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# Athens Journal of Education

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\*\*\*\*\*

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The current issue is the third of the tenth volume of the *Athens Journal of Education (AJE)*, published by the [Education Unit](#) of ATINER.

Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
ATINER



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- Submission of Paper: **22 April 2024**

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## **Technologies and Digital Competences in Portuguese Education: History of its Integration in Pedagogical Practices since the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

By Sara Dias-Trindade\* & José António Moreira<sup>‡</sup>

This study aims to analyse the evolutionary context of the introduction of technology in Portuguese schools, from the beginning of the 20th century to the present day, and to identify the digital competences of Portuguese teachers at different educational levels. The analysis, qualitative and quantitative in nature, allowed us to conclude that technologies had a slow diffusion in Portuguese schools, because of the scarcity of resources and residual investment in teacher training, giving the use of technology in school a more irregular and playful character rather than truly integrated in pedagogical practices to promote the quality of learning. Although in recent years there has been still some conservatism in the use of technology, very focused on its instrumental use, there have been more practices with pedagogical intent and more focused on the active participation of students, also noting the growing importance of teacher training in this field of digital technologies, with the aim of making teachers more competent and fluent in the pedagogical use of digital. Furthermore, the study focused on the teachers' perception of their digital competences in three dimensions: the teachers' professional and pedagogical competences and the students' competences from the *DigCompEdu* framework and the self-assessment questionnaire of digital competences built from the same framework - *DigCompEdu Check-In*. The analysis of the answers obtained in this questionnaire (collected from the participation of 434 teachers of Basic and Secondary Education and 118 of Higher Education) showed that teachers need to increase their levels of digital proficiency through specific training, since they present, globally, a moderate level of digital proficiency - level B1 -Integrators- being the areas 4 - Evaluation - and 6 - Digital empowerment of students, the ones that present the greatest weaknesses.

*Keywords:* history of education, educational technologies, Portugal, teachers' digital competences, teachers' training

### **Introduction**

The relationship between technologies and education has always been very close, with each one always benefiting from the development of the other. On the one hand, technology has greatly contributed to improving the educational process (Araújo et al., 2017) and to changing the teaching and learning processes and, on

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the other hand, the improvement in the quality of education systems contributes to the evolution of technology itself.

Naturally, technology alone does not promote school success. However, when accompanied by pedagogical changes, it has been found to be helpful in students' performance and in the development of their complex thinking (Graça, Quadro-Flores, & Ramos, 2021).

Throughout the 20th century, analogue, audiovisual, digital and, with the spread of the internet, networked technologies have been transforming education. 0 and used to evolve, also, the pedagogical practices, trying to provide students the possibility to analyse, criticise, "learn by doing", experiencing and experimenting to proceed to their own knowledge construction.

Considering a coetaneous thought and simultaneously equating a problematisation that would take into consideration the possibilities of complementary approaches, we intended to study not only the technological evolution in school environments, but, above all, how this technology has been used in education. In fact, from previous analysis carried out, it was found that there were few works that dedicated their attention to the history of technology in education, focusing mainly on a more recent period and more specifically dedicated to the potentialities of the use of digital technologies. Thus, the need was justified to create a space in the study of recent contemporary history that would include a rigorous analysis of the relationship between technology and education, through an interpretation of the influence that one and the other have had on each other and on societies in general, and how this was articulated with competences requirements (Shanks & Hodder, 1995; Dias-Trindade, Ferreira, & Moreira, 2021).

In addition, it was considered urgent to understand the level of fluency in the use of technologies in general and their relationship with digital technologies, in an attempt to understand how much the use of technologies relates or not to cognitive-cultural heritage in order to contribute to improvements in educational processes because, as already recognized by Dias-Trindade and Moreira (2019), "identifying the nature of the knowledge required for the integration of technology in the learning process may allow for a very effective response to bridge the gaps identified in this study at the level of digital proficiency" (p. 75). However, this needs to be analysed in relation to material, social, cultural, and educational contexts because this is the only way to obtain a systemic and dense vision capable of envisaging a consistent action strategy in the face of such rapid changes as those currently taking place. Therefore, the main objectives of this study<sup>1</sup> were defined as follows: to characterise the evolution of the technologies used in educational contexts over the 20th and 21st centuries; and to assess the perception of Portuguese teachers of Secondary and Higher Education on their digital competences and the resulting training needs.

To achieve these objectives, the study combined two types of research in methodological terms, in a perspective of complementarity: qualitative and quantitative.

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<sup>1</sup>This study is part of the project "Digital Competences of Portuguese Teachers" (CoDiProPT) at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies (CEIS20), University of Coimbra (funding: UIDB/00460/2020).

Thus, at first, and within the framework of a constructivist paradigm, the research was based on a qualitative methodology through the systematic analysis of the journals of the main Portuguese *Lycea* (namely *Labor*, *Palestra*, *Arquivo Pedagógico* and *Boletim do Liceu Normal de Lisboa*), from a historical perspective, as well as articles published in the *SCOPUS*, *Web of Science* and *SCIELO* databases, covering a period between the early twentieth century and the present day. The aim of this analysis was to verify how technology has been used in education, trying to understand not only how the equipment was introduced in the school environment, but also how this equipment was used and how teachers were prepared to integrate it in the classroom.

In a second moment, a quantitative analysis of the results of the application of the *DigCompEdu Check-In* questionnaire, in its version validated for the Portuguese population by Dias-Trindade, Moreira, and Nunes (2019), was conducted with Secondary School teachers and, also, with Higher Education teachers.

### **Technology and Education in Portuguese Schools: A Past and Present Perspective**

The literature review carried out showed that most of the innovations that are disseminated in other countries came from the United States, and that Portugal has remained close to these innovations. However, particularly during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were very few references to the use of technological resources in Portuguese schools, denoting some ignorance about their pedagogical use and implying that teaching through technology was mostly a novelty, almost unheard of, reduced, above all, to the main Portuguese high schools located mostly in a few urban centres (Dias-Trindade, Ferreira, & Moreira, 2021).

This situation remains over time, and several authors continue to recognize that the use that has been made of the technologies that later entered the schools (computers, projectors, interactive whiteboards, tablets, among others) was usually conservative and little associated with truly innovative practices. However, they point out that, for renewal to happen, it would be necessary to invest in training to empower and equip teachers with digital competences that enable them to use technologies with pedagogical intent (Lobo & Sánchez, 2016; Ricoy & Couto, 2011; Silva, 2001).

This issue assumes greater urgency with technological development and, above all, with the pedagogical possibilities generated by digital technologies. It becomes ever more important to train teachers so that digital resources are integrated into quality pedagogical practices (Meisner & McKenzie, 2022; Aşık, et al., 2020; Gutiérrez-Fallar & Henriques, 2020; Rodrigues, 2020; Alves, Torres, Neves, & Fraga, 2019) not forgetting that, as Lobo and Sánchez (2016) stated, this fruitful integration of technology in school will " have a significant impact on the students' community and therefore on the general community for the generation and creation of knowledge" (p. 49).

However, as Ducros and Finkelstein (1986) point out, innovation is not something simple to achieve. It requires a change in attitudes and the ability to adapt. The school has kept the door open to innovation, even if with certain asymmetries, because of internal or external factors. The big question is how this innovation is used to enhance the educational process. In fact, analysing the Portuguese journals published by the *Liceus Normais* (schools that usually had initial teacher training in Portugal), one finds several texts, over the years, calling for the need for teacher training, but not specifying the need for teacher training for a pedagogical use of these technological resources (Dias-Trindade, Ferreira, & Moreira, 2021a). Tomaz (1964) indicated that, in the 1960s, one began to live the euphoria of technical-didactic aids (audiovisual aids, music, radio, television and, in the 1960s, the "teaching machine"). However, this teacher states that it is fundamental that all these resources be used after prior preparation and due integration into the learning objectives for the students. As Moderno (1984) also noted, "too often these [audiovisual] media are introduced into educational establishments without the question of teachers' needs, interests and preparation being raised" (p. 181).

Despite a slow pedagogical introduction of technology in education, initially very little associated with innovative practices, much the result of an incipient pedagogical preparation for the use of technology in the classroom, there was a continuous development of projects, especially from the 80s onward, seeking to encourage teaching and learning processes enriched by technologies in general and, more recently, also by digital ones (Dias-Trindade, Moreira, & Ferreira, 2021b).

In recent decades, and despite some conservatism still in the use of technology, very focused on its instrumental use, we found a greater number of practices with pedagogical intent, also concerned with an active participation of students in their learning process, also noting the growing importance of teacher training in this area, with the aim of making teachers more fluent in the pedagogical use of digital (Dias-Trindade, Moreira, & Ferreira, 2021b).

This analysis allowed us to reach some very important conclusions about the relationship of the school with technology and that, on the one hand, justify the training needs that still exist today and, on the other hand, reveal how, despite being old, this relationship has often taken on a more exotic side than effectively pedagogical.

In addition, it was also possible to see that the dissemination of technology was not homogeneous, especially in the most recent years of the 20th century, and that it was only within the reach of some secondary schools with funds that allowed them not only to buy and maintain the equipment, but also to adapt spaces for its placement and use.

However, in the face of the overwhelming evolution of technology, which is currently undergoing constant innovations and provides the development of pedagogical scenarios that make use of that technology and of digital environments that are now increasingly available to all, in a close interaction between human and non-human actors for the construction of knowledge, it was still important to understand effectively how that interaction can be put into practice.

To this end, it was necessary to understand the articulation between pedagogy and technology, so that the teacher could make a pedagogical use of technological resources, which will thus contribute to enhance the teaching and learning processes.

In our view, for technology to be correctly integrated into educational environments, it is necessary, above all, to understand which competences need to be mobilised. In what concerns teacher digital competences, we consider that it is important to define and make explicit the construct "digital competence", in articulation with the concepts "digital literacy" and "digital fluency".

It was this awareness that guided the second part of this study towards the analysis of teachers' digital competences, seeking, as mentioned above, to assess the perception of Portuguese teachers of Secondary and Higher Education on their digital competences and the resulting training needs.

## Methodology

Aware of the complexity of the operationalization of "digital competences", different international organizations have, in recent years, sought to list all the competences that should be developed in educational settings to overcome the stage of digital literacy and reach digital fluency, and several benchmarks and models have already been produced with a view to improving the teaching and learning processes using digital technologies (Dias-Trindade & Moreira, 2021).

In 2017, the *DigCompEdu* emerged because of the awareness that it is essential for teachers to master a set of specific digital competences to take advantage of the potential of digital technologies and, thus, enhance and innovate education (Redecker, 2017).

The organisation of the *DigCompEdu* framework takes on particular importance for defining these concrete areas, in particular this concern with the empowerment of students, whose integration in 21<sup>st</sup> century education seems fundamental.

Redecker (2017) recognises the importance of teachers as key role models to demonstrate how to make creative and critical use of digital technologies, but more than that, to assist their students in the learning process and to build with them quality digital environments.

It is therefore essential that teachers are aware of the validity of digital competences in their profession, both in the field of pedagogy and as "facilitators" of the development of these same competences in their students, making them able to meet the demands of this millennium, especially (but not only) when they are able to enter the labour market (Dias-Trindade & Moreira, 2021). In line with this idea, Hatos, Cosma, and Clipa (2022) consider that it is important for the teacher to be digitally competent as it facilitates knowledge transfer.

Therefore, we sought to understand the level of digital competence of Portuguese teachers, as already mentioned, through the application of the self-assessment questionnaire of digital competences *DigCompEdu Check-In*.

It is understood that, although a study based on the teachers' perception of their own digital competence is only an estimate, as mentioned by Bandura (1994), the individual's perception determines how he/she feels, thinks, behaves and is motivated. In this case, for example, Wang, Meyers, and Sundaram (2013) have already pointed out that motivation is considered one of the factors that influence the willingness to, for example, progress in terms of digital competence.

The instrument was applied during 2019 and early 2020 to 434 teachers of Secondary Education (Dias-Trindade, Moreira, & Ferreira, 2021b) and to 118 teachers of Higher Education (Dias-Trindade & Ferreira, 2020), with similar mean ages, with a greater preponderance of females in Primary and Secondary Education (representing 82% of the sample) (Table 1).

Table 1. Participants' Age and Gender

Age				
Mean [minimum – maximum]		Interquartile interval		
Secondary Education Teachers	50.5 [32-65]	Secondary Education Teachers [45-56]		
Higher Education Teachers	49.9 [31-69]	Higher Education Teachers [44-56]		
Gender				
	Female		Male	
	N	%	N	%
Secondary Education Teachers	356	82.0	78	18.0
Higher Education Teachers	60	50.9	58	49.1

Source: The Authors.

## Results and Discussion

The results obtained in both studies, systematized in Table 2, show some similarities, particularly regarding the mean scores obtained, with teachers of Basic and Secondary Education obtaining 43 points and those of Higher Education 39 points, placing them at level B1, *Integrator*, i.e., corresponding to teachers who already use digital technologies in the educational context, but without major methodological changes, without the necessary adjustments in the design of learning activities.

One of the characteristics of this level, *Integrator*, refers to teachers' motivation to learn more and to develop their digital competences to be able to move to subsequent levels in the different areas of this framework, which is in line with what Wang, Meyers, and Sundaram (2013) refer to.

Furthermore, it can be seen that among Higher Education teachers there are more initial levels (A1 and A2, corresponding to 34.8%) than among Secondary Education teachers (Table 2), which can also be associated with the fact that the vast majority of higher education teachers have not had any pedagogical preparation, simply because it is considered that teaching is an activity additional to the investigative dimension and eminently practical for which very specific knowledge will not be required (Pretto & Riccio, 2010; Zabalza, 2004).

Table 2. Results by DigCompEdu Check-in Level

Teaching level	Secondary Education Teachers		Higher Education Teachers	
	N	%	N	%
Digital competence level				
A1	9	2.1	12	10.2
A2	80	18.4	29	24.6
B1	187	43.1	42	35.6
B2	119	27.4	26	22.0
C1	39	9.0	8	6.8
C2	0	0.0	1	0.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>434</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>118</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: The Authors.

In fact, as Vieira recognises, "although lecturers and institutional managers value teaching and research as structuring activities of the university, the relationship between them tends to be conflictual and research is overvalued to the detriment of teaching" (2014, p. 24). Also, Zabalza (2004; 2012) refers to the importance of paying attention to the training of higher education teachers and to the importance of disseminating good practices as a way of providing this teaching staff with solid knowledge in didactics and pedagogy, we add the need to integrate, in this preparation, the integration of digital technologies into quality pedagogical and didactic practices. For that to happen, it is necessary, therefore, to invest in proper training.

In line with the above, on the importance of the interaction between content, pedagogy and technology, the need for greater investment in teacher training is justified, particularly regarding Higher Education. It is, therefore, necessary to address this lack of teacher training in technologies and provide these professionals with the competences to integrate quality digital resources into their teaching practices, adapting them, naturally, to the objectives to be achieved (Lima & Loureiro, 2015).

The results also showed that there are similarities in the results by area, particularly in terms of the area with the greatest weaknesses, which, in both cases, was area 4 - *Assessment* (Table 3). This shows the difficulty that teachers in general have in using digital technologies to monitor and assess the performance of their students and, consequently, to provide them with the necessary feedback.

