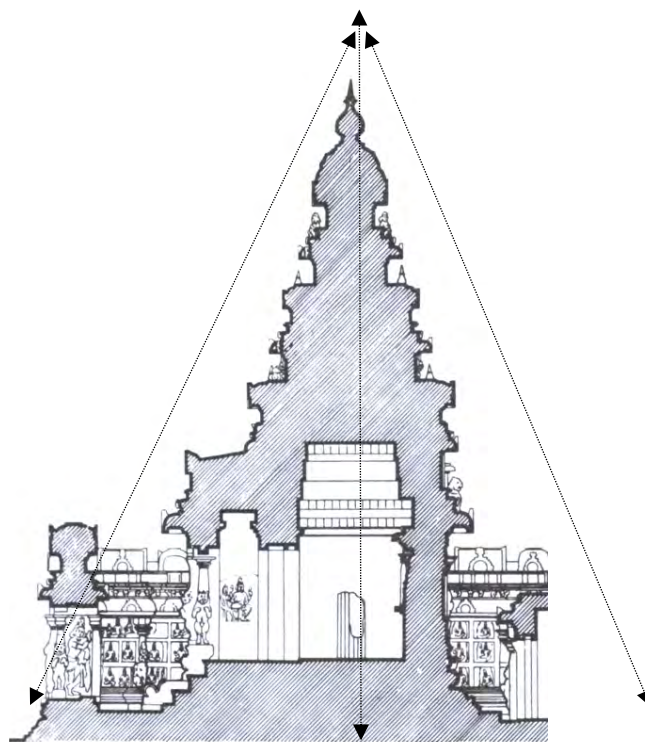


Figure 10: Section through the Shore temple, Mamallapuram  
(adapted from Meister (Ed.), 1999)

Photo: American Institute of Indian Studies (Permission granted 19.11.20)

The figure presents a section through the *garbhagrha* and the *vimāna* of the Śiva of the Shore temple. The two-way arrows illustrate the flow of energy and the underpinning of the Spirit of the site. The movement of energy is not only upwards, but also downwards. Whilst the overall form of the *vimāna* is seen to be receding upwards, the architectural and decorative elements seem to reveal the cosmic and mythological symbolism as the whole shrine expands downwards (Hardy, 1995).

### The Example of Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur

Designed by Charles Correa in 1986, the Jawahar Kala Kendra functions as a cultural centre for the city Jaipur, Rajasthan State, India. The centre is dedicated to the memory of India's great leader Jawaharlal Nehru.

Correa explains that the Jawahar Kala Kendra is “a contemporary construct based on an ancient perception of the non-Manifest World, as expressed in the *vastu-purush-mandalas* – those sacred Vedic diagrams that have been of seminal importance for Hindu, Buddhist and Jain architecture over many centuries”. (Correa, 1996, p. 28). A *maṇḍala* with a central space as an absolute void or nothingness (*shunya*), and simultaneously a point source of all energy or everything (*bindu*), is a “truly mind-blowing concept”, says Correa, “similar to the black holes of contemporary physics” (Cruikshank, 1987, p. 57).

It is important to note that this design evolved from a renewed interpretation of the original concept of *vāstu purush maṇḍala*. It is a nine-square plan, but the squares are not assigned to Gods. Correa's *maṇḍala* illustrates the adaptation of the original and traditional knowledge

concept. Here, the nine-square grid signifies the *Navagraha* – the nine planets, and each square denotes a planet and contains functions that relate to that planet. The central square denotes *surya* – the source of all energy and creation.

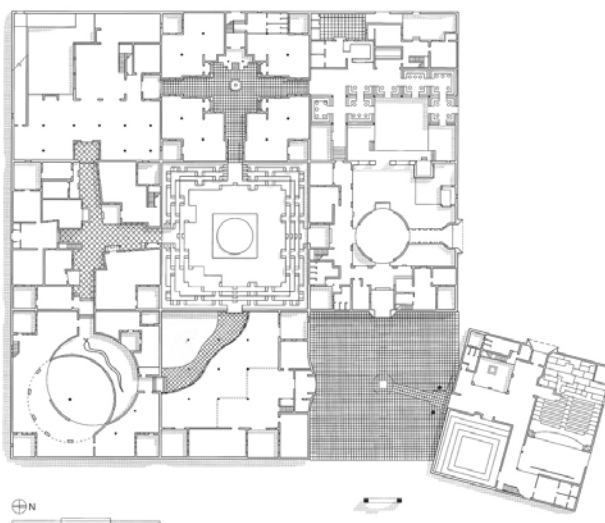


Figure 11: Floor plan, Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur

<https://archeyes.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/concept-drawings-jawahar-kala-kendra-charles-correa-museum-floor-plans-4.jpg?w=150>

(Copyright, Charles Correa Associates, courtesy Charles Correa Foundation, permission granted 19.11.20)

The design of the centre has remarkable similarity with the plan of the historic city of Jaipur. The conceptual approach draws inspiration from the original city plan of Jaipur, “drawn up by the Maharaja, a scholar, mathematician and astronomer, Jai Singh the Second, in the mid-17th century” (Khan, 1987, p. 142). Jai Singh’s plan was strictly based on a 9-square *mandala* or nine houses representing the nine planets. Due to the presence of a hill to the north of the city plan, the square along the northwest direction was moved to the bottom, along the square along the southeast direction.

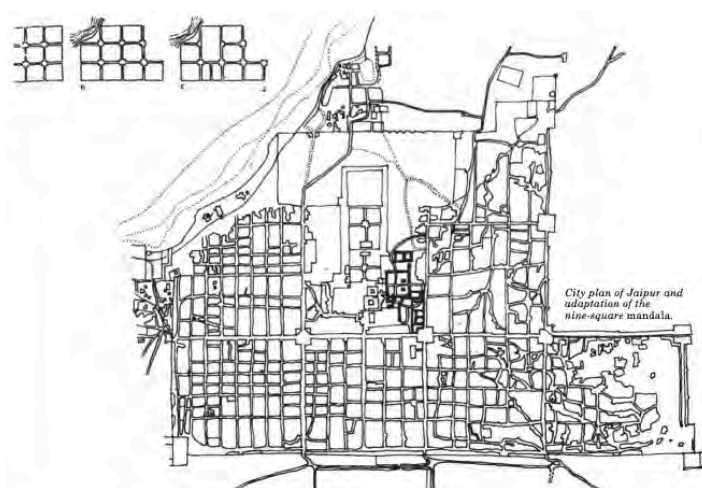


Figure 12: Plan of the historic city of Jaipur

Kagak, C. (Ed.), 1986, *Vistāra - The Architecture of India, Catalogue of the Exhibition*

(Copyright, Charles Correa Associates, courtesy Charles Correa Foundation. Permission granted 20.11.20)

Correa's plan invokes the *navagriha* or nine house *mandala*. Analogous to the original city plan, one of the nine squares of the centre is pivoted. In conformity with the *sāstras*, the central space is an open-to-sky void, whilst rest of the squares house covered or semi-open functions.

### The Example of Vidyadhar Nagar, Jaipur



Figure 13: Conceptual sketch of Vidyadhar Nagar township, Jaipur  
[https://www.sangath.org/uploads/images/1535114309\\_6-Vidhyadhar%20Nagar-Jaipur.jpg](https://www.sangath.org/uploads/images/1535114309_6-Vidhyadhar%20Nagar-Jaipur.jpg)  
 Photo: Vastushilpa Foundation Archives (Permission granted 21.11.20)



Figure 14: Layout plan of Vidyadhar Nagar township, Jaipur  
[https://www.sangath.org/uploads/images/1535114309\\_11-Vidyadhar%20Nagar-Jaipur.jpg](https://www.sangath.org/uploads/images/1535114309_11-Vidyadhar%20Nagar-Jaipur.jpg)  
 Photo: Vastushilpa Foundation Archives (Permission granted 21.11.20)

The final example for discussion is the masterplan of Vidyadhar Nagar, a satellite town for the historic city of Jaipur, Rajasthan. This contemporary township was designed by the Pritzker Award-winning architect BV Doshi in 1984. The city plan was conceived on the main premise “to bring together the best of traditional and modern design” (Sachdev, 2011, p. 94).