As Amante, Bastos, and Oliveira (2021) point out, training in digital assessment is essential. In their study, these authors found that many participants had difficulties in defining assessment criteria, objectives, or competences to be assessed. This reflects a need, once again, to invest in training that integrates the digital in pedagogical practices, since digital resources today allow a panoply of types of assessment (in this specific case, but also related to the other dimensions presented in the *DigCompEdu* framework), and it is therefore necessary to integrate all these resources in different pedagogies, different objectives and different assessment models, fully integrated in the training needs for the society of the 21st century.



Table 3. Results by Area

Digital competence areas		Secondary Education Teachers		Higher Education Teachers	
		Mean values	Level	Mean values	Level
Teachers' professional competences	Professional engagement	9.5	B1+	8.1	B1
Teachers' pedagogical competences	Digital Technologies and resources	4.1	B1	4.2	B1
	Teaching and learning	10.2	B1	9.7	B1
	Assessment	5.2	A2+	4.9	A2+
	Empowering learners	4.8	B1	3.1	A2+
Learners' competences	Facilitating learners' digital competence	9.6	B1	8.7	A2+

Source: The Authors.

The results presented in Table 3 also reflect the intermediate levels of the *DigCompEdu Check-In* digital competence levels mentioned above - 43 points for secondary school teachers and 39 points for higher education teachers and, as stated, corresponding to Level B1 - *Integrator*. Specifically, this result reflects that professionals who use digital technologies, are willing to use and reflect on this (and which concerns the competences related to Area 1 - *professional engagement*), but still need to understand how to adapt the different digital tools to their objectives, their strategies and methodologies and, above all, to a more practical work with their students (very much associated with the areas that involve an adaptation to the reality and context of their own students - especially areas 4, 5 and 6). These competence areas are those where there is a need for an articulation between teaching and learning, creation of digital content and preparation of activities and strategies that help students control their learning processes and their own empowerment for transversal areas, particularly responsible digital citizenship. Samuelsson and Lindström (2021) also recognise that teachers lack the competences to help their students prepare for living in an increasingly digital society.

Therefore, these teachers will still have some difficulties in defining which technologies are most suitable for different situations and how they can improve the educational process.

Furthermore, the fact that higher education teachers show greater weaknesses, especially in areas 5 - *Empowering learners* - and 6 - *Facilitating learners' digital competence*-, reveals greater problems when it comes to digital competences, which imply the ability to use digital technologies to foster students' autonomous work and to assist them in digital communication among themselves and with an external audience.

**Table 4. Results by Age Group (Mean Values)**

Age	Teachers	Secondary Education Teachers	Higher Education Teachers
30-39		51.30	35.93
40-49		43.64	42.52
50-59		43.25	36.17
60-69		42.00	36.56

Source: The Authors.

Table 4 reflects what several authors already had stated: age is not a relevant variable when it comes to the assessment of digital competences (Wang, Meyers, & Sundaram, 2013; Drossel, Eickelmann, & Gerick, 2017; Gil-Flores, Rodríguez-Santero, & Torres-Gordillo, 2017). In fact, Wang, Meyers, and Sundaram (2013) suggest the existence of a continuum rather than a dichotomous rigidity between the so-called digital immigrants and digital natives, and that there are several factors other than age or accessibility to digital tools and content to explain the issue of digital fluency. In the present study it is found that although among secondary school teachers the average levels of digital competence decrease with increasing age group, they are minimal differences between the groups. As far as higher education teachers are concerned, there are even groups of teachers with higher ages that show slightly higher average values than teachers with lower ages.

Gu, Zhu, and Guo (2013) report that length of service can affect the level of digital competence more than the age of the teacher. In their study they conclude that teachers with less than 5 years of service used less digital technologies in class than those who had more years of teaching experience. This idea goes along with the PISA 2021 report (OECD, 2019), where it is indicated that there is evidence that younger teachers still have some inexperience regarding the pedagogical uses that can be given to different technologies, while older teachers sometimes lack the technical knowledge for a use of technology to enhance learning. A combination of pedagogical and technological competences is therefore needed, for which experience will also play a role.

Thus, the average results of digital competences were also analysed according to the length of teaching experience (Chart 1).

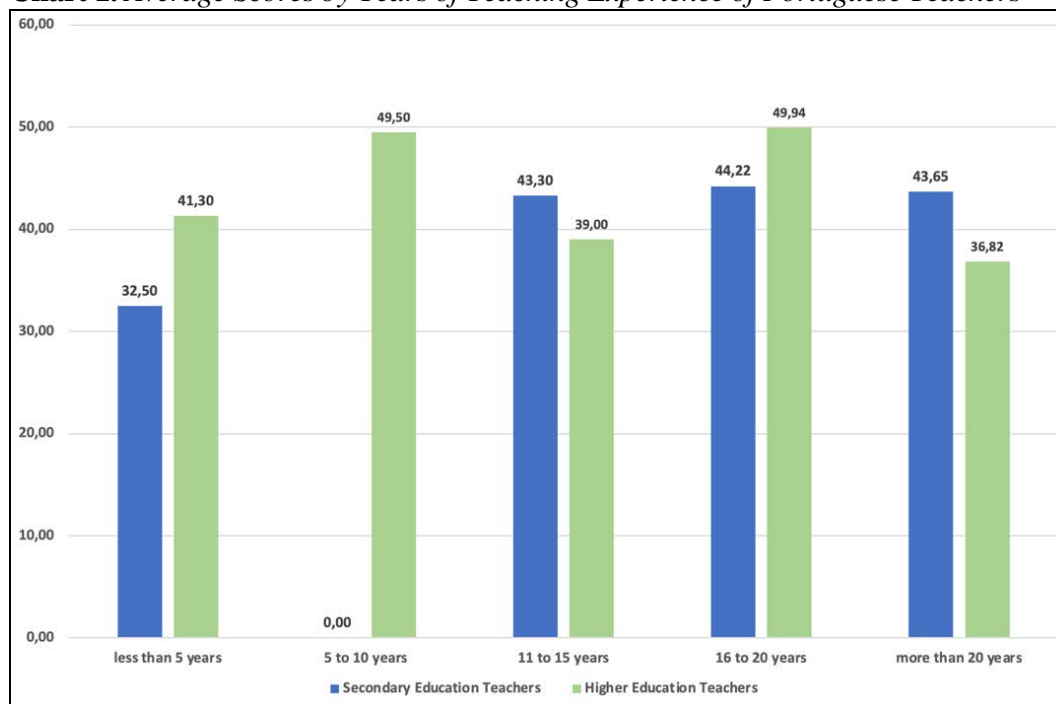
Once again, it is recognised that there is a difference in the average scores of teachers when analysing the age groups for both secondary and higher education teachers. However, the youngest secondary school teachers (with less than five years' experience) are the ones who present the lowest average scores in this study. In higher education, the teachers with 16 to 20 years of experience are those with the highest values.

Although these results do not corroborate the results of Gu, Zhu, and Guo (2013), mentioned above, they do show that it is important to focus on training for the pedagogical use of technology, both in initial and continuing education.

In fact, we advocate training that helps teachers identify the nature of the knowledge required to integrate technology into teaching, without neglecting the complex, multifaceted and situated nature of teachers' knowledge. Understanding the scenario of these teachers in times of pandemic is fundamental to act

strategically within the institution and make profitable the formative paths that are being designed for this set of teachers.

**Chart 1.** Average Scores by Years of Teaching Experience of Portuguese Teachers



Source: The Authors.

Riel, Dewindt, Chase, and Askegreen (2005) point out that it can be an added value that training pays attention to what they consider to be three important dimensions of learning: student-led, socially constructed, and continuous, which when combined can become a powerful vision of teaching and learning with technology. In this sense, it is certainly possible to move from using technologies only as a way of transmitting knowledge to a model in which those same technologies are used daily, in various individual or group tasks, by both teachers and students.

Therefore, one understands the importance of initial and continuous preparation for a pedagogical use of technology, in particular digital technology, a training that helps the teacher to identify the nature of knowledge required for the integration of technology in teaching, without neglecting the complex, multifaceted and situated nature of teachers' knowledge. This training will contribute to a feeling of greater confidence and motivation for the integration of different technologies in educational practices.

Different authors refer that the speed of technological evolution makes it difficult to prepare teachers, especially, to use technology to contribute to change practices and make use of different resources and digital technologies to transform the school (Albion, Tondeur, Forkosh-Baruch, & Peeraer, 2015; Redecker, 2017; Felizardo, 2019). In this sense, it is important to remember that "while technology may just be a bunch of gadgets, good technology is really good opportunity - good

technology allows people to do things they literally could not do before" (Norris & Soloway, 2013, p. 110).

In fact, the pandemic started in 2020 has made the needs more visible and accelerated the process of digitalization of schools, a process that was already underway in Portugal under the Portugal INCoDe.2030 (National Initiative Digital Competences e.2030), which started in March 2017, and that in April 2020, in the path of digital empowerment of the country, comes to strengthen the focus on Digital Education through the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 30/2020. This resolution approves the *Action Plan for Digital Transition*, which includes a strategic area focused on "Empowerment and digital inclusion of people" through Digital Education, and provides a digitalisation programme for schools that includes, in addition to access to digital resources and equipment, a digital training plan for teachers (Dias-Trindade, Moreira, & Ferreira, 2021b).

This training plan also follows what Dias-Trindade and Ferreira (2020) had already mentioned, about the need to prepare appropriate training at three levels of complexity (initial, intermediate and advanced), since even teachers who are at lower levels in a given area, may be at intermediate or even advanced levels in other areas; this self-assessment allows designing a training path perfectly suited to their real needs, and that enables the evolution in the field of digital competences and the design of a path leading to the achievement of digital fluency (p. 183).

Currently, one cannot think about education without including training in the use of digital media and technologies, nor without thinking about the importance they can have in promoting quality educational environments. Indeed, as Fraile, Peñalva-Vélez, & Mendióroz Lacambra (2018) recognise, "there is a real need for wisely designed training programs (whether initial training for novice teachers or continuous training), which help to close this divide between the demands posed by a knowledge society and the end-of-course profile of newly formed secondary school teachers" (p. 10). Also, Schwab (2018) refers: "emerging technologies are changing the way we create, exchange and distribute not only values, but also how we extract meaning - which helps us imagine our possible futures, and what futures are worth living in" (p. 67).

As recognised with this study, two key issues emerge in close relationship with the results obtained and with the notion of digital proficiency: the teachers' ability to take advantage of the different potentialities of the digital technologies available for teaching and learning; and the ability to know not only which technologies can be used more, but also which ones can best help achieve the objectives, thus approaching digital fluency.

This understanding of what defines teachers' digital competences is very important. How this construct encompasses an evolutionary process and requires reflection by the teacher to identify the areas where he/she is still in a digital literacy stage reflects this importance and clarifies the need for further training, and where he/she may already be close to a complex and critical use of digital resources and, thus, closer to digital fluency (Dias-Trindade & Ferreira, 2020). Furthermore, as Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos, Matarranz, Casado-Aranda, and Otto

(2022) have pointed out, to understand teachers' training needs it is necessary to start by identifying the starting point.

Indeed, this is an important point: to be able to understand teachers' real needs, to act according to those needs and to prepare training - in direct line with the recognised importance of both initial and continuous teacher training.

### Conclusions

The work presented here seeks to explain how different technologies have been introduced at school and how pedagogical practices have been changed or influenced either by the existence of these technologies or by the very needs of society in general. In fact, it is perceptible that this relationship between technologies and school is the result of a symbiotic interaction, in which each of these elements influences and is also influenced by the other. Furthermore, in an increasingly digital society, the school is required to prepare its students to know precisely how to move in spaces increasingly influenced by the digital.

It is clear from the analysis carried out that this technology assumes mainly a novelty character, with no pedagogical concerns about its use, which would be essentially sporadic, playful and without a strategy that truly integrates it in the educational process. This situation extends over time, and several authors continue to recognize that the use that has been made of technologies that have entered the schools (computers, projectors, interactive whiteboards, tablets, among others) has been conservative and little associated with truly innovative practices. However, they point out that for the renewal to happen, it is necessary to invest in training to train and equip teachers with digital competences that enable them to use technologies with pedagogical intent.

In fact, what was seen happening more recently, with the emergence and dissemination of the internet, was a major revolution in society and, once again, in school. Technology and the digital signal have made it possible to change educational processes and to think in networked environments, where teachers and students can build and develop knowledge and digital competences, in educational spaces that go beyond the physical classroom. However, the work here presented showed that, despite initiatives such as the Portuguese Technological Plan for Education (PTE), still at the beginning of the 21st century, the teachers' digital competence is still below the desired level.

If it was already reported the almost non-existent concern in preparing teachers, either in their initial or continuous training, throughout the twentieth century, in the early twenty-first century there began to be drawn, in the Portuguese school, examples of government projects that sought that the use of technology and digital signal were beyond the episodic and, above all, to enhance the educational processes. These projects, as the mentioned PTE, allowed some pedagogical experiences that incorporated different digital technologies, and where, little by little, and especially in more recent times, a digital and networked education begins to take shape (Dias-Trindade, Moreira, & Ferreira, 2021b).

Developing pedagogical environments where technology has a function, studying and understanding its organisation, requires the articulation between scientific and technical conditions and political, social, and economic conditions (just as the mentioned relationship between the reality of the last year and the public policies that emerged both nationally and internationally - albeit from a preparation that preceded the pandemic crisis) has been. It is from this articulation that a culture emerges where education and the school system are inserted.

Furthermore, thinking about education always implies an idea of the past and the future. It is therefore fundamental to understand the evolution of the integration of technologies in school, how they shape education and even how they are influenced by society and thus contribute to the development of school systems.

In 2015, the World Economic Forum pointed out the importance of technology for the development of some key factors for the development of countries (WEF, 2015). Two years later, in 2017, the same entity reinforced this role also as a facilitator of an extension of education through parents, educators or caregivers, in an educational development that goes beyond foundational competences, abilities or character qualities and includes social and emotional learning, as together they can equip students to succeed in a rapidly evolving digital economy (WEF, 2017). With the pandemic situation recently experienced, the 2020/2021 report points in a similar direction amplifying, however, the sense of urgency that on this issue the different societies need to place (WEF, 2021). For this to happen, there must be an integration of digital technologies in teacher training, and, above all, an understanding of the digital competences needed for these technologies to be used in a way that effectively enhances educational processes.

It is therefore recognised that digital competence in an educational context is not limited to the ability to use digital resources in teaching or learning, but should integrate the whole school context, from peer communication to the promotion of a digital pedagogical culture among students.

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## **Teacher-Student Relationships: Impact of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports**

*By Rene Martinez\* & Mervyn Wighting<sup>‡</sup>*

The purpose of this study was to investigate how caring student-teacher relationships facilitate positive student behavior. Additionally, it examined the effect of student behavior when building positive student-teacher relationships. Previous research by the authors determined that when teachers build relationships with children it is one of the most effective strategies to impact student learning. A secondary implication identified by the participants and their administrators in that study was that building relationships can create a positive classroom environment resulting in fewer discipline disruptions. This current study was conducted to measure the relationships between school children, in grades K-8 in the USA, and their teachers using a standardized instrument before and after a two-week implementation of a positive behavioral intervention and supports strategy to determine if there are any significant differences. The participants involved in this study are comprised of classroom teachers in their first year of teaching, and experienced classroom teachers (5+ years).

*Keywords:* teacher preparation, teacher-student relationships, positive behavior support interventions

### **Introduction**

As many educators have attested, when teachers build relationships with students it is one of the most effective strategies to impact student learning. Positive teacher-student relationships have “long been considered a foundational aspect of a positive school experience” (Brophy, 1988). When teacher-student relationships improve, classroom behavior is positively impacted. In contrast, when students and teachers have conflict and negative interactions, there is a greater risk of behavior problems. Research has shown the importance of teacher-student relationships, but there are few studies that share how intentionally implementing a positive behavioral support intervention can help build teacher-student relationships in the classroom.

Teachers face increasingly more demands and challenges in the classroom. Strong teacher-student relationships are considered to be the essential element in academic engagement and student motivation (Jerome, Hamre, & Pianta, 2008; Roorda et al., 2017; Wentzel & Miele, 2016). This paper aims to explore whether there are differences in teacher-student relationships after implementing a two-week positive behavioral support intervention. Additionally, teachers shared their perceptions of the effects of this two-week intervention. The research study investigated differences between the pre-and post-survey; the positive behavioral

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support intervention chosen to be implemented; as well as differences in teacher-student relationships among students that are excelling, students that are struggling, and students that are neither excelling nor struggling. This may be an important step in determining the ways teachers can build relationships and the time commitment needed to build teacher-student relationships.

### **Research Question**

Are there any significant differences in teacher-student relationships when a teacher implements a positive behavioral intervention support strategy?

### **Impact of Teacher-Student Relationships**

Classrooms are complex social systems, and student-teacher relationships and interactions can also be complex. Pianta, Hamre, and Allen (2012) posit that the nature and quality of relationship interactions between teachers and students are fundamental to understanding student engagement, can be assessed through standardized observation methods, and can be changed by providing teachers knowledge about developmental processes relevant for classroom interactions and personalized feedback/support about their interactive behaviors and cues. According to Tyler and Boelter (2008), positive teacher expectations were associated with high academic performance or academic gains, whereas negative teacher expectations resulted in a decrease in academic performance. Further information on the impact of caring teacher-student relationships on academic achievement is provided by Johnston, Wildy, and Shand (2022) who report that the students in their study improved their academic attainment when their teachers communicated high expectations of them.

Students spend approximately 8 hours a day at school and most of that time is spent with their teachers. It is not surprising that teacher-student relationships are a predictor as to a students' liking of school (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Research has shown that students who like school are less likely to drop out of school, have absentee issues, have lower disciplinary issues, and overall perform better academically. Students tend to like school more when they have a respectful and caring relationship with their teacher (Hallinan, 2008). Strong teacher-student relationships also predict how connected a student feels to school (Monahan, Oesterle, & Hawkins, 2010). Student connectiveness refers to a classroom environment where students believe that teachers care about them and their learning. Students that feel connected to school are more likely to succeed (Mosley, Broyles, & Kaufman, 2021). Building relationships with students helps students have a more positive attitude about school and learning.

## **Student Discipline and Classroom Management**

There is a growing body of research that provides evidence that poor student discipline is associated with lower academic achievement. Teachers reported one of the reasons for the loss of instruction is due to classroom disruptions. On the contrary, the less disruptions, the more class time that is allotted for classroom learning (Vieluf, Kaplan, Klieme, & Bayer, 2012). Student disruptions decrease the opportunity for classroom instruction and learning and overall has a negative impact on student learning.

According to Postholm (2013), the principal goal of effective classroom management is to establish a quiet and calm environment in the classroom so that the pupils can take part in meaningful learning in a subject, and the second aim is to contribute to the pupils' social and moral development. In regard to classroom management, the aim is to develop a positive climate conducive to teaching and learning with minimal disruptions, rather than a focus on student discipline.

Regarding teacher–student relationships, successful classroom management focuses on “establishing and working within personal relationships with students” (Brophy 1988, p. 18), making it the task of teachers “to develop caring, supportive relationships with and among students” (Evertson & Weinstein 2006, p. 5). In order to develop relationships with students, teachers need to create a positive classroom environment where students feel safe and feel cared for.

### **Implementing PBIS**

The purpose of this study is to examine any differences in teacher-student relationships after teachers implement the use of a selected positive behavioral intervention support (PBIS) strategy. PBIS is a nationally-recognized approach to support positive academic and behavioral outcomes for students in the USA. It is a school-wide prevention strategy that is currently being utilized by over 16,000 schools in the United States in order to address the academic and behavioral needs of students (Bradshaw, Pas, DeBman, & Johnson, 2015). PBIS promotes school-level change in order to promote a positive school environment and prevent student behavior problems.

PBIS helps teachers and administrators learn about and implement new techniques that reduce disruptive student behavior, which typically leads to office referrals, in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions that decrease instructional time for students. Based on extensive research, PBIS utilizes a positive approach to discipline. PBIS ultimately impacts the very culture of the school to shift attention to positive behavior and successful learning systems for children, teachers and administrators (Petrasek et al., 2022).

When implementing PBIS, a school-wide behavior plan is needed that focuses on positive behavior expectations across all school contexts. This model, used by all school staff consistently, draws on social and emotional learning, behavioral, organizational, and positive youth development theories (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner 2001; Bradshaw, Pas, DeBman, & Johnson, 2015). PBIS is a behavior plan that recognizes, supports, and rewards students who

demonstrate positive behavior, cultivates positive relationships between the children and staff members, and strives for continuous improvement in student discipline.

A school-wide PBIS plan uses incentives to recognize, support, and reward positive student behavior. PBIS is a research-based framework that can improve student behavior where the focus is on positive behaviors. Teachers spend time teaching expectations to students, they intervene early when disruptive behaviors begin, and when students exhibit positive behavior, they are rewarded for that behavior. Schools create their own expectations which typically center around respect, responsibility, and safety.

Classroom dynamics are complex and involve the relationships and interactions between teachers and their students and between students and their classmates. Research reported by Koth, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2008), indicates that student- and classroom-level factors tend to have a greater influence on students' perceptions of the school environment than do school-level factors. By implementing PBIS, not only does this help create a safe school environment, but it also creates a safe classroom environment. When a teacher intervenes at the onset of undesired behaviors and dedicates time to teaching expected classroom behaviors, more positive attitudes may be formed.

PBIS implementation has been known to help decrease behavioral problems in the school and classroom. Researchers have found that as a result of PBIS implementation, discipline problems have decreased (McGurty et. al., 2016). This study provided participating teachers with five different types of positive behavior support interventions and they decided which support they would implement with their students. The following were the support options:

1. Support students by spending 2 minutes a day in conversation connecting with them individually.
2. Provide written feedback to students individually in their daily journals.
3. Support students with verbal praise for good behavior.
4. Provide an immediate reward (food, candy, stickers).
5. Provide material privilege (use of cell phone, use of a special chair in the room, etc.).

Once teachers chose which PBIS method they would employ, they completed a before and after survey to measure the results.

## **Method**

This research employed a mixed-methods approach. Participants volunteered to be a part of the study and data were collected using a standardized instrument as well as asking open-ended questions. The participants were classroom teachers in their first year of teaching and experienced classroom teachers (5+ years).

## Participants

The present study was conducted among twenty-eight teachers. A convenience sample of twenty-three first year teachers, and five experienced classroom teachers with five or more years of experience participated in the study. All participants are employed teaching children in grades preK-sixth grade. The biggest percentage of teachers teach grade 6, 30.4%; 29% of the teachers teach preK; 8.9% teach Kindergarten; and the remainder of the teachers teach in grades 1-5. When teachers completed the survey they purposefully selected six students in their class to take part in the study as requested by the researchers. Two of the students were excelling in their class; two were struggling; and the other two students were neither struggling nor excelling. Data were collected on a total of 168 students. After implementing a two-week positive behavioral support intervention, teachers completed a post-survey with the same six students. All participants were teaching in the same state in the USA. The first-year teachers (23) had recently completed alternative licensure preparation courses; the seasoned teachers (5) had been teaching in public education for at least five years.

## Instrument

Teachers' perceptions of the quality of their relationships with the students they teach were measured using the short form of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 2001). This 15-question survey Student-Teacher Relationships Scale (STRS) is a reliable and valid teacher-reporting standardized instrument for measuring the quality of relationships with students. An example of the instrument is included in the Appendix. Teachers responded to all items using a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = definitely does not apply and 5 = definitely applies. After teachers completed this survey, teachers selected a positive behavioral support intervention to implement for a two-week period. At the conclusion of two-weeks, the teachers completed a post-survey using the same instrument. Additionally, the participating teachers were asked two open-ended questions: "What did you discover from participating in this study?" and "What help do think this might be to you in your classroom next year and beyond?"

Participants were asked to choose a positive behavioral support intervention strategy to implement over a two-week period. Each participating teacher employed one strategy selected from the following options:

1. Support students by spending 2 minutes a day in conversation connecting with them individually.
2. Provide written feedback to students individually in their daily journals.
3. Support students with verbal praise for good behavior.
4. Provide an immediate reward (food, candy, stickers) or
5. Provide material privilege (use of cell phone, use of a special chair in the room, etc.).



Teachers selected one of these strategies to estimate the effect produced after employing the PBIS strategy.

### Analyzing Data

The short form of the STRS is scored by summing groups of items corresponding to two factor-based subscales that capture two dimensions of the student-teacher relationship: closeness and conflict. To assess the overall quality of the relationships, a total score was calculated. These total scores were compared from the pre to post survey in order to measure the effect of the teacher-student relationship when a teacher implements a positive behavioral intervention support strategy.

### Results

This research investigated the following research question: Are there any significant differences in teacher-student relationships when a teacher implements a positive behavioral intervention support strategy?

The results indicate an overall improvement that is statistically significant for teachers developing closer relationships with students using a PBIS strategy. The overall mean of closeness between the pre and post survey was -3.196, indicating that the mean of the post-test was greater than the mean of the pre-test, hence the negative difference. It is also a significant difference given that both the one and two-sided p tests are less than 0.001. This is to be expected from a question on closeness. Additionally, the results show that the overall conflict between teachers and students goes down when employing one of these PBIS strategies. The overall mean difference of 2.946 is larger on the pre-test than the post-test, indicating less conflict. The conflict results also indicate a significant difference given that both 1 and 2 sided p is less than 0.001. Table 1 is a breakdown of each individual question and the implications.

*Table 1.* Analysis between Closeness and Conflict from the Pre- to Post-survey

Subscale (Conflict or Closeness)	Question	Mean of the paired difference	Significant difference Two-sided p
closeness	1. I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child.	-0.482	<0.001
conflict	2. This child and I always seem to be struggling with each other.	0.435	<0.001
closeness	3. If upset, this child will seek comfort from me.	-0.56	<0.001
closeness	4. This child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me.	0.161	0.154
closeness	5. This child values his/her relationship with me.	-0.476	<0.001
closeness	6. When I praise this child, he/she	-0.476	<0.001

	beams with pride.		
closeness	7. This child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself.	-0.44	<0.001
conflict	8. This child easily becomes angry with me.	0.435	<0.001
closeness	9. It is easy to be in tune with what this child is feeling.	-0.351	<0.001
conflict	10. This child remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined.	0.625	<0.001
conflict	11. Dealing with this child drains my energy.	0.411	<0.001
conflict	12. When this child is in a bad mood, I know we're in for a long and difficult day.	0.44	<0.001
conflict	13. This child's feelings toward me can be unpredictable or can change suddenly.	0.339	<0.001
conflict	14. This child is sneaky or manipulative with me.	0.262	0.005
closeness	15. This child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me.	-0.571	<0.001

Table 1 shows the results of the analysis between closeness and conflict from the pre- to post-survey. The results show the mean of the differences between the pre- and post-test. Each question shows a significant difference with the exception of question 4. This is to be expected because question 4 is a reversed scored item based upon the wording of the question: This child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me. Teachers chose a score of a 1 on the Likert-Scale if it did not apply and a score of 5 if it did, thus, the results are comparable because the researchers had to account for the reversed score.

Table 2 shows the results of the positive behavioral strategies teachers chose to employ. The data shows 41.9% of the participating teachers chose to implement the strategy of supporting students by spending 2 minutes a day in conversation with them individually. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the strategy that each teacher chose to use for this study.

*Table 2. Employed Positive Behavioral Strategies*

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Percentage of teachers selecting this strategy</b>
Support students by spending 2 minutes a day in conversation connecting with them individually	41.9%
Provide written feedback to students individually in their daily journals	2.4%
Support students with verbal praise for good behavior	24.1%
Provide an immediate reward (food, candy, stickers)	22.7%
Provide material privilege (use of cell phone, use of a special chair in the room, etc.)	8.9%

Teachers were asked what they discovered from participating in this study and how it may impact their relationships in the future with students. Teachers, overall, reported positive results when employing a PBIS strategy. One teacher reported that when he intentionally invested in student relationships, students tended to respond more positively to correction in class. Another teacher shared how he was able to get a glimpse of what a small reward, such as a sticker, can do to reinforce desired behaviors. Several teachers mentioned how surprised they were by the difference two minutes a day can make in the life of a child.

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study have the potential to be useful for state agency administrators, program administrators, researchers, faculty, and teachers. Educators can use the findings of this study in making decisions to help build student-teacher relationships by implementing a PBIS strategy in the classroom. As research shows, teacher-student relationships are a predictor of students' liking of school (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). If students like school, we may have fewer students drop out of school and schools may see student improvement on academic achievement (Johnston Wildy, & Shand, 2022).

This study has shown the improvement that can be made in teacher-student relationships in a short amount of time by employing a PBIS strategy. This study shows that providing teachers with a toolkit of strategies is important in order for them to choose one that will work when needed. Another implication of this study is that teachers should strive to build relationships with the children they teach from the outset. This study concludes that positive student-teacher relationships can be formed when a teacher shows he/she cares for the student. Starting this at the beginning of the year creates an opportunity for this relationship to grow by the end of the year. This does not have to be complicated – a teacher just needs to choose a positive behavioral support intervention, implement it and begin forming student-teacher relationships.

Bradshaw, Pas, Debnan, and Johnson (2015) provide evidence that if a teacher implements PBIS, then classroom discipline will be better and therefore, there will be fewer discipline referrals. In regard to classroom management, rather than focusing on student discipline, the aim for teachers is to develop a positive climate conducive to teaching and learning with minimal disruptions. Therefore, the implication for administrators is that they might wish to conduct professional development on the focus on relationship building between their teachers and the children they instruct, stress the importance of this concept during the hiring process and in faculty meetings, and to look for evidence of it when conducting classroom observations.

Implications for teacher educators who prepare licensure candidates for the classroom are that building relationships with children in schools is just as important as building relationships to be successful in business, in commerce, or in the military. Alternative licensure teachers who have already developed and

employed inter-relationship skills in their first career should be encouraged to carry those skills with them as they transition to teaching.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited by the number of participants. There was a total of twenty-eight teachers. Twenty-three first year teachers and five experienced classroom teachers with five or more year' teaching. This is a limitation because it is a small sample and a larger-scale study may yield different results.

The participants in this study were provided with a list of 5 positive-behavior intervention strategies from which to choose the one they wanted to implement in their classroom. This is a limitation that may have impacted the results as teachers were able to self-select a strategy that they preferred.

### **Recommendation for Further Study**

The results from this research indicate that positive teacher-student relationships can impact student behaviors. A follow-up study using a larger sample size over a longer duration while tracking discipline referrals is recommended. After analyzing the data from this research additional questions became apparent. Further study on the following question should be conducted:

- Are there any significant pre-survey and post-survey differences among first year teachers?
- Are there any significant pre-survey and post-survey differences among seasoned teachers?
- Would the outcome change if teachers were given a single PBIS strategy to use instead of choosing from a list of PBIS strategies?
- Are there any differences between excelling students and teacher relationships; struggling students and teacher relationships; and students neither struggling or excelling and teacher relationships?
- What did teachers discover from participating in this study? What help do teachers think this might provide for their future classroom management?