Doshi's *mandala* invokes the traditional principles of town planning in order to address the complexities of a modern city design. The application of traditional building knowledge is reconfigured to provide solutions for contemporary issues of liveability, development and sustainability. The township promises to provide an experience of a paradise where the inhabitants are happy and healthy. There are employment opportunities, and they live well. There are markets, schools, offices, parks and waterbodies for an enjoyable and fulfilling life.

The layout plan of Vidyadhar Nagar is a “synthesis of reformist urbanism of Le Corbusier with its emphasis on nature, circulation and hygiene – the essential joys of light, space and greenery; and the ancient urbanism of India with its tight streets, urban courts and mixed uses” (Curtis, 1988, p. 29).

It is argued that the planning of the historic city of Jaipur served as an influence, or a wider context, for the urban design of Vidyadhar Nagar. However, it does illustrate that the considerable modifications and adaptations were made to the original concept to ensure its contemporary relevance and future utility.

### **Relevance of Traditional Design Concept in Contemporary Design Education**

The relevance of traditional concepts of design has been established for both practice and education. Whilst there are examples that demonstrate the use of these concepts in a range of building typologies, scale and functions; particularly the *mandala*, the use of traditional design principles in architecture pedagogy is far from satisfactory.

We argue that although traditional building knowledge is relevant for contemporary architecture education, current pedagogic content and methods do not provide sufficient emphasis on the traditional principles, concepts and skills of design. This relevance of the fundamental aspects of traditional knowledge can be assessed with the help of a set of indicators, namely cognition, relativity, context, innovation, trust and future utility (Piplani & Brar, 2020). These indicators are operationalised as follows, and then applied to the contemporary architecture education system:

- a) Cognition is an attribute of assessment which is associated with an interest in and the worth of knowledge content. An individual must find it worth an effort to gather and process the inputs, for he/ she is assured of greater positive cognitive effects (Wilson & Sperber, 2004).
- b) The attribute of relativity identifies with the quality of knowledge content in terms of its usefulness, meaning and authenticity. It works on the assumption that all information is relevant for a specific context and time; only the degree of relevance varies with a situation(s).
- c) The context of knowledge content is defined by the original source from where the knowledge is drawn, interpreted and communicated to an individual. In comparison to intuitive or experiential teaching, the knowledge content that is contextualised in its own original source is of optimal relevance and facilitate constructive learning.
- d) Innovation in knowledge content, in order to sustain the relevance of knowledge for the changing times and contexts, is at the core of the assessment of knowledge. New and imaginative pedagogy content that satisfies expectation and learning capacity sustain a higher level of relevance as compared to conventional or traditional methods.

- e) Another key attribute of the relevance index is trust. The information that will lead to true conclusions and preclude the possibility of any falsification are of maximum relevance to an individual. Therefore, it is essential that the knowledge content, its source of origin and medium of delivery are trustworthy.
  - f) The knowledge content that is valuable not only in the contemporary context but will remain useful in the future as well, has a greater relevance. The indicator of future utility ensures the continuity and validity of knowledge content in the long-term.
- (Piplani & Brar, 2020)

### **The Contemporary Architecture Education System**

In the current architecture education curriculum, three broad strands for teaching-learning may be identified. These are derived from the minimum standards of architectural education regulations (1983) prescribed by the Council of Architecture, and are discussed as follows:

- i) Theoretical component in which structured lectures, presentations and seminars are offered to students. This may also be considered as a taught component of the curriculum, and depends primarily on text-based learning,
- ii) Applied component in which pre-determined exercises with gradually increasing complexity through the years are given to students. This may be considered as a part-taught and part-practice component of the curriculum.
- iii) Practical training component in which professional exposure, practice and experience is gained by working in an architectural office. This may be considered as a professional ability and skills enhancement component of the curriculum.

(Piplani & Brar, 2020)

The three components of design education are not mutually exclusive, but they are interconnected and inter-dependent. All three components need to be undertaken in a balanced way in order to achieve the overall vision, aim and objectives of architecture education.

In terms of the theory of the philosophy of design, the architecture pedagogy in India has drifted apart from the traditional principles and practices. It is argued that India's current architecture pedagogy receives its inspiration from the Western, or rather European, systems of teaching, both in its content and method.

In this respect the foundations of contemporary architecture education in India are erected upon a rather superficial sub-layer of the British colonial era, though a more solid bedrock of traditional building knowledge also lies much deeper in ancient Indian history.

TB Macaulay's Minute of Education of 1934 (Tillotson, 1989) underpins the primary intention behind the type of education propagated in British colonial India. The sole objective was to create a whole new cadre of assistants, trained in westernized attitudes, to serve the colonial masters in the administration. The use of English language played a critical role in fulfilling this intention and consolidating the British colonial political agenda in the country (Piplani & Brar, 2019).

However, it is an entirely different scenario today, in post-independence India. There is a greater emphasis on the indigenous aspect of education; this is particularly relevant and

applicable in the domain of architecture education. Today, there is a unique opportunity for the reversal of the catastrophic phenomenon that resulted in a slow erosion of the traditional knowledge of architecture and the traditional method of learning, which is rooted in ancient texts and cultural practices.

Questions that arise at this point are:

- a) In what way might the inclusion of traditional building knowledge add value to architecture education?
- b) What are the possibilities for embedding the ancient knowledge of *maṇḍala* into contemporary approaches to India's design education?

### **Possibilities**

#### ***Maṇḍala* in Design Education**

The concept of *maṇḍala* and the principles for its use in design are illustrated using examples in the previous section of the study. The indigenous Indian philosophy of design, codified in the knowledge of a *maṇḍala*, has been a source of inspiration to traditional *sthāpatis* and continues to do so for modern architects as well.

It is essential that this vast knowledge and unique inspiration imbued in the traditional concept of design is incorporated in the content, framework and methods of contemporary architecture education. The value addition to the current system of education will potentially impact at two levels – first, add value widely across the domain of critical history of architecture in India, by establishing the contemporary relevance of traditional building knowledge; and second – imbibe meaning more specifically to architecture pedagogy, by offering a contextual-learning framework.

In terms of possibilities for integrating the traditional understanding of *maṇḍala* in design education, this paper suggests identifying significant correlations between the knowledge content and design approaches. This is an innovative knowledge concept where the fields of confluence are identified between traditional concepts of design and contemporary approaches to learning. These fields of confluence are:

- a) Principles and concepts of knowledge content,
- b) Methods and tools for critical abstraction, and
- c) Skill sets and practices for informed use.

The knowledge of fundamental principles of *maṇḍala* as a design concept will connect with the “theoretical” component of architecture curriculum. This will provide a solid philosophical foundation to the design process.

The knowledge of primary methods for a critical abstraction of *maṇḍala* as a design tool will connect with the applied component of the curriculum. This will provide an in-depth analytical framework for the design manifestation.

The knowledge of essential skill sets to use *maṇḍala* as a design representation will connect with practical training component of architecture education. This will provide meaningful articulation of the design experience.

## Conclusion

The current architecture education system, first imported and later imposed, on the Indian context is not going to yield the desired outcomes as it does in its source of origin. The understanding and experience of design in India is strikingly different from that in the western context, or more specifically Europe, from where the current design pedagogy continues to receive inspiration. In India, the traditional building knowledge continues to be relevant, but its significance is neglected and unheeded by the dominating presence of contemporary design education.

The paper recommends a meaningful and inextricable inclusion of traditional building knowledge within India's contemporary design education. In this respect the *vāstu purush mandala* is both a concept and a tool for design, and is applicable to contemporary design because of its multi-dimensional and multi-directional qualities. We propose that the study, interpretation and use of *mandala* in education will provide a critical theoretical position to secure this design more firmly in tradition. It can also provide an effective tool and method to situate a design in its own context of time and space.

The key consideration, however, is to ensure a critical focus on the philosophy and symbolism of *mandala*, more than its mere understanding as a grid or tool. We suggest that an innovative and judicious application of the design *process*, rather than of geometric pattern, would render the *method* of teaching more informed, worthwhile and authentic.