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## Appendix

### Student-Teacher Relationship Scale – Short Form

Participation in this study will consist of completing two surveys (a pre- and post-survey) and the implementation of a positive behavior intervention support strategy. For this pre-survey, you will submit six times, one for each student you selected to be part of your sample. Each survey will only take two or three minutes to complete.

In order to keep track of the 6 students, please use this format. Start with the teacher's last name, then give each of your students a number 1-6, and then end with an E for excelling, S for struggling, or A for average. For example: Edwards1E, Edwards2E, Edwards3S, Edwards4S, Edwards5A, Edwards6A. Please track which student you assigned each number because when you complete the post survey, you will use these same numbers.

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Assigned Letter: (Teacher last name, student #, S, E, A -struggling, excelling, average)

Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Choose 1 of the following PBIS methods to implement for this student (if you are already using one of these methods, please choose a new one):

1. Support students by spending 2 minutes a day in conversation connecting with them individually
2. Provide written feedback to students individually in their daily journals
3. Support students with verbal praise for good behavior
4. Provide an immediate reward (food, candy, stickers)
5. Provide material privilege (use of cell phone, use of a special chair in the room, etc.)

Please reflect on the degree to which each of the following statements currently applies to your relationship with this child. Using the scale below, circle the appropriate number for each item.

Definitely does not apply	Not really	Neutral, not sure	Applies somewhat	Definitely applies
1	2	3	4	5

1. I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
2. This child and I always seem to be struggling with each other. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
3. If upset, this child will seek comfort from me. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)

4. This child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
5. This child values his/her relationship with me. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
6. When I praise this child, he/she beams with pride. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
7. This child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
8. It is easy to be in tune with what this child is feeling. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
9. This child remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
10. Dealing with this child drains my energy. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
11. When this child is in a bad mood, I know we're in for a long and difficult day. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
12. This child's feelings toward me can be unpredictable or can change suddenly. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
13. This child is sneaky or manipulative with me. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
14. This child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)

### **Post-Survey Student-Teacher Relationship Scale – Short Form**

Participation in this study will consist of completing two surveys (a pre- and post-survey) and the implementation of a positive behavior intervention support strategy. For this pre-survey, you will submit six times, one for each student you selected to be part of your sample. Each survey will only take two or three minutes to complete.

In order to keep track of the 6 students, please use this format. Start with the teacher's last name, then give each of your students a number 1-6, and then end with an E for excelling, S for struggling, or A for average. For example: Edwards1E, Edwards2E, Edwards3S, Edwards4S, Edwards5A, Edwards6A. Please track which student you assigned each number because when you complete the post survey, you will use these same numbers.

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this study is to investigate how authentic student-teacher relationships facilitate positive student behavior. It aims to examine the effect of student behavior when building positive student-teacher relationships. As a current classroom teacher, what did you discover from participating in this study? What help do think this might be to you in your classroom next year and beyond? You

only need to respond to this reflection one time, and not for each student. (short answer)

Child's Assigned Letter: (Teacher last name, student #, S, E, A -struggling, excelling, average)

Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following PBIS methods did you implement for this student:

1. Support students by spending 2 minutes a day in conversation connecting with them individually
2. Provide written feedback to students individually in their daily journals
3. Support students with verbal praise for good behavior
4. Provide an immediate reward (food, candy, stickers)
5. Provide material privilege (use of cell phone, use of a special chair in the room, etc.)

Please reflect on the degree to which each of the following statements currently applies to your relationship with this child. Using the scale below, circle the appropriate number for each item.

Definitely does not apply	Not really	Neutral, not sure	Applies somewhat	Definitely applies
1	2	3	4	5

1. I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
2. This child and I always seem to be struggling with each other. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
3. If upset, this child will seek comfort from me. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
4. This child is uncomfortable with physical affection or touch from me. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
5. This child values his/her relationship with me. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
6. When I praise this child, he/she beams with pride. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
7. This child spontaneously shares information about himself/herself. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
8. It is easy to be in tune with what this child is feeling. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
9. This child remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
10. Dealing with this child drains my energy. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
11. When this child is in a bad mood, I know we're in for a long and difficult day. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
12. This child's feelings toward me can be unpredictable or can change suddenly. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)



13. This child is sneaky or manipulative with me. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)
14. This child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me. (1 = definitely does not apply; 5 = definitely applies)

## **Teacher Planning Templates: Helpful Tool or Waste of Time? A Comparative Analysis of the Perceptions of Novice and Experienced Teachers in the UAE and USA**

*By Rebecca Renee Herrera\* & Sharon Kay Waller<sup>±</sup>*

*Lesson plan templates are a frequent requirement in schools around the world. School administrators often choose a standard lesson plan style and require the consistent layout for all teachers of all grade levels and across all disciplines. Lesson planning, when done well, should be a guide for both teachers and administrators of the educational concept the students need to learn, how the teacher will teach the concept, and how student learning will be evaluated. Lesson planning is a time-consuming task for the teacher and a requirement and expectation by which administration oversees instructional practices in schools. This research study sought to obtain, evaluate, and analyze the perspectives of administrators and teachers from both the United Arab Emirates and the United States on the perceived usefulness of lesson planning templates in the planning process. A quantitative method employing a close-ended survey was used to obtain data. An exploratory factor analysis was applied to determine perspective of teachers on the value and utility of completing templates for instructional planning purposes, and an independent variable T-test was applied to examine similarities and differences in perspectives based on time in the field. The impact of the study could shape future views on the practice, benefits, training, use, and research of lesson planning templates.*

**Keywords:** *novice teacher, experienced teacher, lesson planning templates, administrative requirement, teacher planning*

### **Introduction**

Virtually every teaching position requires the submission of a lesson plan to the administration of the school. Many administrators, for varied reasons, insist on the utilization of a specific template by all teachers in all subjects across all grade levels. Review of the literature indicates that the implementation of a standardized lesson planning template is often intended to facilitate to ensure a specific structure within the classroom or a change in process. For some teachers the template provides a helpful support, giving guidance and structure to support the creation of meaningful effective lessons. For others, completion of the lesson planning template constitutes a menial task, not useful in the planning of their lessons. The process may be seen solely as an administrative requirement, taking time away from the *actual* planning of activities and instruction.

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This research examines two research questions. The first focuses on the descriptives of the participants in the survey, all teachers from the UAE or USA. The second examines whether relationships exist among the survey responses, inquiring about their perceived utility of planning templates and their interactions and experiences using them, between novice and experience teachers in the USA and UAE. Determining whether time in the field plays a role in the perceived utility of standardized lesson planning templates and reviews teacher opinions regarding the benefit of the utilization of lesson planning templates in implementing effective lessons. The research also examines the underlying reasons behind these perceptions.

Planning templates are designed as aides in the teaching process. Their purpose may be best served for those who have teaching in their zone of proximal development rather than mandated universal employment by all teachers across all disciplines regardless of their experience and instructional expertise. This research analyzes if benefits are or are not seen by the teachers themselves. If no benefit is perceived in the utilization of a standard planning template, should the requirement of submission be reexamined by administrators? Should the utilization of lesson planning templates be adjusted to provide greater support to teachers and promote wider adoption of the practice? With the uncertainty of benefits, or perceived benefits, of lesson planning templates it should be examined why the practice is so widely utilized. As the profession of teaching has transformed into a more data driven profession, perhaps the transition has not adequately valued the benefit of this previous best practice, or perhaps it is longstanding.

This research begins with a brief introduction, followed by a thorough review of existing literature on the topic of lesson planning templates. The research questions and research methodology are explained followed by the data analysis and the findings of this research. The paper will conclude with a discussion and conclusion including recommended areas for future research.

### **Operational Definitions**

For the intent of this research, teachers with 5 or more full years of in-field teaching experience will be noted as “experienced” teachers, and teachers with less than 5 full years of in field teaching experience will be noted as “novice” teachers. “Benefits” are defined as seen or felt improvements in teaching from the perspective of the teacher or administrator. “Administrator” will refer to leadership staff in schools not classroom teachers.

### **Literature Review**

Every teacher can remember their first day in front of their very first class. Excitement, nervousness, and a lingering question of whether what they had planned was going to work. For many, their lesson plan template provided a security blanket to ensure their success as they moved through the lesson. The experienced teacher next door stood by their classroom door smiling and encouraging their students with phrases such as, “No worries, you got this!” The experienced teacher

casually greeted their students at the door with hugs, waves, high-5's, and a casual very real sense of calm. The novice teacher watched this scene and longed for that sense of confidence and calm born with experience. So, what does the literature say about the role of the lesson planning template and process in transitioning a novice teacher into an experienced calm confident teacher?

John (2006) reviewed the teaching of the dominant lesson planning model lesson to student teachers. This researcher identified three goals: 1) to critically think about the dominant approach used, 2) to compare the dominant model with lesson planning done by both novice and experienced teachers, and 3) to suggest an alternative dialogical model of lesson planning. John found that giving student teachers a lesson planning template helped to guide their thought processes. The researcher also found that a template ensured that these individuals, who were new to teaching, understood what thought should go into planning an effective lesson, as well as, to effectively align to a planned curriculum. In turn, the utilization of the lesson planning template provided the new teacher with a sense of security in delivery of the lesson.

Mcalpine, Weston, Berthiaume, and Fairbank-roch (2006) examined the thought processes of teachers in the stages of lesson planning then reflection. Their interview protocol insured participants be experienced classroom teachers who have previously developed approaches and strategies to their instruction. The rationale that the use of novice teachers may provide inaccurate data in assessing pre and post lesson thought processes. As instructors developed their instructional models, they may frequently change approaches as they become more experienced. This supports the conception that an aid such as a planning template may be more beneficial for teachers with less experience.

John (2006) suggested that while some individuals find lesson planning to be creative and thought-provoking, others find it unorganized, stressful, and chaotic. The researcher pointed out that a lesson planning template can successfully guide the inexperienced teachers through the thought processes that experienced teachers naturally develop. While Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development focused on the child, his model has been applied across age groups as its popularity has grown. Burkhauser and Lesaux (2017) note that experienced teachers adapt curriculum to meet the needs of students and school requirements more easily than novice teachers. The template can serve as an aide to teach and organize thoughts to ease the cognitive load for inexperienced or struggling teachers. Many school improvement plans are initiated with planning templates to guide a change in practice. Borda et al. (2018) gives an example of this practice documenting a school leadership's attempt to create common practices across the school. Teachers were asked to use a specific template to create consistency and common aspects from classroom to classroom to support student learning. This is only one example of what is a frequent practice across the globe.

While linear models do give consistency throughout schools and districts and can help guide teachers that have difficulty planning, teaching is anything but linear. These benefits seem to be lost when discussing the use of templates with experienced teachers. Ramírez et al. (2017) conducted a research study looking at the planning process and how tasks were performed in the classroom with all

variables in play. This research brought into question what is truly coming first the teaching and practices or the planning and knowledge of the classroom. Pointing out that while there is a connection between the planning and the teaching, these two topics are vastly different practices. Real teaching has many variables that planning itself may not consider. Both the utility and effectiveness of lesson planning are warranted and important. Some teachers complete lesson plan templates after the teaching of lessons rather than before. The template in this type of situation being used as a reflective tool rather than a planning aid. In this situation, the teacher's self-created mental template guides the instruction rather than the standard template checklist short circuiting the purpose and intent of the formal lesson planning template.

John (2006) indicates that for many student-teacher instructors teaching with a specified template can be a convenience for grading and assessment purposes. For policy makers, lesson plans templates can be one way to hold teachers accountable to what these individuals believe teachers should be doing within a lesson. Teaching has changed dramatically over the last 60 years, yet lesson plan templates have remained surprisingly constant since the 1940's; emphasizing six primary areas: 1) objectives, 2) vocabulary, 3) resources, 4) starter, 5) main activity, and 6) plenary. With few variances including *differentiation*, *timings*, *technology*, and details within each heading. "Although a variety of lesson-planning formats and approaches are recommended for use, few of the formats are derived empirically" (p. 483). This researcher suggests that in a profession that requires such flexibility, lesson planning should likewise possess a degree of flexibility. Goals should be subject to adjustment as the lesson develops in order that all important factors can be considered to best enhance learning.

The findings of the previous research were also supported by a study conducted by Ramírez et al. (2017). The Ramirez study focused on early childhood education teachers working with students three to six-years-old in the subject area of information and communication technology (ICT). These teachers were not required to use a template, they planned their lessons based on their own experiences and preferences. The study looked at how much planning, and which planning, gets carried out in the actual classroom experience as opposed to which planning ends up changing and needing to be adjusted on the spot due to variables in play in an actual classroom setting. Ramirez and colleagues directly point out that, "In fact, the elements that teachers handle and consider when planning are very wide-ranging, although what they actually put down in writing when they have to comply with administrative regulations on planning is quite another matter" (Ramírez et al., 2017 p. 714). This research supported the idea that lesson planning has two aspects: 1) planning for teaching and 2) writing to satisfy administrative requirements.

Ramírez et al. (2017) found that teachers that were able to adhere closely to their lesson plans devoted much of their time planning for activities and situations that could arise in the classroom as opposed to focusing on items frequently listed on lesson plan templates such as "materials" and "objectives." The study also demonstrated the reduced importance of various aspects in teaching brought on by strict adherence to template requirements and found that most of the actual planning went to activities which tend not to be primary factors of many lesson

planning templates. As the field of teaching becomes more data-driven in all subjects, these results may be applicable across disciplines. While this study focused on the subject area of ICT, the results can be generalized to many other subjects and disciplines.

Given the prevalence of lesson plans in teacher-education programs, a surprisingly limited account of empirical data has been used to inform these tools. Wilson (2019) promotes ten key elements in planning a lesson and argues that the utilization of these ten key elements will create an effective experience for your learners. Wilson's ten steps follow:

- 1) Audience-consider the students and their personalities.
- 2) Effective learning strategies - include spiraling lessons.
- 3) Have the end in mind - set concrete goals and clear lesson objectives.
- 4) Write formative assessments considering benchmarks, pacing, and reinforcement.
- 5) Differentiate instruction.
- 6) Design for peer instruction.
- 7) Work examples - consider background knowledge and the needs of learners when creating examples and algorithms – utilization of fading examples.
- 8) Show why/how ideas work and are supported and point out common misconceptions.
- 9) Challenge and encourage learners - avoid demotivating.
- 10) Active learning - allow students to be a part of the discovery, not a bystander in the lesson.

Some of these steps are included on many lesson planning templates, most notably steps three, four, and five. Many of Wilson's steps are implemented independently and seem to be considerations in teacher planning, but not administrative paperwork for submission. For example, *step 1: considering your audience* is frequently left off templates but constitutes an important aspect in starting preparation for any lesson. *Step 2* discusses the idea of spiraling topics to include old topics as review, while connecting to current benchmarks, and preview upcoming lessons that will use the same ideas. This continuity of instruction in learning is common among teachers yet is seen on very few templates. Peer instruction may be frequent in teacher planned activities; however, many templates do not require the details of planned activities. Steps seven and eight require the planning of examples to be used, grow, and extend throughout the lesson. These concepts often do not appear on lesson plan templates. Steps nine and ten are about teacher student interactions which are also rarely considered on templates.

Wilson (2019) also contrasted the needs of novice and experienced teachers as illustrated by the following quote. Within *step 7: using fading examples* the researcher stated:

A worked example is a step-by-step demonstration of how to solve a problem or do some task. By giving the steps in order, the instructor reduces the learner's cognitive load, which accelerates learning. However, worked examples become less effective as learners acquire more expertise, a phenomenon known as the 'expertise reversal

effect.’ In brief, as learners build their own mental models of what to do and how to do it, the detailed step-by-step breakdown of a worked example starts to get in the way. This is why tutorials and manual pages both need to exist: what’s appropriate for a newcomer is frustrating for an expert, while what jogs an expert’s memory may be incomprehensible to a novice (Wilson, 2019, pp. 6-7).

Many experienced teachers may suffer from “expertise reversal effect” when planning lessons for administrators. A step-by-step example, like a template, may be useful for inexperienced persons who need a guide to complete a new task, while frustrating and stifling more experienced teachers.

Staiger and Rockoff (2010) found that many differences in teaching approaches exist between experienced and novice teachers. As such, the planning that goes into teaching lessons differs greatly between these groups. Both explicit and implicit data have shown students being taught by novice teachers as opposed to being taught by an experienced teacher show lower gains in achievement. Differences in teaching style and approach are noted frequently between experienced and novice teachers. This research provides the foundation for the operational definition of novice and experienced teachers used in this research.

Lutovac and Kaasila (2018), examined one teacher’s view of teaching contrasting his opinions through his preservice years forward to his acquisition of 15 years of experience. While a novice, this teacher relied on his strengths in his academic area (mathematics) and textbooks to plan teacher centered learning opportunities. During this time, he felt that if he was teaching and the students were listening intently the lesson was going well. Stating he was surprised by the degree of difference in academic levels among his students. This teacher felt that part of being a good teacher was the ability to answer students’ questions immediately- with an explanation to get to the answer as quickly as possible. He looked at himself more as a content area specialist and prepared his lessons in that way. At this stage in his career, a lesson plan template seems to have been supportive of his style and may have guided him through the process.

These opinions were found to have changed as his career progressed. Lutovac and Kaasila (2018) also identified significant changes in his teaching perspective and approach. These researchers again interviewed this teacher fifteen years later and identified a very different perspective. Experience had changed his teaching style to a more student-centered approach. He focused more on how student’s think, and less about the content he was teaching. He no longer used the textbook to plan lessons (making listing page numbers on a template an extra duty) and focused on more on pedagogy and his instructional approach. The teacher had become more realistic about his expectations of his students and the amount of differentiation it takes to reach them all, understanding that they may be reached at various levels (knowing your audience). He also pointed out that he learned to focus on his pupil’s “identity development” making sure his students separated their academic skills from how they see themselves as human beings and worked to positively build their confidence ensuring to point out positive theory even with incorrect implementation. This teaching style does not seem to follow a template style planning approach.

Lutovac and Kaasila (2018) provide this example of a developed teacher who has gained experience and a new approach on teaching throughout his years. Where he used to spend time focusing on content when planning his lessons, he now focused on student interaction with the material, differentiation, and student wellbeing. These researchers propose that moving to a student-centered approach from a teacher centered approach is something that is learned over time. Subsequent changes to lesson planning and the time spent focusing on specific parts of the planning become the result of experience in the classroom.

In the teacher's novice years, he used a very structured, textbook-driven approach consistent with the requirements of many lesson planning templates. His behavior is also consistent with the expectations taught to student teachers by the training programs of many educational institutions. As a fifteen-year veteran teacher, his approaches to teaching did not align with the linearity that a template provides; therefore, making the lesson plan template an additional administrative task.

While the aforementioned research consistently agrees that experience leads to changes in teaching, it is more importantly noted for this research study that experience generally leads to an improvement in teaching. Ost (2014) found that experience within grade levels impacts teaching and the achievement level of students, predominantly in mathematics, where benchmarks change throughout grade levels. Ost (2014) also found that many teachers find time constraints to be a major hinderance to planning effective lessons. By continuing to teach consistent curriculum, teachers have already completed many of the administrative tasks required, often including the submission of lesson planning templates. Many have also experienced the sequencing of the lesson in previous years, having already noted changes that should be made to the lesson and possible changes in the sequencing in previous reflective moments. Their planning time being available to focus on pedagogy and the individuality of their students in order to meaningfully impact their lessons. They have experiences with student-centered approaches and have developed expertise in implementing those activities that are likely to be the most successful. Given all this, one could deduce that the more experience a teacher has, the less time it takes to prepare an effective lesson.

Ost (2014) noted that less than half of teachers remain in a consistent grade level in their first five years of teaching. This is notable because the research study also shows higher gains in students that have teachers with grade-specific experience, especially in mathematics. Grade specific experience allows teachers to spend less time constructing effective lessons, as the groundwork has previously been laid, and there is less time on administrative tasks. In turn, this dedicates more time to plan for classroom events that may arise impacting sequencing of classroom instruction, differentiation, and character building.

Altayli and Dagli (2018) conducted a study at primary schools to examine differences in the perceptions of novice teachers (in their first two years), mentor teachers, and administrators. The role of administrators in supporting and helping guide teachers through career changes was also examined. Where the data showed novice teachers facing difficulties due to their lack of experience, the administrator's assigned mentor teachers to provide guidance and support rather than assigning the



linear framework provided by a lesson planning template. This process was shown to be successful; however, the utilization of this model did add responsibilities to administrators and experienced teachers.

Altayli and Dagli (2018) observed that one should not discount the ability of novice teachers to bring new perspectives to experienced teachers noting that the technological revolution has left many experienced teachers without digital experience. Novice teachers may bring a level of technological expertise to offset corresponding areas of weakness in experienced teachers. As teaching has begun to take a turn toward more data driven practices, experienced teachers often had their training focus on pedagogy as opposed to the utilization of technology and employment of data analytics.

As changes continue to arise in education, lesson planning templates are often employed to guide the change yet training on utilizing the provided templates is often overlooked. Borda et al. (2018) provide an example demonstrating how a lesson planning template was provided to teacher to aid in creating a common structure throughout the school. Unfortunately, no provision was made to train the teachers to utilize the provided template. Teacher training programs often follow the same pathway as they place more focus on the utilization of data driven analytics without putting sufficient emphasis on guiding teachers to develop and analyze the required analytics. The question arises as to which teachers are more impacted by the lack of adequate training: novice teachers or experienced teachers.

Schmidt (2005) points out that teaching is a rare profession in that many people believe they have lived experience through observing their teachers during their schooling years. This gives many people the false perception that anyone can teach. With the ever-growing shortage of qualified teachers around the world many school systems are resorting to bringing people into the teaching profession from other areas in the workforce. Schmidt found that though these individuals may be considered content experts, they have little to no training in pedagogy. Many of these individuals do not make it past the novice stage of teaching as they quickly realize the workload associated with being an educator. They are often overwhelmed by the behind-the-scenes portions of teaching that were never observed from the student perspective, primarily, the extensive lesson planning. These teachers are rarely trained to utilize templates for the purposes of planning. Instead, they are given the template as an administrative requirement, thus, creating a disconnection between the planning and the template.

An abundance of research has been conducted into the topic of lesson planning templates; however, little has been produced to examine perceptions of lesson planning templates across global boundaries. As technology advances and new methods are developed, teachers across the world continuously update their teaching tool bags. One thing that has not changed over the last 40, or more, years is the administrative requirement of submitting a lesson plan, generally using a standardized template. As discussed previously in the Introduction and Context, there have been numerous studies looking at small groups of teachers, their preparation routines, and the outcomes of the lessons after implementing the teachers' plan of instruction. In these studies, researchers have found that discrepancies exist, to varying degrees,

in terms of lesson plan utility between and among novice and experienced teachers. These studies have not examined the global arena.

Review of the available literature indicates differing planning needs of novice and experienced teachers; however, the researcher has ascertained that a gap exists in the perceived usefulness of lesson planning templates based on the teacher's experience levels. No previous research was identified to address the issue on the global stage. This research is intended as a step towards closing these gaps.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The goal of this quantitative exploratory research was to discern the existence of relationships between or among the responses obtained by a twenty-question survey administered to teachers in the United States and in the United Arab Emirates. Factors examined included but were not limited to years of experience, location of service, and perceptions towards the utilization of lesson planning templates. This study aimed to examine teacher's attitudes towards administrative requirements towards completing and submitting lesson planning templates. The framework guiding this study centered on how time in the field and teacher experience influenced the degree of usefulness lesson planning templates serve both novice and experienced teachers.

The study examined two research questions. Research Question One was utilized to identify the descriptives associated with the survey while Research Question Two was employed to identify the existence of relationships between or among the survey response variables. These two research questions follow.

*Research Question One:* What are the survey responses for novice and experienced teachers in the United States and the United Arab Emirates?

*Research Question Two:* Do relationships exist between or among the survey responses for novice and experienced teachers in the United States and the United Arab Emirates?

The following null and alternate hypotheses were formulated to examine research question two.

*H<sub>0</sub>:* No relationships exist between or among the survey responses for novice and experienced teachers in the United States and the United Arab Emirates.

*H<sub>a</sub>:* Relationships exist between or among the survey responses for novice and experienced teachers in the United States and the United Arab Emirates.

Using the above research questions and hypotheses as a guide, this study aimed to ascertain teacher's perceived benefits in completing lesson planning templates for instructional planning. Frequently practices differ based on time in the field of teaching while simultaneously changing the perspective of utility of many teaching tools and administrative tasks. This may be creating a gap between best practices and useful practices between novice and experienced educators. The findings of this exploratory factor analysis will provide critical insight into this

problem of practice and contribute to closing the gap in literature and data concerning the utility of lesson planning templates and instructional planning itself.

### **Research Methodology**

In response to Research Question One, the study provided the survey response descriptives of number, mean, and standard deviation for each of the survey questions. The hypotheses for Research Question Two were examined via the utilization of exploratory factor analysis. This dimension reduction technique first employed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy to determine how suited the data set was for factor analysis. KMO scores of .400 or higher were deemed appropriate indicative of the suitability of the data set. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was employed to determine that the data set differed significantly from the identity matrix and thus has sufficient correlations to warrant the utilization of an exploratory factor analysis. A significance level of 0.05 or less was deemed appropriate (Waller & Lumadue, 2013).

This research examines the degree of utility and perceived benefit in completing a lesson plan template in preparation for teaching a lesson between novice and experienced teachers in the UAE and USA. For the purposes of this study, a novice teacher will be defined as a teacher with five or less years of in-field teaching experience and an experienced teacher as one having more than five years of in-field teaching experience.

Questions in the survey were designed to accrue data: testing the perceived usefulness of lesson plan templates; testing who finds the process of completing the template helpful in the sequencing and preparation of lessons; ascertaining a perspective of the attitude of educators toward the task of completing lesson plan templates; examining the extent of training given on utilizing lesson planning templates; and comparing how the length of time of in-field service has influenced the perceived utility of templates for teachers.

### **Data Collection and Surveying**

For this study, a twenty-question survey was sent to novice and experienced teachers in the UAE and USA using a Microsoft Forms link for easy dispersal. After requesting participation from all immediate contacts fitting the criteria, participants were asked to continue passing the survey to their contacts using a snowball method of disbursement to reach as many respondents as possible. All participants had the option to discontinue the survey at any time if they felt uncomfortable with the line of questioning or felt their anonymity will be disclosed in any way. The Microsoft Forms platform was utilized to make dispersion and accessibility of the survey convenient across countries for all participants and SPSS Software was used for a clear analysis of the data.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

The survey was presented to expert faculty at the American University of Ras Al Khaimah as well as Master of Educational Leadership students to establish content validity prior to being distributed. Names and identifying information were not collected. A generic set of descriptive criteria was gathered to include country (USA or UAE), language of preference, number of years in the field, gender, type of school, and educational level to secure trustworthiness and ambiguity by the participants. A Cronbach's split alpha was utilized to test reliability with an anticipated score of 0.80 or higher. The actual alpha score was 0.61 which did not meet anticipated levels but provides reasonable assurance that the data have moderate reliability.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The survey inevitably began as a convenience-cluster-self-selecting sample of teachers due to availability and includes all the limitations traditionally associated with self-disclosed responses. To mitigate for these limitations, the researcher used a snowballing method of disbursement to contacts from those respondents, in both the UAE and USA, who had previously responded. The survey was delimited to participants in the field of education in the UAE and USA where access to multiple contributors was available. The survey was given in English and Arabic to extend the research to local as well as expatriate teachers in the UAE.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Findings in Response to Research Question One**

The study began with an examination of survey descriptives in order to answer Research Question One. Table 1 provides the number, mean, and standard deviation for each of the twenty-survey questions. Several of the questions are not designed to provide sequential responses moving from one response to a more emphatic response. For example, questions such as language of preference, gender, marital status, age range, location of employment, and educational level do not lend themselves to this type of analysis. The numeric counts of the responses for questions one through twenty are provided in Tables 2 and 3. The reader should note that this dual examination of the responses provides greater insight into the survey responses.

Table 1. Survey Response Descriptives

Question	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. I prefer the survey to be taken in English or Arabic.	143	1.31	0.465
2. What is your gender?	143	1.75	0.435
3. What is your marital status?	143	1.53	0.927
4. What is your age range?	143	4.47	1.757
5. Where is your employment?	143	1.84	0.372
6. In what type of institution are you employed?	143	1.16	0.372.
7. What is your highest educational level?	143	1.44	0.623
8. How often are you required to submit lesson plans to administration?	143	3.12	0.562
9. Which lesson plan template model does your administration require?	116	3.23	0.954
10. Do you aspire to become an administrator?	143	1.64	0.665
11. How many years of teaching experience do you have?	143	3.74	1.306
12. If you found a template that had all required elements, would you:	143	2.08	1.040
13. The main reason I complete lesson plan templates is to:	143	2.03	0.918
14. I find lesson planning templates to be:	143	2.34	1.087
15. I started using lesson plan templates:	143	2.80	0.847
16. My administration, when it comes to completing lesson plans:	143	2.51	1.059
17. My mentality for lesson plan template submission came from:	143	1.53	0.982
18. I have found completing lesson plan templates helpful.	143	2.86	1.029
19. The longer I teach a particular topic/subject/class:	143	2.94	0.998
20. When it comes to training on lesson plan templates:	143	2.04	1.122

Source: Survey Data Compiled Using SPSS.

The response counts by question category are provided in Table 2. These findings further illustrate the response patterns for survey questions one through eleven.

Participants in the study included 106 who selected to take the survey in English and 37 who selected to take the survey in Arabic. Thirty-five (35) were male and 108 were female. The majority of the participants were married (89) with 34 being single, 12 divorced, and one widowed. The most common age ranges were 30 to 45 years. Thirty-five (35) participants were from the United States, and 105 were from the United Arab Emirates. The most common educational levels were the bachelor's (84) and master's (53). The study included 28 novice teachers with five or less years of service and 115 experienced teachers with more than five years of experience.