In conclusion, the application of *mandala* in design will require an expansion of the traditional knowledge content to include the realities and challenges of the contemporary world, that is, modern materials, construction techniques, development pressures, climatic changes, lifestyle trends, information technology, and economic considerations.

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**Introducing Animal-Assisted Intervention for Special Education in  
Integrated Farming System**

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### Abstract

Autism spectrum disorder is a neurodevelopment disorder that affects an individual's social skills, communication skills and repetitive behaviours. Due to these factors, an autism learning environment has to be purposely-built to cater for the sensory needs of these learners. In special education practice, animal-assisted intervention has become popular over recent years to this end. This study aims to analyse the practice of animal-assisted intervention in an autism learning environment with the aid of a sustainable system called an integrated farming system. The study is conducted using mixed methods, involving content analysis of the technical information and detailed drawings of an integrated farming system, as well as an online survey about the implementation of the intervention in autism classrooms via such a system. Our findings show that the technical drawings for implementing an integrated farming system in the built environment represent an architectural intervention. The online survey also shows positive feedback from experts in autism services. The study concludes that animal-assisted autism learning is a promising future model for special education. It also suggests that an integrated farming system is a potential nature-based livestock farming solution to include animals in a farm-based autism educational setting. This could serve as a reference and basis for future architects or researchers to extend the research or implement animal-assisted interventions in real practices.

*Keywords:* animal-assisted intervention, autism learning environment, autism spectrum disorder, integrated farming system, special education

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurodevelopment disorder (Cassidy, 2019). Ting et al. (2014) listed three characteristics that describe ASD: impairment in social skills, communication skills, and repetitive behaviour. Autistic individuals often require a sensory-friendly environment for effective learning due to their sensory processing disorder (Ghazali et al., 2018). Different technologies have been integrated into the learning environment for the needs of special students (Balmeo et al., 2014). Architects could play an important role in designing the learning environment based on the sensory requirements of autistic individuals (Mostafa, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

In Malaysia, there is a shortage of autism related facilities to cater for the increasing number of ASD diagnoses every year. According to research, the government policies pertaining to educational building for autism is insufficient in Malaysia (Nazri & Ismail, 2016). While there is a resurgence in the research field on nature or farm-based education, very few autism schools in Malaysia incorporate such programs in a farm-based setting (O'Connor et al., 2018). The only purpose-built autism educational facility in Malaysia is Permata Kurnia, built in 2015 in Sentul, Kuala Lumpur. This is the most relevant facility in Malaysia that incorporates greenery in the layout design, albeit it does not have a full-scale animal integrated facility (Ghazali et al., 2018).

In many countries including Malaysia, the inclusion of animals in educational settings for animal-assisted intervention (AAI) is still relatively new and controversial (Rud & Beck, 2003; Uttley, 2013). Animal-loving parties might support the idea, while the opposing parties might raise concerns of bringing animals into an indoor environment due to concerns such as safety, sanitation, public relations, parents' agreement, housekeeping and management (Comartin, 2018). Besides, there is a lack of technical information on the inclusion of animals through architectural intervention to ensure that the welfare of animals is protected.

### **Research Objectives**

This study aims to implement animal-assisted intervention in a sensory friendly, autism learning environment through a sustainable and passive system called an integrated farming system. The research objectives are formulated as follows:

- To identify the benefits and challenges of implementing animal-assisted intervention in an autism learning environment.
- To examine the technical information and detailing to incorporate livestock farming into an autism learning environment through integrated farming system.

By conducting this study, the sensory needs of autistic individuals can be catered for with benefits from the inclusion of therapeutic animals in a nature and farm-based environment. The study findings form a theoretical basis for experts in the autism community such as architects, researchers and other professionals to implement animal-assisted intervention and incorporate livestock farming into future autism facilities. This study also aims to apply architectural intervention to fill in the research gap of animal inclusion in autism learning environments. The technical information of an integrated farming system examined can serve as a basis for architects to include animals in the built environment for AAI without sacrificing the welfare of animals. By completing this study, we hope to address a gap in the research about incorporating animal-assisted intervention in special education, by showing how vertical livestock farming can be integrated into a school compound, especially in urban or sub-urban areas where land size and space are limited.

## Literature Review

In special education, animal-assisted intervention (AAI) is used to assist individuals with autism spectrum disorder in their learning development (Brelsford et al., 2017), bringing improvement in social interaction and affection to other people (Ferwerda-Van Zonneveld et al., 2012; O’Haire et al., 2013). Animals have been used to assist humans for a long time (Macauley, 2006; Trivedi & Perl, 1995). The first practitioner to use animals in therapy sessions was Levinson, a child psychologist, in the 1960s. The pioneering work of Levinson has contributed to the progress of animal-assisted intervention (AAI) in various fields, including special education in autism. The common choices of animals include dogs, cats, horses, guinea pigs, rabbits, turtles, birds, fish, and many more (Comartin, 2018). Besides, research has shown that exposure to nature and greenery contributes to an improvement in cognitive, emotional and physical abilities (Barakat et al., 2019; Birkeland, 2016; O’Connor et al., 2018; Reeve et al., 2015). There is also a resurgence in research in the benefits of outdoor learning (Enrich, 2014). These could serve as a theoretical foundation for a farm-based education with the inclusion of therapeutic animals.

For the purpose of introducing AAI in special education, an integrated farming system (IFS) is studied as a form of livestock farming to be practised in an autism learning environment. IFS is a sustainable system that relies on the direct use of fresh livestock manure in fish culture for fertiliser (Little & Edwards, 2003). This system ensures a “zero waste” policy through product recycling, which can be economical and ecological in the sustainable development (Fawcett, 1990). In special education, an IFS allows the combination of a fish subsystem with different types of livestock that can provide therapeutic effects to autistic students.

In Malaysia, integrated farming systems have been practised by farmers since the 1930s (Ahmad, 2001). In IFS, the livestock shed is built with slatted flooring directly over the fish pond so that the manure can drop directly into the pond and stimulate phytoplankton production (LiveCorp & Meat & Livestock Australia, 2008). Through photosynthesis, phytoplankton will produce dissolved oxygen to be consumed by the fish. However, an overabundance of phytoplankton should be avoided to maintain an optimum environmental condition for fish growth or survival. This controlled environment can be achieved by controlling the density of animals which in turn controls the amount of manure loaded into the pond (Sevilleja et al., 2001). In other words, while a higher number of animals is better for AAI in the autism learning environment, the number should not exceed the recommended number to avoid an adverse effect for fish growth in the pond.

## Method

This study was conducted by using a mixed methods approach through both content analysis and online survey. Search engines such as Proquest, Google Scholar and Research Gate were used to obtain secondary data by previous researchers. The selection of material is mainly based on professional journal articles, books and conference proceedings.

### Qualitative Method

Under qualitative research, the technical information of IFS was examined through content analysis. Since IFS is typically practised in rural areas, human-animal cohabitation design and autism-friendly design were applied to propose a common solution to implement IFS into a sensory-friendly, autism learning environment. Table 1 shows the summarised criteria that need to be fulfilled for this. The technical information on IFS determines the boundary

conditions for the inclusion of animals in an autism learning environment. Human-animal cohabitation design ensures a healthy connection between humans and animals, while autism friendly design provides the approaches to realise such integration in a farm-based autism school. Referring to the concepts and theoretical drawings from other researchers, detailed drawings were adapted and reproduced with the aid of AutoCAD.

Table 1: Criteria to implement IFS in an autism learning environment

Criteria	Description
Technical information on IFS (Little & Edwards, 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depth of fishpond</li> <li>• Area of fish pond</li> <li>• Density of livestock to be raised per area of fish pond</li> <li>• Floor area required per livestock</li> </ul>
Human-animal cohabitation design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature or farm-based environment (Chutchawanjumrut, 2015)</li> <li>• Connection between human and animals for sensory stimulation (Jon Coe Design, 2014)</li> <li>• Environmental enrichment (Alshaheen, 2019)</li> </ul>
Autism friendly design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curvilinear layout</li> <li>• Natural ventilation</li> <li>• Acoustics</li> <li>• Biophilic element</li> <li>• Natural building materials</li> </ul>

### Quantitative Method

The findings from the qualitative methods were translated into a questionnaire and distributed to the designated target groups through Google Forms. The online survey consists of 15 questions and was completed by 47 respondents. The personal information of these respondents is kept confidential, but 70% were special education teachers, 15% were the staff from the National Autism Society of Malaysia, 9% were other professionals in autism services and 6% were from other fields. On average, the majority of the respondents had below three years of experience in autism services. The summarised results are tabulated in Table 3 and discussed in relation to the research objectives. The online survey gives deeper insights and a more comprehensive picture of the study of animal-assisted autism learning environments via integrated farming system from the opinions of individuals with experience in autism services.

### Findings

The summarised results provide a suggested solution to the implementation of AAI in a farm-based autism learning environment via IFS, as supported from the opinions of different experts in the field.

### Implementation of Integrated Farming System (IFS) in an Autism Learning Environment

In order to adopt an integrated farming system into an autism learning environment, requirements of IFS are fulfilled, and human-animal cohabitation design strategies are applied to integrate IFS with autism-friendly architecture. Table 2 shows the technical information on IFS.

Table 2: Technical information of IFS

Types of animals	Low density (nos)	High density (nos)	Area of animals (m <sup>2</sup> )
Ducks	3-5	15-20	0.45
Chickens	5-15	20-35	0.30
Goat/Sheep			3.00
• All day	2	4	
• Night only	4	8	

(District Livestock Development Office, 2012; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2010; Gupta & Noble, 2001; Tripathi & Sharma, 2001)

The three farm animals selected – ducks, chickens and goats – are the common farm animals suitable to be included in IFS as well as acting as therapeutic animals in an autism care farm. The density of animals raised on a shed above the fish pond determine the amount of manure loaded into the pond and should be decided carefully. Lower density of animals may ease the management, but this creates lower harvest of livestock products. In contrast, higher density of animals increases the harvest and creates more chances of interaction with the autistic students but requires more manpower in management. Nevertheless, the recycling properties of an integrated farming system very much ease the management and livestock handling process compared to the practice of individual livestock farming system. Hence, as long as the area of fish pond allows, it is good to raise high density of livestock. In certain scenario, animals are released from their sheds into the field during daytime and only kept at the sheds during night time. In such cases, the density of animals should be decided based on the recommended figure as shown in Table 2. Next, the data presented under the “area per animal” shows the space required by an animal when it is fully grown. If the design permits, it is always good to provide a larger space than the minimum requirement.

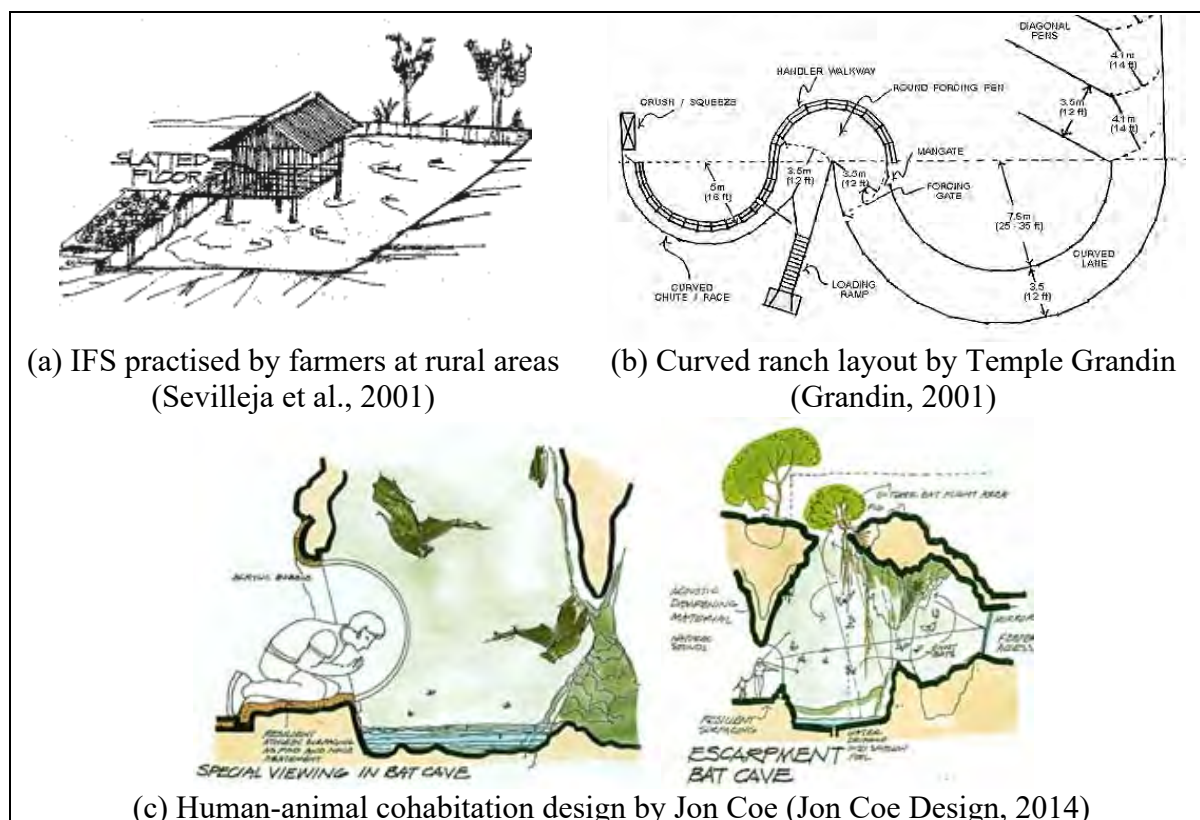


Figure 1: Theoretical drawings by other researchers



According to research, a curved layout is autism friendly due to more fluidity in circulation (Mostafa, 2014), and also animal friendly because animals are more attracted to curved structures in animal psychology (Grandin, 2001). This knowledge is applied by Grandin in her livestock farming design (Figure 1b).

Referring to the technical information in Table 2 and theoretical drawings in Figure 1, autism classrooms are improvised as typical modules slotted into a curved layout of farm grids where animals are kept in their respective sheds (Figure 2). There is not a single best recommended size for the classroom modules or teacher-student ratio due to the diverse needs of autistic students along the spectrum. As a general guide, the ratio can range from 1:15 to even 1:1 (Zarghami & Schnellert, 2004).

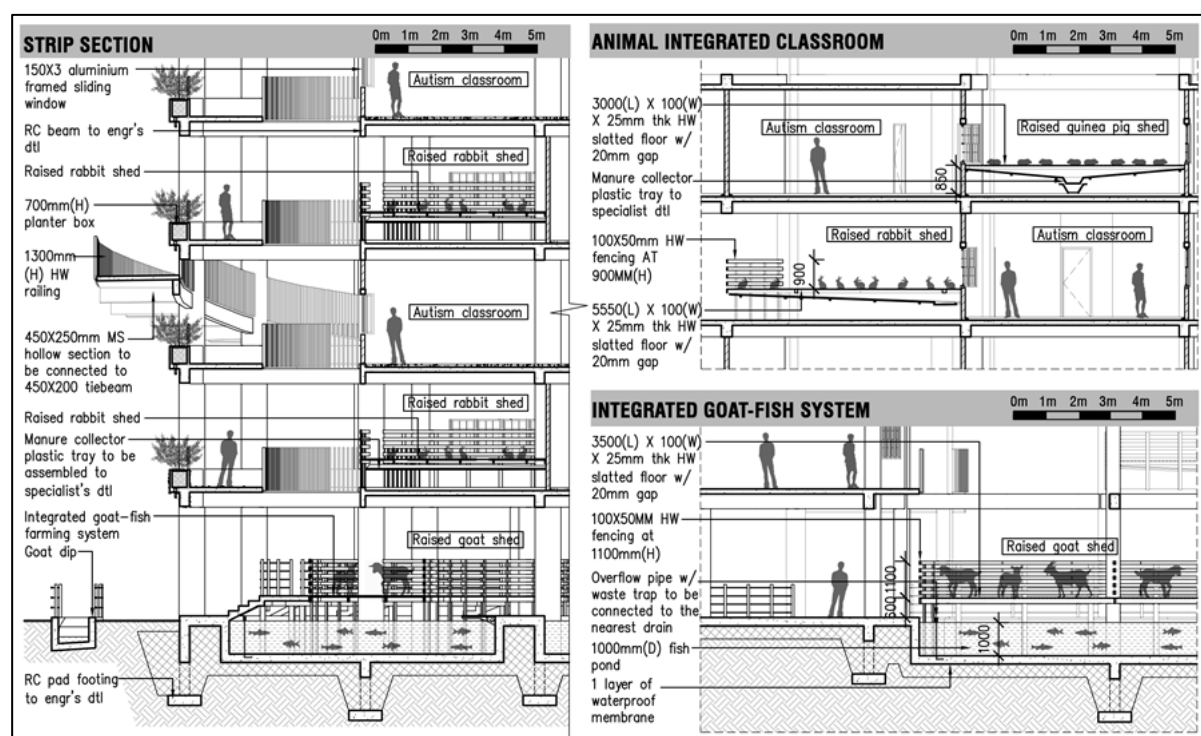


Figure 2: Improved detailed drawings of IFS in a farm-based autism learning environment