Table 2. Question Counts by Response Category for Questions One through Eleven

Question	Category	Count	Category	Count
1. I prefer the survey to be taken in English or Arabic.	English	106	Arabic	37
2. What is your gender?	Male	35	Female	108
3. What is your marital status?	Married	89	Single	34
	Divorced	12	Widowed	1
4. What is your age range?	<25	2	25<30	16
	30<35	26	35<40	31
	40<45	33	45<50	11
	50<55	13	55<60	8
	60 up	2	No Answer	1
5. Where is your employment?	USA	38	UAE	105
6. In what type of institution are you employed?	Public	124	Private	19
7. What is your highest educational level?	Bachelor	84	Master's	53
	Doctoral	3	Other	3
8. How often are you required to submit lesson plans to administration?	Never	27	Daily	12
	Weekly	78	Not Stated	26
9. Which lesson plan template model does your administration require?	No Template	8	My Choosing	18
	Mixed	29	By Admin.	61
10. Do you aspire to become an administrator?	Yes	58	Not At This Time	71
	No Answer	14		
11. How many years of teaching experience do you have?	0-2	10	2-5	18
	5-10	26	10-15	31
	15+	58	No Answer	0

Source: Survey Data Compiled Using SPSS.

Table 3. Question Counts by Response Category for Questions Twelve through Twenty

Question	Category	Count
12. If you found a template that had all required elements, would you:	1. Recommend this template to the administration.	52
	2. Submit the template.	55
	3. Show my colleagues to see what they thought.	15
	4. Continue to use the current template as required.	21
13. The main reason I complete lesson plan templates is to:	1. To satisfy administrative requirements.	54
	2. To ensure appropriate planning and pacing of my lessons.	43
	3. I need templates to plan what I will do in class activities.	38
	4. Because it is good practice and helps me think through the lessons in advance.	8
14. I find lesson planning templates to be:	1. Administrative necessity without practical application.	15
	2. A way to organize previously planned material.	37

	3. A helpful tool in planning.	68
	4. An essential tool in planning.	23
15. I started using lesson plan templates:	1. I do not use templates.	10
	2. In college in my education classes.	27
	3. In my first five years of teaching.	42
	4. After teaching for more than five years.	64
16. My administration, when it comes to completing lesson plans:	1. Understands that teachers have different planning needs.	38
	2. Listens to teacher's needs and tries to keep submitting as convenient as possible.	39
	3. Is supportive but strict when it comes to submitting.	37
	4. Is not concerned with teacher's opinions.	29
17. My mentality for lesson plan templates submissions came from:	1. My experience as a teacher.	105
	2. My college classes.	17
	3. Research and reading.	8
	4. Tradition.	12
18. I have found completing lesson plan templates helpful.	1. Never.	14
	2. At the start of my career.	43
	3. When I start teaching a new topic.	37
	4. My entire career.	49
19. The longer I teach a particular topic/subject/class:	1. Has no bearing as they are no longer helpful.	9
	2. The less benefit is received.	52
	3. No change.	33
	4. More benefit is received.	49
20. When it comes to training on lesson plan templates:	1. No desire for training.	67
	2. Not seeking but can benefit.	34
	3. Would appreciate training.	20
	4. Would appreciate and believe all teachers would benefit.	22

Source: Survey Data Compiled Using SPSS.

## Findings in Response to Research Question Two

The null and alternate hypotheses supporting Research Question Two were examined via the utilization of exploratory factor analysis. The findings of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity are provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.611
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	467.4
	Degrees of Freedom	190
	Significance	< 0.001

Source: Survey Data Compiled Using SPSS.

The KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy exceeded 0.400 indicating the data set's suitability for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity returned a significance

of  $< 0.001$ . Accordingly, the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternate hypothesis. Relationships were found to exist between or among the survey responses for novice and experienced teachers in the United States and the United Arab Emirates. An exploratory factor analysis was then conducted to examine the number of underlying factors driving participant answers. Seven factors were identified with Eigenvalues at or above 1.0. Additionally, the factor loading associated with these seven factors were identified using principal component analysis and a Varimax rotation. Table 5 includes an analysis of the seven factors, and Table 6 provides the factor loadings. The rotation converged in 11 iterations.

Table 5. Total Variance Explained

Initial Eigenvalues			
Component	Total	% Of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.07	15.352	15.352
2	2.34	11.675	27.027
3	1.77	8.867	35.894
4	1.57	7.868	43.762
5	1.27	6.324	50.086
6	1.23	6.131	56.217
7	1.07	5.323	61.540

Source: Survey Data Compiled Using SPSS.

The seven factors underlying participant responses accounted for 61.54% of the total variance in the data set. These seven factors validate the survey as actually measuring seven unique factors. To further explore these underlying factors, an examination was made of the factor loadings utilizing a Varimax rotation. These factor loadings follow in Table 6.

Table 6. Rotated Component Matrix

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. I prefer the survey to be taken in English or Arabic.	0.109	0.226	-0.074	0.786*	0.124	0.608*	-0.038
2. What is your gender?	-0.021	-0.047	0.038	-0.011	0.758*	-0.157	-0.123
3. What is your marital status?	-0.088	0.115	0.173	-0.019	0.149	-0.227	-0.738*
4. What is your age range?	0.072	0.840*	0.025	-0.172	0.064	0.083	0.043
5. Where is your employment?	0.030	-0.382	-0.085	0.668*	-0.081	0.076	-0.016
6. In what type of institution are you employed?	0.012	-0.406*	-0.570*	-0.264	0.162	0.190	0.061
7. What is your highest educational level?	0.157	-0.041	0.689*	-0.102	0.100	-0.025	-0.044
8. How often are you required to submit lesson plans to administration?	-0.168	0.132	0.514*	-0.202	0.376	0.149	0.217
9. Which lesson plan template model does your administration require?	-0.011	-0.016	-0.546*	0.307	0.294	-0.229	0.237
10. Do you aspire to become an administrator?	0.038	0.236	0.229	-0.112	0.100	-0.426*	0.679*
11. How many years of teaching experience do you have?	-0.003	0.826*	0.000	0.130	0.044	0.099	-0.042
12. If you found a template that had all required elements, would you:	-0.101	-0.290	0.425*	0.060	0.159	0.120	0.329



13. The main reason I complete lesson plan templates is to:	0.716*	-0.148	0.036	0.287	-0.035	-0.043	0.105
14. I find lesson planning templates to be:	0.640*	0.011	0.109	0.161	0.026	0.248	0.072
15. I started using lesson plan templates:	0.100	0.222	0.049	0.166	0.058	0.799*	0.019
16. My administration, when it comes to completing lesson plans:	-0.368	0.071	-0.076	0.203	0.297	-0.507*	-0.123
17. My mentality for lesson plan template submission came from:	-0.167	-0.102	-0.042	-0.077	-0.651*	-0.092	-0.056
18. I have found completing lesson plan templates helpful.	0.778*	0.240	0.112	-0.081	0.078	0.139	-0.080
19. The longer I teach a particular topic/subject/class:	0.802*	0.023	0.026	-0.006	-0.006	-0.056	-0.030
20. When it comes to training on lesson plan templates:	0.614*	0.004	-0.171	-0.074	0.081	0.043	0.026

Source: Survey Data Compiled Using SPSS.

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

a. Rotation Converged in 11 Iterations

\* Exceeds |0.400|

### Overview of Factor 1

Factor 1 accounts for 15.352% of the variance in the sample data set. Questions 13, 14, 18, 19, and 20 have significant factors loadings. These questions relate to the usability of lesson planning templates in satisfying administrative requirements and as helpful tools in planning. Factor 1 was not influenced by the age, experience, or location of the respondents. This factor has been named, Template Usefulness. Notably the questions of significance in factor 1 are not associated in any way with the working experience of the participants. Specifically, novice teachers and experienced teachers may be said to possess similar opinions of the usability of lesson planning templates. This finding is not consistent with the literature examined.

### Overview of Factor 2

Factor 2 accounts for 11.675% of the variance in the sample data set. Questions 4, 6, and 11 had significant factor loadings. These questions address the age of the teacher, the type of institution of employment, and the number of years teaching experience. This factor has been named, Teacher Experience, as it is the only factor linked to the teacher's age and teaching experience. Notably, the teachers in the public sector appear to be more experienced than those in the private sector.

### Overview of Factor 3

Factor 3 accounts for 8.867% of the variance in the sample data set. Questions 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12 have significant factor loadings. The questions address the type of institution, educational level, frequency of lesson plan submission, lesson planning model, and use of the required template. This factor has been named, Lesson Planning Practices. Notably, teachers in the public sector appear to possess

higher levels of education than those in the private sector. The private sector may have less rigorous expectations for the utilization of lesson planning templates than the public sector.

#### **Overview of Factor 4**

Factor 4 accounts for 7.868% of the variance in the sample data set. Questions 1 and 5 have significant factor loadings. These questions address the preferred language and geographic location of the teacher. This factor has been named, Location. The analysis indicates that more of the Arabic speakers are employed in the United Arab Emirates as would be expected with limited Arabic speaking institutions located in the United States.

#### **Overview of Factor 5**

Factor 5 accounts for 6.324% of the variance in the sample data set. Questions 2 and 17 have significant factor loadings. These questions address the participant's gender and knowledge of lesson planning templates. This factor has been named, Gender. Notably, females appear more likely to accept lesson planning templates based on their experience as a teacher. Males appear to rely more on research, reading, and tradition.

#### **Overview of Factor 6**

Factor 6 accounts for 6.131% of the variance in the sample data set. Questions 1, 10, 15, and 16 have significant factor loadings. These questions address the language of preference, aspiration to become an administrator, utilization of lesson planning templates, and the administration's understanding that teachers have different planning needs. This factor has been named, Administrative Aspirations. Analysis of the factor loadings indicates that Arabic speakers are less likely to aspire towards administrative roles and are more likely to expect administrators to be more sympathetic towards understanding that teachers have different planning needs.

#### **Overview of Factor 7**

Factor 7 accounts for 5.232% of the variance in the sample data set. Questions 3 and 10 have significant factor loadings. These questions address the participant's marital status and administrative aspirations. Notably married participants were more likely to aspire to become administrators. This factor has been named, Marital Status. The analysis indicates that married respondents were more likely to hold aspirations towards becoming administrators.

## Summary of Findings

The exploratory factor analysis indicated that seven factors drove participant responses. These seven factors were: 1) template usefulness, 2) teacher experience, 3) lesson planning practices, 4) location, 5) gender, 6) administrative aspirations, and 7) marital status. These factor loadings indicate that novice teachers and experienced teachers may be said to possess similar opinions regarding the usability of lesson planning templates which contradicts the findings of previous literature. For this study, teachers in the public sector appeared to be more experienced than those in the private sector. Teachers in the public sector also appeared to possess higher levels of education than those in the private sector. Teachers in the private sector may have experienced less rigorous expectations for the utilization of lesson planning templates than their counterparts in the public sector.

More Arabic speakers are employed in the United Arab Emirates as would be expected with limited Arabic speaking institutions located in the United States. Females appeared more likely to accept lesson planning templates based on their experience as a teacher while males appeared to rely more on research, reading, and tradition. Arabic speakers were less likely to aspire towards administrative roles and were more likely to expect administrators to be more sympathetic towards understanding that teachers have different planning needs. The analysis also indicated that married respondents were more likely to hold aspirations towards becoming administrators.

This structured quantitative study helps close the literature gap examining the utility of lesson plan templates across the UAE and USA as well as drawing attention to other areas for further examination.

## Discussion

The bulk of available literature represents teaching practice in the United States or the United Kingdom. Little research exists which examines teaching practice from a global perspective. While many of the findings of this study contradict findings of previous studies, the reader must recognize that the previous studies were not conducted on the global field. These studies were in specific environments. The current study not only examines teaching practice in the United States but reviews practice in the United Arab Emirates. As the UAE is a Muslim nation with different social morals and expectations than the United States, it stands to reason that educational practice and teacher expectations would differ. For example, Schmidt's (2005) study found differences in the opinions of novice and experienced teachers in regard to the importance of lesson planning templates. The current study primarily involved teachers in the UAE and identified no differences in the opinions of novice and experienced teachers finding instead that females and males utilize lesson planning templates for different reasons. This finding was interesting in light of the differing expectations for men and women in the UAE.

The importance of training to use lesson planning templates was only significant for Factor 1 which had no impact on location or preferred language. In other words, teachers in the USA and the UAE were not polarized on this issue apparently holding similar views. While views of the need for training are similar, differences do exist in regard to views to becoming an administrator and expectations of administrative support. These differences illustrate the need to broaden research concerning instructional practices across a broader range of global forums.

### **Moving to a Data Driven Classroom**

In recent years teaching has been moving to a more data-driven profession. While most planning templates have remained constant with a focus on sequencing and pedagogy, teachers may be moving away from this type of formatting and moving toward documents that show results of teaching rather than the plan of teaching. Questions arise as to the engagement of data driven teaching across global perspectives. While views regarding the utilization of lesson planning templates in some cultures, global views regarding data driven teaching may also exist.

### **Filling Teaching Positions**

Additionally, with an extreme teacher shortage in many countries, these positions are often being filled by individuals coming from other areas of the world and from a wide range of workforce backgrounds. These teachers may arrive with differing views and expectations. Recognition of these differences may serve to enrich the educational environment leading to potential new areas of improvement. The views of novice and experienced teachers may more consistently blend in order to seek a common instructional path.

### **Conclusions**

The literature reveals that many reasonable aspects exist for requiring teachers to use lesson planning templates. The reader must recognize that many of these studies were only conducted in one or two cultures and may not represent the broader global environment. As the structure is now, many teachers are required to complete these documents while not recognizing any benefit in this practice. For these aides to serve a restructuring or supportive purpose, they need to be accompanied by training into their utilization. As teachers gain experience in structuring lessons, or in a new practice or structure and develop expertise, the practice of template completion may become less practical and more of a menial administrative task. Teachers not seeing purpose in required templates leads to minimal effort put into them, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If these documents are simply a convenience for teacher-trainers and administrators, a push from policy makers, or a box to check rather than a useful tool in a teaching; the practice of submitting these templates may need to be

reexamined and/or substituted with a more meaningful and purposeful task to teachers.

The goal in all schools is to employ the best teachers to produce the most successful students. Teachers who were most successful in implementing their planned lessons spent their time planning activities carefully and considering the classroom dynamics with a focus on what they knew about their students and their personalities. These teachers were able to ‘plan to adjust’ activities on the spot when unanticipated events arose. Lesson planning can differ from grade to grade, subject to subject, teacher to teacher, and even school to school. Teaching is a profession of flexibility. The skillfulness and the sequencing of effective lessons are no doubt related to the teachers planning and expertise, but little connection has been made to the planning template they do or do not use.

The differences between novice and experienced teachers are great; but the perception of lesson planning templates is one thing they share. Novice and struggling teachers tend to be learning and changing large parts of their teaching philosophies dominantly in their first years in the field. Tending to plan for the short-term, one week at a time as time permits, and in general, following the sequence of learning outcomes as they have been presented to them. This type of structure aligns with the structure of lesson planning templates, but notably is not ideal for classroom and student success. Successful teachers tend to plan for long-term goals. These teachers change the sequencing of benchmarks to give flow to the lessons and are not afraid to spend more time on some learning outcomes and less on others if such works in the classroom. These attributes are not areas of focus or even noted on most templates. Regardless of which type of teacher researched, many are not seeing a benefit in the practice of completing lesson planning templates. This itself is a reason to reexamine the practice of requiring submission for all teachers as it currently stands in many institutions.

Given what is available in the literature and the findings of this research, a better understanding of the process of lesson planning and the use of lesson planning templates is of utmost importance. While this research may have helped clarify the problem in practice, an examination into the intended purpose behind the requirement of completing lesson planning templates is essential to improve and/or correct it.

### **Recommended Areas for Future Research**

This study is intended to guide future research. Accordingly, the following studies are recommended.