In the improvised drawings shown in Figure 2, animals are raised in an open ventilated shed at a farm-based environment with perimeter planter box. The types of interaction, either active or passive, between autistic students and the animals depend on the types and sizes of the animals. Bigger-sized animals like goats are kept at the ground floor over a one-meter depth fish pond for easy management. In such design, the connection between humans and animals is passive as it only provides visual and sound stimulation to the autistic students in the classrooms located at upper levels.

Smaller animals such as rabbit and guinea pig can be integrated with the classroom at upper levels and form active connection between the two parties. Students will be able to interact with the animals by touching and holding them inside the classroom, where the animals are acting as “social lubricant” for the students. However, the limitation of an animal integrated classroom is the difficulty in applying integrated livestock-fish farming system as building separate fish ponds in between every classroom is not efficient and will be cost intensive. Hence, the animal shed is simply built with slatted timber above floor level with a manure

collecting system below for easy manure disposal. For cleaning, water can be splashed at the slatted timber and allow water to run through and rinse over the plastic tray to remove existing dirt and unpleasant scent.

### Analysed Results from the Online Survey

As shown in Figure 3, the survey found that the top three farm animals selected by the respondents are rabbit, chicken and horse. 83% of the respondents selected “rabbit” as their choice of animals in AAI, which suggests that smaller animals are still generally preferred by most of the respondents to be raised in an autism school. However, if the school has a large compound, even large animals like horses can be included to be part of the animal-assisted program.

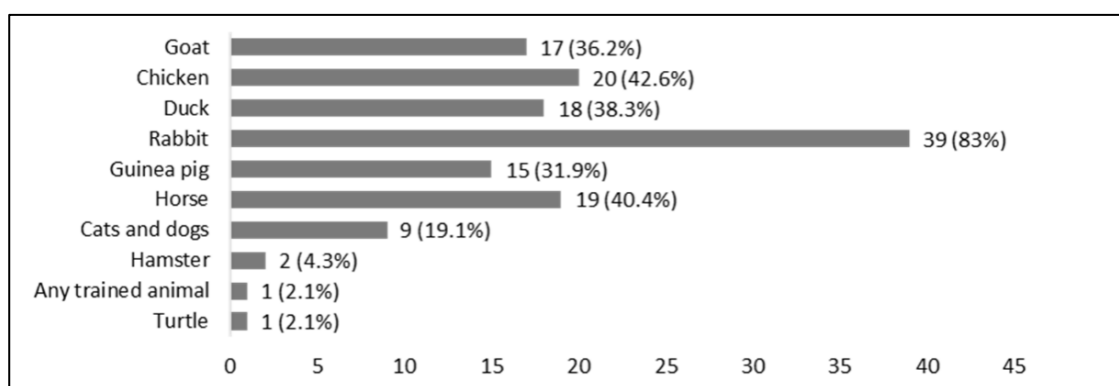


Figure 3: Suitability of animals for AAI in an autism learning environment

In the online survey, opinions on the benefits of integrating livestock farming or animal-assisted intervention in a farm-based autism school were gathered, as shown in Figure 4. The top three benefits chosen by the respondents include, “social improvement – 85.1%”, “student engagement – 78.7%” and “reduce stress and anxiety – 78.7%”. Further, 31.9% of the respondents chose “reduce problematic behaviour” to be among the benefits. The results suggest that the inclusion of therapeutic animals in an autism learning environment can benefit autistic students in many aspects, especially in social interaction and mental and behavioural management.

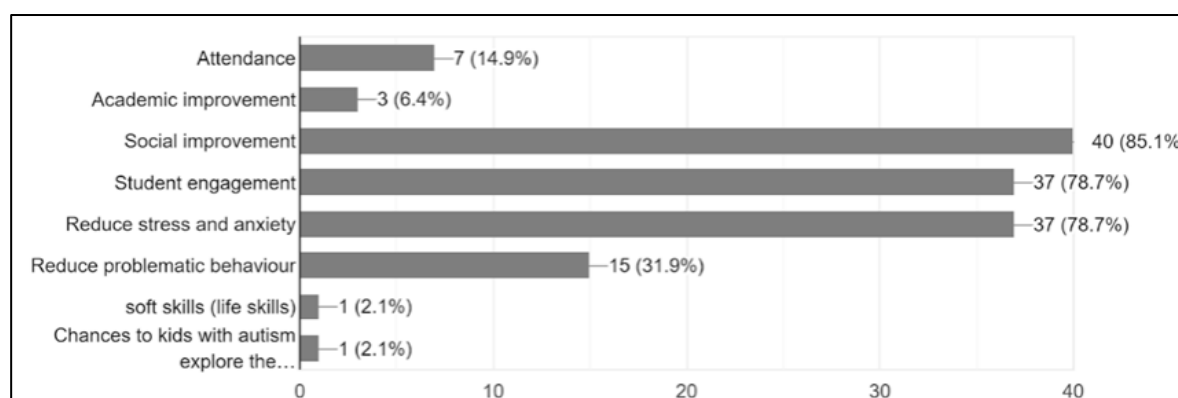


Figure 4: Benefits of livestock farming/AAI in a farm-based autism school

Figure 5 presents the common challenges to integrate livestock farming or animal-assisted intervention (AAI) into a farm-based autism school. The findings show that 72.3% of the

respondents rated “animal care outside of school hours” to be among the top challenges. Next, 66% of the respondents were concerned about the animal welfare as this is a common issue of animal inclusion in a learning environment. Also, there will be students’ allergy issues if the hygiene of animals is not properly maintained. Further, 42.6% of the respondents raised concern on “animal manure handling” if animals are included in autism classrooms for animal-assisted intervention.

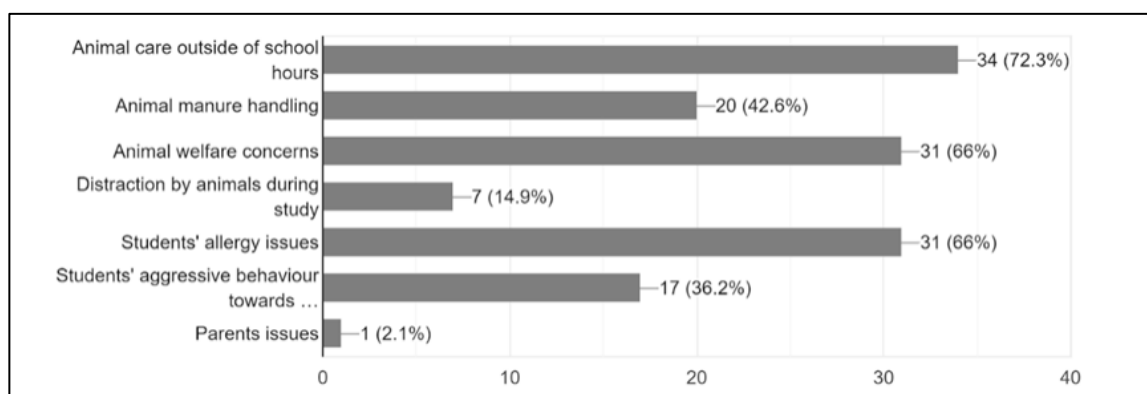


Figure 5: Challenges of livestock farming/AAI in a farm-based autism school

## Discussion

For the benefits of animal-assisted intervention, in autism care farms autistic individuals can interact with animals such as horse, goat, chicken, pig, dog, cat, rabbit, guinea pig, cow, goose and other small animals (Ferwerda-Van Zonneveld et al., 2012). However, not all animals can be brought into a learning environment in a school setting. The types of animals to be selected for animal-assisted intervention in an autism school largely depend on the suitability of the animals in the learning environment. Large-sized animals are often excluded in the selection process due to insufficient space provision in the school, especially in urban areas. Also, animals such as pigs are often avoided because autistic individuals can be overwhelmed by the intense scent. Next, while dogs and cats can be included for AAI, they are not productive livestock that can provide income through livestock farming. Hence, the improvised detailed drawings in Figure 2 only include therapeutic animals like goats, rabbits and guinea pigs. Nevertheless, as a general guide, if other animals are to be included for AAI, the principles of IFS can be followed based on the requirements of the specific animals in the system.

### Discussion on Content Analysis

Autistic students can interact with the therapeutic animals in two manners – one in an active connection, and another one in a passive connection. Among the animals in discussion, goats are the larger animals to be included in the autism learning environment. Considering the difficulties of bringing the goats to upper levels of the classrooms, they are only raised at the ground floor in an integrated goat-fish farming system for easy management. As the floor area in the ground floor is reserved for IFS, the classroom modules are only built starting at first floor level. Hence, students at upper levels can only interact with the goats at ground level passively from visual and sound stimulation. For direct interaction with therapy goats, students can come to the goat shed at the ground floor for the proven benefits of improving moods and overall quality of life (Harada et al., 2019).

Next, participation in livestock farming can be part of the animal-assisted program. Another type of livestock that can be included in an autism school is chickens. Due to their small size, chickens can be raised in an integrated chicken-fish farming system in the upper levels of the vertical farm grid as the transport and management of small-sized livestock is not too difficult. However, as a fish pond is required in IFS, there should be space provision for the depth of the fish pond. Similarly, the density of chickens to be raised above the fish pond is restricted by the size of fish pond to maintain a desirable amount of manure loaded into the pond. Therefore, even if the shed is big enough to accommodate a higher density of livestock, the density should be limited based on the specific requirements of the livestock presented in Table 2. Nevertheless, it is recommended to build the shed bigger than the minimum floor area to respect the “social contact” between the livestock. This ensures that the livestock are not cramped within a limited space as in intensive industrial farming (Blecha, 2007). If the space provision permits, a garden can be built beside the fish pond to release the chicken into the field to provide environmental enrichment for their well-being.

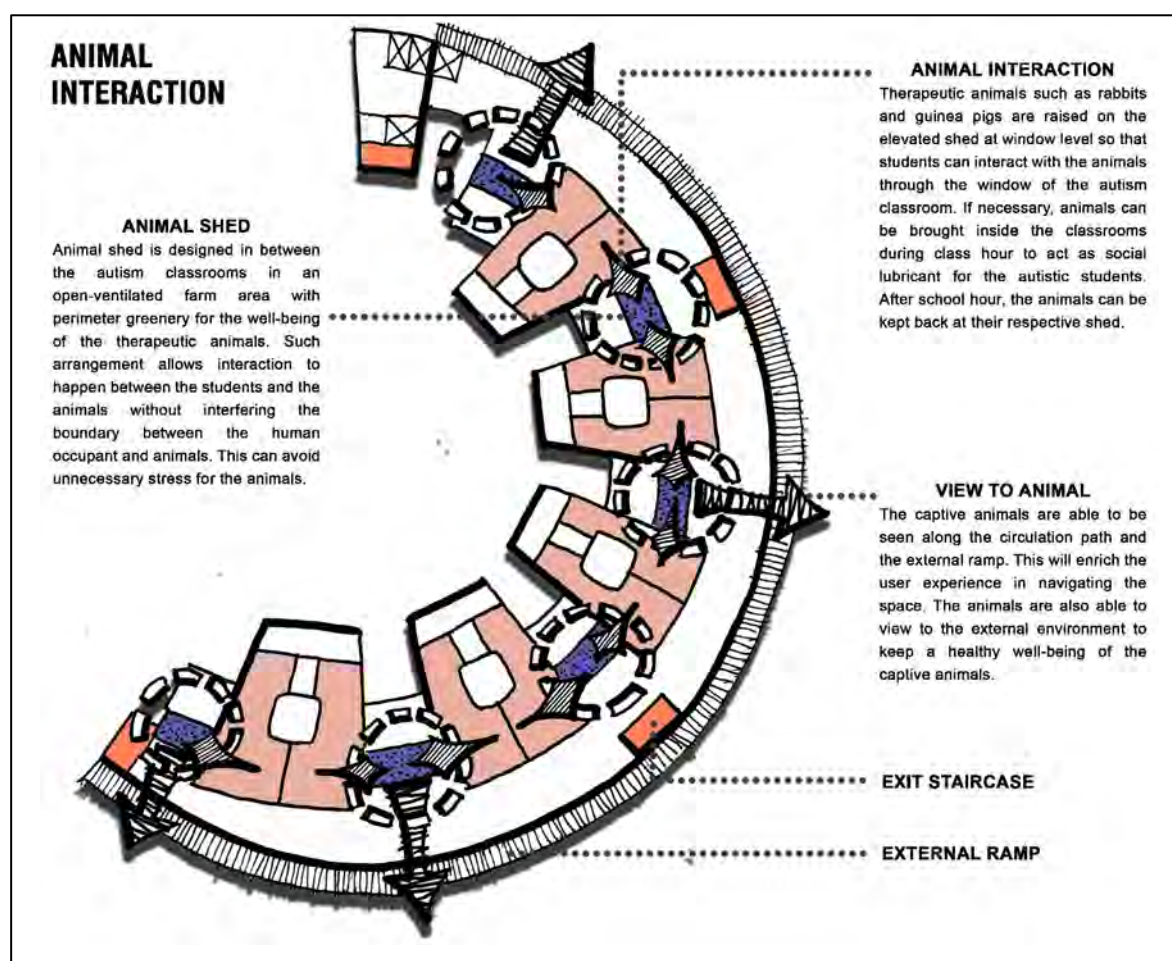


Figure 6: Animal interaction in an animal-assisted autism learning environment

Therapeutic animals recommended to be integrated with the autism classroom for AAI include rabbits and guinea pigs. This is because they are lazy and gentle animals which will not be overactive and require much care. Figure 6 shows the improvised plan layout of autism classroom modules inserted into the curved layout of farm grids. As discussed in the findings, a curved layout can bring mutual benefits to autistic students in their sensory needs, as well as animals in their natural behaviour. The animal sheds are built in between every classroom

module to allow interaction between students and animals to occur in an active manner. The farm grid design creates a farm-based environment surrounded by greenery from the perimeter planter box to maintain a healthy environment for the captive animals. Students can actively interact with the animals by touching and holding them inside the classroom. This could improve their social interaction with other students in the presence of therapeutic animals (O’Haire et al., 2014). The limitation of this approach is the difficulty in applying IFS with the classroom as the system requires a big size fish pond to collect the livestock manure in an automatic process. In this case, the manure collected from the manual collection system below the animal sheds can either be disposed of or manually loaded into the fish pond as fertiliser.

The improvised curved layout with autism classroom modules inserted into the farm grid is deemed to be sensory friendly to autistic individuals. As shown in Figure 7, the wayfinding is simple and straightforward to be comprehended by autistic individuals. As suggested by various research, autistic people can be stressed by sudden turns in transition and circulation (Marchi, 2013). In contrast, a curvilinear layout ensures a smooth circulation without dead corners, avoiding stress and anxiety experienced by autistic people in circulation. Additionally, ramps can be built as a form of vertical transportation as an alternative to staircases. Autistic individuals prefer to use ramps over staircases in terms of balance and body awareness (Marchi, 2013). The use of outdoor ramps allows users to enjoy the outdoor scenery in circulation.