Parallel and duplicated quantitative studies throughout the world are recommended to compare data and strengthen the understanding of the views of teachers as a whole and throughout cultures. Multiple comparative studies strengthen the overall understanding of all topics and there is a lack of data collected in this area of education and teacher perspective.

The purpose and motives behind lesson planning templates should be examined from a broader global perspective. What are the practices in other nations, cultures,

and across differing religions? Do differences exist in Muslim, Hindu, and Christian nations? What are the practices in nations that have been deeply impacted by colonization?

The impact of new teachers on the data-driven classroom should also be examined. Are these new teachers more open to technological innovation and the utilization of data analytics?

Differences in cultural expectations for the classroom should also be examined. How has the shortage of teachers impacted the global classroom? How has the influx of non-traditional sources of new teachers changed the educational field?

This research has identified some areas of discrepancy between global practice and the findings of current literature. These perceptions are areas recommended for future research. Perceptions of teachers should also be compared to those of administrators.

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## **Three Keys to Retaining Talented Teachers in the UAE: Leadership, Community, and Work-Life Balance – A Phenomenological Case Study in the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah**

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The United Arab Emirates hires many teachers from abroad to work in both the private and public school systems. Recruiting foreign teachers can be exceedingly costly, especially when one considers the financial investment associated with air fare, health insurance, housing, transportation, and a competitive salary, along with the substantial processing time involved in issuing work visas, professional and intercultural training. One way organizations may be able to save on additional expenditures is to retain the teachers who have been hired and are already settled in the country. Naturally, a substantial part of the decision for the teacher to remain working and living in the UAE lies with the expatriate teacher. This exploratory, case study employed a qualitative approach in which descriptive data was collected from six in-depth, semi-structured interviews exploring job satisfaction as one, of what may be other, indicators associated with length-of-stay among expatriate teachers in the UAE. These descriptive data were analyzed using an interpretive analysis, which culminated with three selective codes: (1) Leadership and community are key to expatriate teacher's job satisfaction; (2) School leaders' engagement in improving behavior management would improve satisfaction; and (3) Positive work-life balance may influence expatriate teachers' length of stay in the UAE. Taken collectively, this data may assist decision-makers, school leaders, and policy-makers on how to foster environments that promote retention among expatriate teachers in the UAE.

*Keywords:* expatriate teachers, UAE, job satisfaction, work-life balance, school leadership

### **Introduction and Background of the Problem**

While job satisfaction has been researched thoroughly amongst teachers in abundance, there is disagreement on the best way to measure job satisfaction; leading to a balkanization of the research (Pepe, Addimando, & Veronese, 2017, p. 397). When measuring job satisfaction of teachers, researchers have gone to great lengths to mitigate different confounding variables, or at least explain them; whether it is age and/or gender differences (Ma & MacMillan, 1999), emotional and stress level differences (Parveen & Bano, 2019) or differences in the country of practice (Pepe, Addimando, & Veronese, 2017). Although job satisfaction among teachers is a well-researched area, there is limited empirical data concerning the job satisfaction

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of expatriate teachers in public schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). As such, it would be beneficial to have a higher retention rate of those teachers, especially given the substantial cost of recruiting and relocating expatriate teachers, and their families, to the UAE. Additionally, in order to keep employees in any field satisfied with their job, a successful onboarding phase is necessary, and this is especially true for international employees (Bauer, 2022). The aim of this research is to understand the influence job satisfaction may have on the length of stay of expatriate public-school teachers in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE.

The reasons for which job satisfaction continues to empirically intrigue managers, practitioners, and researchers are easily listed, and are mainly linked to the awareness that “happy employees” can lead organizations to prosper more (Pepe, Addimando, & Veronese, 2017). This leads to the corollary that unhappy employees do not lead organizations to prosper more, with a direct connection to multiple motivation theories. The cost of turnover to organizations in the UAE that hire teachers from foreign countries is more than that of schools that hire teachers from within their own country. Parveen and Bano (2019) state that stressors felt by teachers that are not addressed will eventually negatively impact students. This can be amplified in the UAE when a teacher, who may be experiencing high levels of stress, leaves their position before the end of their contract; recruiting a replacement is not a fast process. Positive and negative emotions were found to be significant moderators between the relationship of teachers’ stress and job satisfaction (Parveen & Bano, 2019, p. 353). Perceived workload, student behavior, and teacher cooperation influence a teacher’s job satisfaction (Toropova, Myrberg, & Johansson, 2021). Demographics may also play a role in teacher satisfaction; such factors include gender, years of experience, and differing employment status (Ma & MacMillan, 1999).

According to Parveen and Bano, the rate of turnover in educational institutions and instances of early retirement has increased compared to previous years (Parveen & Bano, 2019, p. 355). Many of the factors that positively or negatively affect teachers’ job satisfaction appear to be universal. Teachers who are teaching outside of their home country may experience additional stressors in addition to those they would likely experience in their home country.

A teacher moving from New York to Los Angeles, London to Liverpool, or Ras Al Khaimah to Abu Dhabi will probably experience at least some levels of stress. Although the cities in this example may be quite different, they are significantly similar in terms of language, culture, social and political contexts. There is not much change in the non-work environment for someone changing jobs domestically. This is not the case for a teacher moving from the United States or the United Kingdom to the Middle East. The culture, weather, food, daily customs, and language are all different (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). While for some, these new experiences might be the reason for relocating to the UAE, some individuals may overlook these aspects before making the move.

Expatriate teachers must adapt to two cultures when they arrive to teach in the UAE: national culture and organizational culture. Taken collectively, these changes may create disruptions in both the expatriates’ professional and personal lives. This may also affect the job performance, especially when job expectations may be

unfamiliar and/or ambiguous (Selmer & Luring, 2011). This, too, may lead to increased levels of anxiety as the expatriate teacher is learning what is expected of them at their new position. Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou (1991 p. 293), identify three facets of international adjustments for expatriate workers: (1) to the job; (2) to the environment in general; (3) and to the locals of the host country. They also identified two phases of adjustment: the pre-departure or 'anticipatory' adjustment and the post-arrival or 'in-country' adjustment. Individuals who do some research of the region, talk to others who have worked in the Middle East, and are adaptable will have a higher chance of staying for an extended period of time. Individuals who may not possess certain characteristics, are not tolerant, flexible, or adaptable, may not enjoy their time teaching in the UAE (McLean, McKimm, & Major, 2014).

### **Expatriate Experiences**

As stated earlier, there is limited research on the lived experiences of expatriate teachers in the Middle East; a thorough review of the literature reveals, however, expatriate experiences in other fields. Research suggests that expatriates work abroad primarily due to pay and/or job opportunity (Bunel, 2017; Cherry, 2009; McLean, McKimm, & Major, 2014; Sappinen, 1993; Selmer & Luring, 2011), chance to experience a new culture, gain work experience, and travel (McLean, McKimm, & Major, 2014). However, expatriate experiences are varied. There is an abundance of challenges or negatives, identified when compared to benefits, or positives, of being an expatriate worker. This is likely due to a lack of need in research when something is successful; rather research lends itself to fixing problems in areas that are unsuccessful and need reform. Research also suggests that individuals may face a difficult adjustment to a new location/culture (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Bunel 2017; Cherry, 2009; McLean, McKimm, & Major 2014; Sappinen, 1993; Selmer & Luring, 2011), distance from home country (McLean, McKimm, & Major, 2014), difficulty with host country language (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Cherry, 2009; McLean, McKimm, & Major, 2014; Sappinen, 1993), lack of employment opportunities for the spouse (Cherry, 2009), and difficulty with the norms and culture of the host country work environment (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Bunel, 2017; Cherry, 2009; McLean, McKimm, & Major 2014; Sappinen, 1993; Selmer & Luring, 2011). Expatriate employees psychological well-being has been shown to be affected by their perceptions of their work-life balance (Ballesteros-Leiva, Poilpot-Rocaboy, & St-Onge, 2017). To make hiring expatriate employees financially beneficial these negatives need to be minimized to prevent employee turnover.

## **Solutions Proposed**

With regard to the challenges expatriates encounter working abroad, researchers have identified potential solutions. Selmer and Luring (2011) focused on decreasing workload and having more clear objectives for expatriate employees. McLean, McKimm, and Major (2014) had several suggestions: talking to someone who has already taught in the Middle East (“doing your homework”), working to learn the local language, taking a trip to the country before you start the position (if one has the means), and wanting to work in the country not just for material gain. Many of these recommendations are oriented toward employers. For example, employers should be aware of and empathetic toward cultural differences, (Sappinen, 1993). They could also provide language training, social support networks, and job placement assistance for spouses. Finally, employers could implement a screening process that looks at aspects that may identify an employee who would be a good fit for working abroad, including open-mindedness, flexibility, and cultural empathy (Cherry, 2009; McLean, McKimm, & Major, 2014). When looking at schools specifically, leaders can create opportunities for all parents to become familiar with the teachers from outside of the country (Đurišić, & Bunijevac, 2017). This interaction may help all parties to become more familiar with each other and their expectations. In summary, there are challenges in retaining expatriate workers for extended time periods. This research explored the perceptions of expatriate employees in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE public schools: the extent to which distance plays a role, how work/life balance affects their job satisfaction, and evaluating what the teachers believe can be done to improve the situation.

## **Research Methodology and Data Analysis**

The purpose of this study was to discern the degree to which job satisfaction plays in the retention of public-school teachers in the UAE. Teacher retention is already a domestic issue (with some estimates saying 19 to 30% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years) and it may become much more costly when teachers are hired from abroad (Mulvahill, 2019). The research questions that this study sought to address are:

- In what ways does job satisfaction influence the length of stay of cycle two and cycle three public school expatriate teachers in the UAE?
- In what ways does work/life balance attribute to teacher job satisfaction amongst public school teachers in the UAE?

This study employed a phenomenological case-study in order to collect and analyze in-depth, highly descriptive data concerning the lived experiences of expatriate public school teachers in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE.

## Data Collection

For the purposes of this exploratory study, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews in order to solicit descriptive data from volunteers. Since it may be difficult for people to express themselves to others, ensuring participants are at ease during the interview process was imperative. This was critical to ascertain the lived experiences of participants and acquire an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. Interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The researchers employed member-checking, in which participants verified the accuracy of transcripts. Upon verification of the authenticity and accuracy of the data, the original, raw data audio files were destroyed to preserve anonymity of participants.

An interview protocol was developed to include open-ended questions that provided the interviewee an opportunity to fully express themselves. Samples of the types of questions asked by the interviews may be found in Table 1. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, in English, and continued until saturation was reached by the researchers. Saturation occurs when the researchers ceases to collect new data from participants; in the case of this particular study, saturation was reached at six participants due to the purposeful nature of the sampling, as described below in population sampling.

*Table 1. Sample Interview Questions*

No	Sample Question
1	What were your expectations upon accepting the position to teach in the UAE?
2	How does your actual experience compare to your expectations
3	How much research did you do before moving to the UAE?
4	How long do you anticipate staying in the UAE? What makes you feel that way
5	How would you describe your work/life balance?
6	How does your level of job satisfaction compare to previous teaching positions?
7	How would you describe your over-all happiness here during your stay?
8	In what ways do you feel the current pandemic has influenced any of your previous answers?

## Population Sampling

Given the qualitative nature of this study, the researchers utilized a purposeful sampling approach, in which only those participants who met the specified criteria were eligible to volunteer to participate. Convenience sampling, in which the researchers solicit participation from potential participants from a convenient sample were contacted. Participants were eligible for participation based on the criteria below.

**Criterion One: Expatriate Status.** This study sought to understand how job satisfaction influences retention of expatriate teachers; as such, only those teachers who are expatriates who were currently living and working in the UAE were eligible for participation. The experiences of local teachers are beyond the scope of this study.

**Criterion Two: Length of Time in the UAE.** This study sought to understand the ways in which time teaching abroad influences job satisfaction, only those teachers who are expatriates who have spent a minimum of one year abroad, teaching in the UAE, were eligible for participation. Expatriate teachers with less than one year teaching experience abroad are beyond the scope of this study.

**Criterion Three: Teachers with Prior Classroom Experience Outside of the UAE.** This study sought to understand how teaching abroad may influence job satisfaction compared to teaching in the expatriate’s home country; as such, only teachers who have prior teaching experiences before teaching in the UAE were eligible for participation. The experiences of teachers that have no experience teaching outside of the UAE are beyond the scope of this study.

**Criterion Four: Age of the Participants.** Due to the criteria above, this study limited eligibility to teachers who are at least 25 years of age. Teachers under the age of twenty-five will not likely have attained the required years of experience.

**Criterion Five: English Proficiency.** All interviews for this study were conducted in English; as such, only teachers who are proficient in English were eligible for participation. The experiences of teachers that are not proficient in English are beyond the scope of this study.

Six teachers, two from the United States and four from the United Kingdom, were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol to collect in-depth data concerning their lived experiences living and working in the UAE. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym and their background details have been presented in ranges in order to safeguard their anonymity. The participants’ background information is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Participants Background Information

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Years Teaching	Country of Origin
Rick	Man	30-35	8	United Kingdom
Justin	Man	40-45	10	United States
Ramona	Woman	45-50	12	United Kingdom
Violet	Woman	40-45	18	United Kingdom
John	Man	35-40	15	United States
Coleen	Woman	40-45	14	United Kingdom

## Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed through multiple stages of coding, employing an interpretive analysis, in which descriptive data are interpreted for meaning as it relates to the research questions guiding the study. Toward this end, the researchers began with open coding, in which basic units of data related to the research questions were identified. These open codes were then categorized according to similar attributes into axial codes. Open and axial coding was ongoing until data saturation was achieved. Finally, axial codes were classified into selective codes, which were then used to generate themes for the researchers to form the basis of the narrative. The researchers ensured the research questions were adequately addressed, and whether new questions arise. Although it is not possible to remove

all bias, the researchers exerted purposeful effort in applying reflexivity to remain empathetically neutral during the entire research process.

### **Ethics**

Maintaining ethics in research is critical for all researchers. For this study, the researchers ensured that each interviewee was given a consent form that describes the study and gave them a right to withdraw themselves at any time without consequence. All data and personal information solicited during data collection was kept confidential at all times: participants were granted full anonymity and no identifiable information was collected at any time. This is standard for this type of research but of utmost importance. For this research it was imperative all participants felt comfortable in speaking freely and candidly, especially considering their current status as employees. This research was designed to provide individual participants to describe their lived experiences with the aim of developing a greater understanding of the influences that current expatriate teachers face in terms of leaving family, friends, country, and culture behind to make a positive impact in the UAE. If all participants shared openly, the researchers were much better suited to understand these influencing factors and infer potential implications for and future expatriate teachers.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study has been delimited to the scope of expatriate teachers currently living and working, in the UAE. The lived experiences of expatriate teachers elsewhere are beyond the scope of this study. This study was further delimited to those individuals who have spent a minimum of one year abroad and was conducted only in English. While the intent was not to exclude non-native English-speaking teachers from this study, it did require participants to be fluent English speakers, so they are able to express their perspectives fully and freely. Further, the nature of this research rested on the interviewees' willingness to be open and honest. While precautions to maintain confidentiality at all times were taken, there may have been participants who remained concerned; these individuals may have been less willing to share their true perceptions and lived experiences.

Limitations of this study primarily center on the qualitative nature of the study. As this study employed a purposeful sample best suited to address the researchers' questions guiding this inquiry, the findings of this study may not be generalized to other populations. While generalizability is not the goal of this study, its significant value rests on the depth of knowledge concerning the lived experiences of real, expatriate teachers in the UAE.