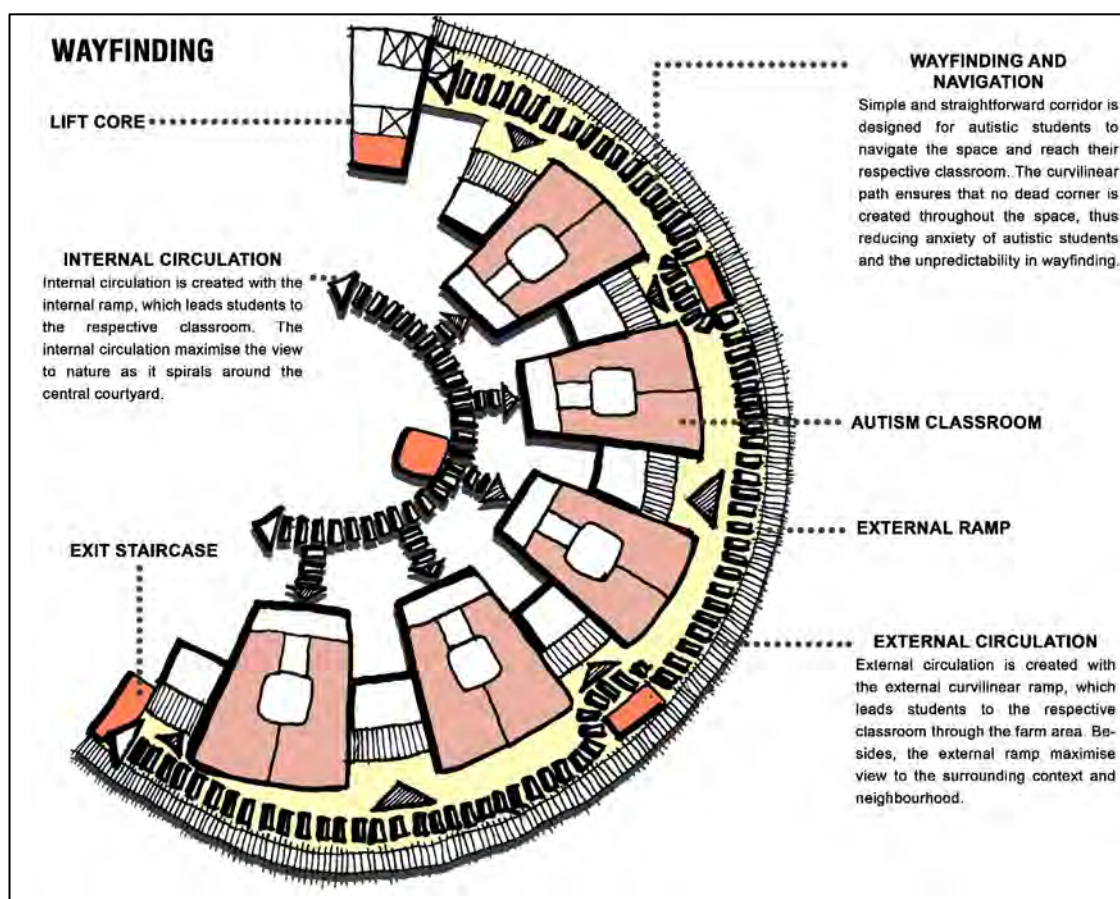


Figure 7: Wayfinding in an animal-assisted autism learning environment

Acoustics is another design criterion in autism sensory design (Mostafa, 2014). One of the design approaches for autism classrooms is to locate quiet rooms to be accessed directly from the classroom. This allows agitated autistic students to calm down in the quiet room during



behavioural meltdown. Also, quiet rooms can be used for one-to-one quiet learning if necessary. As an approach in acoustic design, quiet rooms and services rooms such as storage and restrooms can be located in between the classroom modules, similar to the animal sheds, to act as sound cushion (Figure 8).

The perimeter planter box at the farm grid is another greenery system that can aid in acoustical correction. Basically, the sound waves from the neighbourhood can be dissipated by the plant leaves through mechanical vibration (Iannace et al., 2012; Iannace et al., 2013). This can enhance the learning environment as autistic individuals can be sensitive to excessive sound stimulation. By achieving these sensory friendly requirements, autistic students are enabled to benefit from animal-assisted intervention in a farm-based autism learning environment.

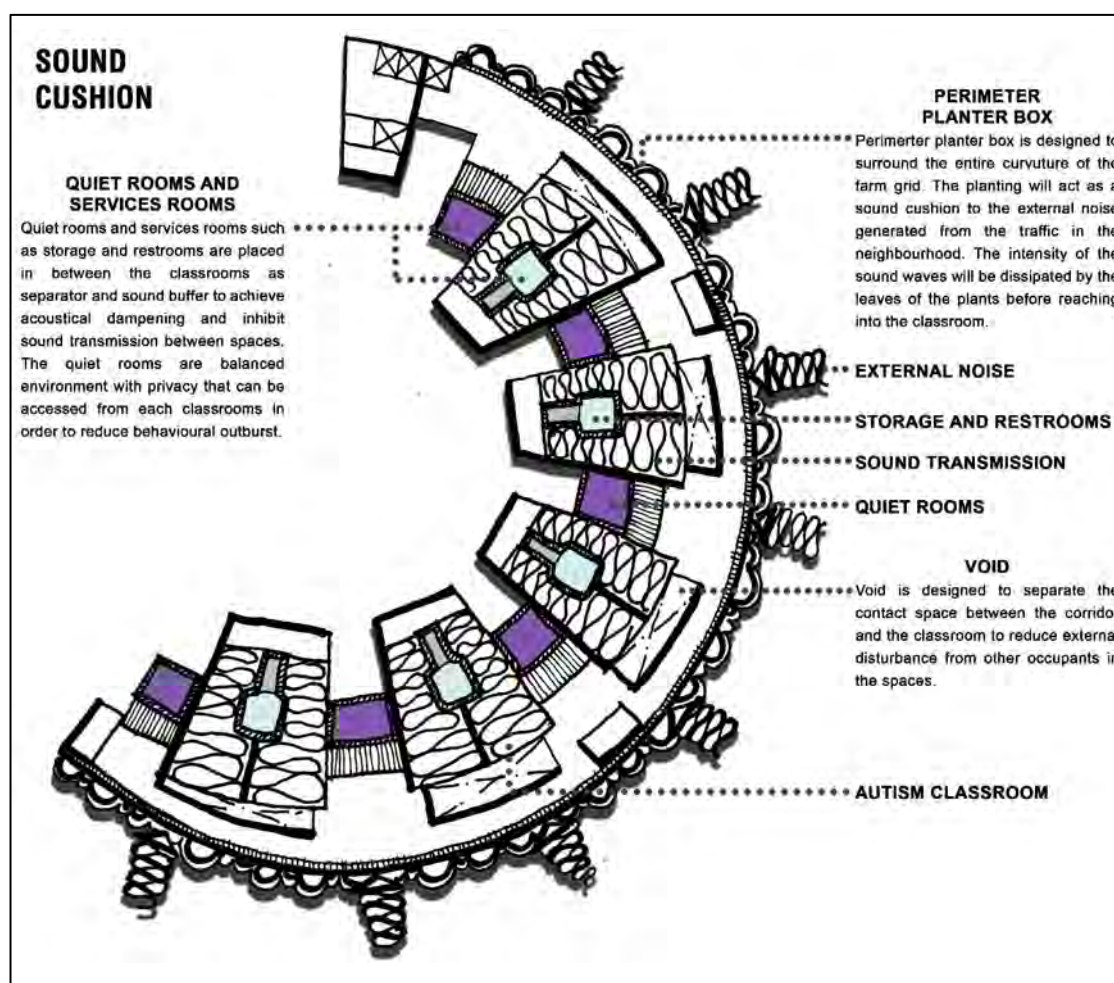


Figure 8: Sound cushion in an animal-assisted autism learning environment

### Discussion on Online Survey

The results from the online survey are summarised and presented in Table 3. The discussion compares the findings with the preliminary studies and the results from the content analysis.

Table 3: Discussion on the findings from online survey

Analysed results	Discussions
<p>Opinions on nature/farm-based education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature exposure is essential – 95.7%</li> <li>• Farming and AAI is effective – 93.6%</li> <li>• Fish rearing is beneficial – 91.5%</li> </ul>	<p>The findings concur with the preliminary studies where the majority of the respondents agree that nature exposure is essential for the well-being of autistic individuals. Besides, since most agree that fish rearing and livestock farming is effective, it gives a supporting evidence to implement IFS.</p>
<p>Top three farm animals for AAI:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rabbit – 83%</li> <li>• Chicken – 42.6%</li> <li>• Horse – 40.4%</li> </ul>	<p>The findings show that small animals are preferred for animal inclusion in the classrooms to assist learning. However, if space is not restricted, even large animal like horse can be raised for AAI, but it would be more challenging to practise IFS with large animals.</p>
<p>Top three benefits of livestock farming/AAI:</p> <p>Social improvement – 85.1%</p> <p>Student engagement – 78.7%</p> <p>Reduce stress and anxiety – 78.7%</p>	<p>The top benefits are mainly mental and socio-emotional benefits. Nevertheless, when one skill is improved, other skills will improve simultaneously as they are all interrelated.</p>
<p>Top three challenges of livestock farming/AAI:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animal care outside of school hours – 72.3%</li> <li>• Students' allergy issue – 66%</li> <li>• Animal welfare concerns – 66%</li> </ul>	<p>The primary concern of animal care should be solved by having a management team to handle the housekeeping of animals. Next, hygiene of animals should be ensured to avoid students' allergy issue. Since IFS can automatically dispose the manure into the fish pond, it might be a good solution.</p>
<p>Opinions on integrated farming system (IFS):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feasibility of IFS – 42.6% agree; 46.8% neutral; 4.3% disagree</li> <li>• Incorporating IFS in autism schools given proper support and facilities – 100%</li> <li>• Livestock farming/AAI as the future direction of special education – 89.4%</li> </ul>	<p>The findings show that IFS is still new to most respondents as the results on feasibility is a mixture of enthusiasm and scepticism. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents believe that AAI is the future direction of special education, indicating the growing popularity of AAI in autism services. More research can be done to further improve the practicality of IFS in an autism learning environment.</p>

### Recommendations

As suggested by the respondents in the online survey, the government should provide sufficient support and facilities in order to implement AAI in autism schools through IFS. Research on IFS can also be extended to enhance its feasibility and practicality. With new emerging technologies and sustainable system, different approaches and methods can be explored to include animals in a building. For future recommendation, animals' behaviour can also be further studied with animal specialists to create a healthy environment that allows interaction between the human occupants and captive animals. Also, there is a need for a more extensive study that integrates the recommended animals into actual autism classrooms with broader

participants in the sample to increase the accuracy of the benefits and challenges of IFS. The technical information and improvised drawings of IFS in this research can serve as a basis or reference to future architects or researchers to improve the practicality and eventually implement the system in real practices. Future research in this area should also seek to include input from the learners intended to benefit from the IFS support system. This information would complement the more technical input from autism experts, and is likely to provide additional insights and suggestions for implementing the IFS system in a user-friendly manner.

### **Conclusion**

While livestock farming and AAI are still relatively new in Malaysia's special educational field, it is a potential model for future direction as the effectiveness of AAI has been proven in the research field. Nevertheless, this study provides the possible solution to implement AAI in an autism learning environment through IFS and architectural intervention, as summarised in the conceptual diagram in Figure 9.

An integrated farming system (IFS) is self-sustained due to the recycling of animal wastes into the fish pond as fertiliser. The water from the fish pond can become a convenient water source for the plants and animals. Besides, the farm grids with perimeter planter box creates a green and healthy environment for the captive animals and autistic students. The farm grid design is also complemented with a lot of environmental benefits, such as sun shading, acoustical correction, cross ventilation and filtering air pollutants (Figure 9). This ensures the well-being and mental health of the livestock serving as therapeutic agents for animal-assisted intervention. The concept of a vertical farm also allows animals to be integrated with the classroom modules in a farm-based autism school, especially in urban areas where land is limited. In conclusion, this study adds value to the research field on farm-based educational models in special education. It is a step forward to a more inclusive society, where the needs of special groups can be included in the design process of an educational architecture.



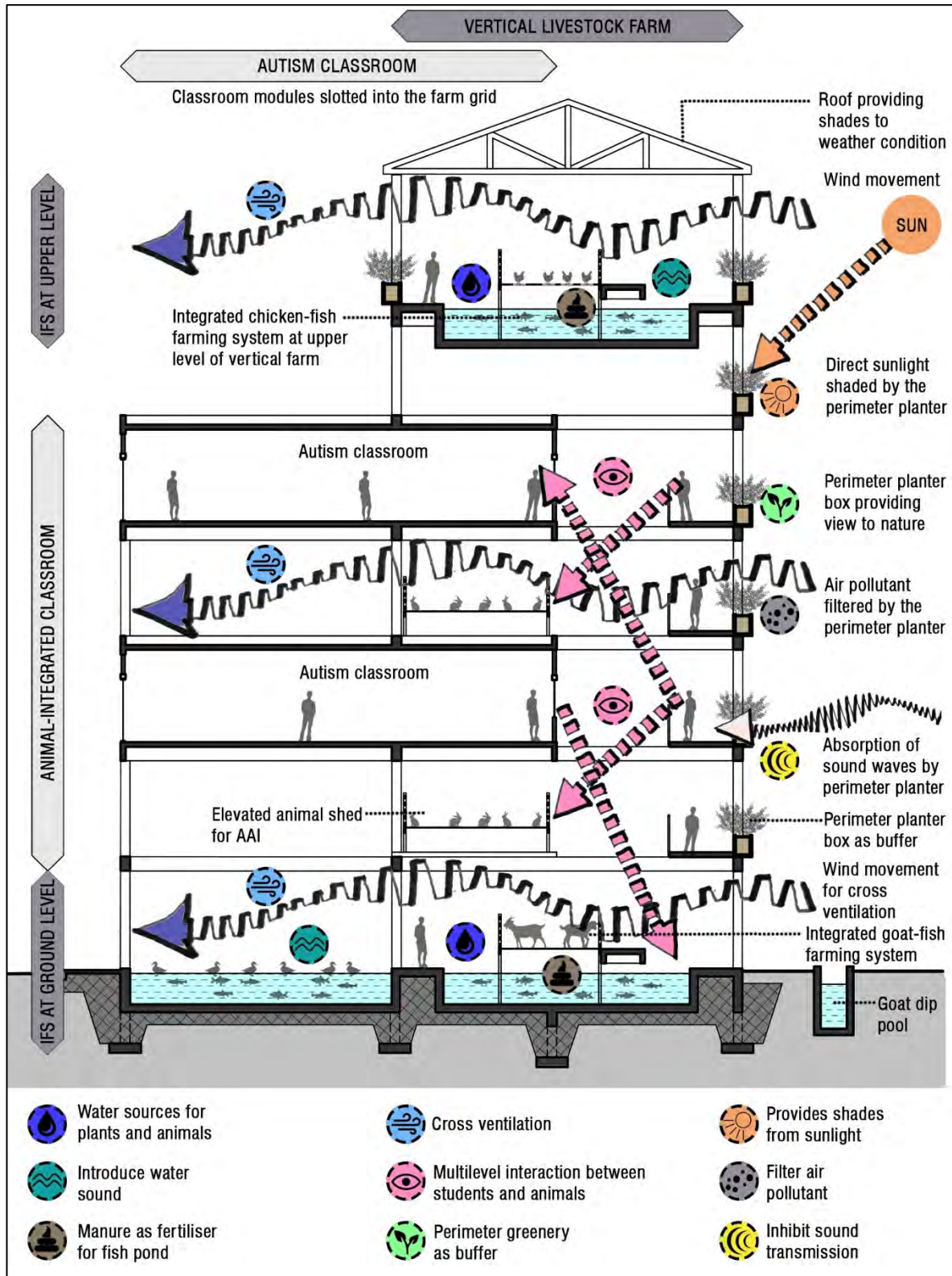


Figure 9: Conceptual diagram to summarise animal-assisted intervention in an autism learning environment via IFS

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