## Results and Discussion

This study examines the degree to which job satisfaction and work-life balance may influence the length of stay of expatriate teachers in Ras Al Khaimah public schools. The analysis revealed three selective codes that are discussed below. A summary of selected quotes is included below in Table 3.

Table 3. Participants and Selected Quotes

Pseudonym	Selected Quote on Job Satisfaction (RQ1)	Selected Quote on Work-Life Balance (RA2)
Rick	... to be looked down on and to be treated a certain way, it makes it harder to stay here due to that...	...taking [my kids] to the aquarium, to the swimming pool, to the beach all the time, there is a lot more to do here [than back home]...
Justin	I was not given a warm welcome... they just put us in the media room and we kept our stuff there.	I really enjoy it here in RAK... we only work from seven to two, approximately.
Ramona	I miss that... be[ing] more interconnected	[less] preparation time [than back home] because everyone is sharing [the workload]
Violet	Sometimes you work so hard and at the end of the day, the results, your student's results, don't show [how much effort you put in]	I get to spend more time with my kids here than I would get to [in the UK]
John	I had more of a sense of purpose [teaching in the US] and I felt I was connecting with the kids more	...here, I do my job, and go home. I'm not involved in [extra curricula activities] so I have more time for myself
Coleen	...unrealistic work expectations, 30 plus hours and six curriculums. When I was teaching [in a different country], the maximum was 24 hours.	I've met some great people here and really love spending time with my friends.

### Leadership and Community Are Key to Expatriate Teacher's Job Satisfaction

The six participants in this phenomenological case-study report that they feel less satisfied with their professional teaching experiences in the UAE than in other locations. This is primarily attributable to a consistent perception among participants that there is little to no community present – neither in a professional nor personal sense. Justin stated, “When [I] first got [to my first school in RAK], I was not given a warm welcome. We weren't even given our own room. They just put us in the media room and we kept our stuff there. When they had meetings, we had to clear out.” Rick echoed similar sentiments, “As [a black man] and a teacher, it's difficult because you feel like you're trying to make a difference, but then to be looked down on and to be treated a certain way, it makes it harder to stay here due to that...I don't want my kids to experience that as well as they get older...it makes it harder to stay here for as long as I would like to.” Both Justin and Rick indicate that they do feel as though they belong. They were not welcomed into a professional working space in a meaningful way, and Rick even suggests that he is looked down upon due to his race. Romona, likewise, has experienced challenges

associated with race and equity, "...I'm from a really like racially mixed city...and I miss that, like, I miss like the, like equality and just being able to jam with different people...and just be[ing] more interconnected." While this sample of participants are coping through challenges that may, to some degree, be addressed by the school leaders, the reality is that some of these challenges – particularly those faced by teachers of color extend beyond the school and into socially constructed stereotypes. While schools cannot, independently, eradicate racist tendencies, there is a substantial amount of work that could be done to improve the professional and personal environments in which teachers circulate.

These unpleasant experiences are further exacerbated by what participants interpret as poor leadership, coupled with motivational challenges. All six of this sample's population reported experiencing challenges with inconsistent leadership, Justin referred to his school leadership this way, "It's like wearing a pair of shoes all day that are too tight, then getting to take them off." Violet shared even more explicitly her frustration with interacting with individuals whom she feels lack the requisite knowledge and skills, "[someone] in the position of DCM (District Cluster Manager) should know more than I know... [and] should be able to give me valuable advice. I do not understand how some of these people were placed in these positions of leadership." Her experiences indicate that she does not feel that those in senior management positions are well-suited to helping guide those who need their support. This commonly held perception among participants may be a factor in eroding trust between leaders and those they lead (Simons, 1999). This sentiment was articulated by John, when he discussed how he had not received critical guidance from the school on how to process required documentation, "...you have to depend on other people's experiences [and] everyone's experiences [are] not the same... when I got my visa [renewed], it was frustrating because I had to make several trips the MOE office because they weren't effectively communicating what [documentation is] needed." John clearly could have benefitted from clear guidance on common governmental procedures required by expatriate teachers in the UAE, rather than asking his colleagues whom, he reported, experienced different processes. While, surely, schools cannot streamline the implementation of governmental procedures, there is still room for schools to assist and facilitate these processes in meaningful ways.

### **School Leaders' Engagement in Improving Behavior Management Would Improve Satisfaction**

Finally, teachers also reported frustration with the lack of student motivation inside the classroom. Rick shared that he has "seen that it [putting in the extra effort outside of teaching hours] doesn't really make much of a difference [to the students' grades]". John has a similar perspective, "[back in my home country] I taught inner-city kids and I definitely had more sense of purpose and felt like I connected with my students more." John suggests that the system rewards students irrespective of effort or performance, "It's like the kids here, they aren't really that curious. They know [no matter how little effort they put in] they'll get good jobs [after leaving school]." Violet also references effort, and makes a connection to the



role of leadership in fostering both student and teacher motivation, “I think in [my home country] there are tangible results for whatever effort you put in. Things are standardized, so if you taught the kids the right curriculum, you knew that at the end of the day, at the end of the term... the kids would do well, and you would feel good as a teacher.” Rick added how this lack of motivation influences his approach to his classes, “[I used to] pour everything into [my lessons], work hard, [give] the best lesson I could give, spend time after school. As time goes on, I’m not putting as much effort into [preparing lessons].” These quotes from the teachers clearly demonstrate a situation in which secondary students, broadly speaking, lack motivation to exert effort in their learning, and whereby teachers are not recognized for their efforts. These two challenges taken collectively definitely impact a teacher’s perception of job satisfaction.

### **Positive Work-Life Balance May Influence Expatriate Teachers’ Length of Stay in the UAE**

Respondents in this purposeful sample reported, overall, high levels of work-life balance, with some even suggesting they have achieved a better quality of life in the UAE, than in their home country. “...I really enjoy it here in RAK... we only work from seven to two, approximately,” Justin shared. Rick concurred, “...taking [my kids] to the aquarium, to the swimming pool, to the beach all the time, there is a lot more to do here [than back home].” Ramona added, “[less] preparation time [than back home] because everyone is sharing [the workload]”. Violet also alluded to having more free time in the UAE when compared to the UK “I get to spend more time with my kids here than I would get to [in the UK]”. The expatriate teachers included in this sample clearly enjoy living in the UAE, despite the dissatisfaction they encounter at their work places. This was especially evident during the global, COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants reported that the Pandemic made it easier for them to save money, stay motivated, and gave them more time to be at home with their families. Coleen shared that she “[joined] focus groups [and] create[d] storyboards for the books and everything for free, because I was just motivated [even with] a heavy workload...now that I’m back in school, I don’t have [that motivation]. Maybe it’s [the] extra commuting time.” Coleen suggests, here, that teaching online allowed her have motivation to teach her students; with the return to on-ground instruction, she is finding that more difficult. Given the physical distance away from their work places, and the greater amount of teacher-independence associated with online instruction during the pandemic, this increase in motivation may indicate that teachers respond positively to opportunities to exercise greater autonomy. Ramona agrees with Coleen’s perspective, “Teaching online was amazing! You could suddenly teach a fully lesson. That’s all gone now.” Justin, however, suggests this motivation gap may be due to the behavioral challenges teachers encounter in the classroom:

I loved teaching the kids online because one of the problems I had with classroom management was just the physicality of keeping kids in their seats...the few kids

[who were] interested, genuinely interested, [they are] at the front of the class...and the other kids are like (pause) you know you're like wasting half the class trying [just to] manage the other kids. It's like impossible to teach...going fully online; those kids that didn't want to pay attention, you know, they just didn't participate... honestly that was okay with me. (laughing) I would just focus on the kids that did want to participate.

Here, Justin describes his experience with managing behavior in the physical classroom, and the reality that children who choose to pay attention are less distracted by students who are disengaged. This, too, demonstrates the need for school leaders to be more actively involved in supporting teachers in managing both student engagement and student behavior. In short, engaged leadership, which provides meaningful administrative and professional support to teachers, along with community building are key to expatriate teacher's job satisfaction and the retention of talented teachers in the UAE.

### **Recommendations**

While the participants in this study do not explicitly link their perceptions of job satisfaction to intended length of stay in the UAE, it is clear that their experiences as Cycle Two and Cycle Three teachers in the public school system do not foster community and lack the leadership required to support teachers in overcoming critical challenges. This lack of leadership and community certainly do not motivate teachers to want to stay. That being said, there are actions that could improve the quality of professional experiences to promote the motivation to remain teaching in the UAE. Toward that end, two notable recommendations are noted: the purposeful promotion of belonging and community and the engagement of stakeholders in the community to combat both explicit and implicit bias against teachers of differing ethnic and racial groups.

Firstly, the researchers recommend that both teachers and schools would likely benefit significantly investing effort in constructing meaningful onboarding policies and procedures purposefully designed to foster belonging in and among the school faculty (Stein & Christiansen, 2010). Developing community provides those who are a part of the community with support, both in terms of professional support and, at times, psychosocial support. School leaders could further promote teacher satisfaction in providing important and necessary support to teachers. This is true both in terms of administrative and professional support. Specifically, implementing procedures that guide individuals new to the country, through the requisite governmental procedures could ease teachers' cognitive overload in assimilating to a new work place in a new country. A team of expatriate teachers who have been working in the UAE for several years could help the newcomers. Research shows expatriate employees value the experiences of other expatriates who have had similar experiences (Bauer, 2022). School leaders should also be providing support and guidance to teachers on how schools could promote student engagement and motivation. Teacher satisfaction is correlated to student discipline (Toropova, Myrberg, & Johansson, 2021) so school leaders should ensure student discipline is a priority. Currently, teachers are left to work on this in isolation, when a whole-

school approach is clearly needed. When leaders respond to the concerns of those they lead, trust is built (Northouse, 2021) and professional learning communities can begin to form. Without the right leadership, it is likely that little positive change will occur to promote the job satisfaction and experiences of Cycle Two and Cycle Three public school teachers.

The second recommendation from the researchers involves community engagement. Given the very real bias and stereotyping experienced by expatriated teachers of color, it would benefit schools, teachers, and community well to implement community outreach programs that engage families with their children's learning and participation at school. Research demonstrates that when schools engage with their local communities, several benefits arise. Notably, in this particular instance, it would provide meaningful and positive exposure to teachers from differing ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds. Providing opportunities for families and individuals to interact in meaningful ways promotes empathy, and may help to alleviate bias and stereotyping (Lueke & Gibson, 2016; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Community engagement has also been shown to positively influence student engagement and parental involvement – both of which then, in turn, tend to improve student performance (Fan & Chen, 2001). The design and implementation of community engagement programs, however, requires school leaders who listen to teacher concerns and are committed to improvement, not simply maintaining the status quo. Should this go unaddressed, it is likely that teachers of color will continue to face bias, discrimination, and possibly abuse from certain areas of the public. This will, undoubtedly, make retaining talented teachers of color challenging.

## **Conclusion**

The Ministry of Education would benefit from higher retention rates and cost savings, and the teachers benefit from lower stress levels. As long as the Ministry seeks to hire expatriate teachers, it would be appropriate and to consider what could be done to improve teacher job-satisfaction. Creating and maintaining satisfactory work environments benefits multiple stakeholders. Satisfied employees tend to be better at their jobs, and also tend to experience higher levels of motivation, and length of stay with organizations (Pepe, Addimando, & Veronese, 2017). The findings of this study indicate that work environments for expatriate teachers could be improved; toward this end, the researchers recommend implementing specific policies and procedures for expatriate teachers that improve both on-boarding and assimilation processes. Additionally, investing in community building will provide teachers with much needed professional and, potentially, social-emotional support. These initiatives will likely have a positive influence on students, as well, as research indicates that improve school-community engagement may promote student performance, overall. Further, engaging with local communities also provides opportunities to build empathy and work to combat bias and stereotyping some expatriate teachers encounter. This is particularly true for teachers of color who, in addition to the stressors associated with teaching in a

foreign country, may also be coping with maltreatment from some areas of the public. In short, the findings of this study suggest that engaged school leaders who emphasize building a sense of community and belonging could help improve job satisfaction, maximize work-life balance, and improve the retention of talented, expatriated teachers within the UAE.

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## **Teaching English as a Third Language to Minority Adult Learners in Norwegian Secondary Schools**

*By Mohammed Awal Alhassan\**

The aim of this study was to explore English teachers' teaching techniques perceived as important when teaching English as a third language (L3) to minority adult students in secondary schools. Using a quantitative research approach, 95 teachers from two districts in the Viken county of Norway completed a 15-item questionnaire titled. Perceived Strategies for English Teaching Scale and an open-ended question about ways of teaching vocabulary for effective English teaching to support students learning in their classrooms. Descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and t-tests were used to analyse the data. The results showed that teaching vocabulary, reading, and grammar, among others, were strategies considered as important in teaching English. Reflecting on teachers challenging roles in teaching English as L3 to minority adult learners with varied English knowledge a collaborative teaching strategy was found to be very useful. The respondents also identified certain ways of teaching vocabulary to support students learning. Implication for further research is discussed.

*Keywords:* Norway, English teaching, minority students, teaching strategies

### **Introduction**

English as a global language is central for both communication and the development of individual identity (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). However, teacher training programs in Norway do not provide English teachers with the necessary skills to teach English as a third language (an L3) as there is no political decision situating English as L3 in language planning in Norway. In this study the term “L3” is used to mean foreign language study for minority adults who have Norwegian as their second language and learning the English language in addition. Teachers may require multilingual competence to teach English as a third language. In many countries, including Norway, curriculum competence and knowledge of English as a foreign language are important in studies, social and working life. Students should be able to read, write and speak in social settings. To be able to understand and speak English, researchers have noted that students need both the ability and will to use the language supported by grammar and vocabulary to equip students with the necessary competence and skill in English reading, writing, and oral communication (Wilkins, 1972; Macaro, 2003). According to Dörnyei (1998), teaching students is almost impossible if the students are not motivated to learn the language, as learning a foreign language is a long process. Research claims that motivation is the driving force for learning a foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Dörnyei, 1998). In fact, studies show that

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there are more than 400,000-2,000,000 words in the English language, only a small number of these appear frequently in the materials we read, and when we learn these words we cover most of the words needed to communicate in English (Nation, 2013; Macaro, 2003; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). According to Macaro (2003), four essential word categories are important to know to be able to count and explore words; *tokens*, *types*, *word families*, and *lemmas*. *Tokens* refer to the total number of words in a text, for example, there are twenty-two tokens in this sentence. *Types* are the number of different words in a text. Measuring types could be useful if we wanted to measure the range of vocabulary used in a text. To be able to learn and use English, it is essential to know the word categories, which again depends on the will and ability to learn them.

The will and the ability to use the language depend on three factors: motivation, language anxiety, and attitude. Without these factors, long-term goals could hardly be accomplished. While motivation provides both the incentive to initiate learning and move on, language- anxiety is associated with a negative impact on the language learning. It has been found to cause poor performances on tests and influence both the learning and production of foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Gardner (2010) argues that L-anxiety has reciprocal influences on language achievement.

Many teachers lack the necessary techniques or competence to teach English as L3 and many studies concur with this assertion. Although some research has investigated teaching English as L2 little has been done to explore or examine teaching competence of teachers of English as L3, which is directed to minority adult students in the Norwegian context, thus creating a research gap in this area. There is little literature regarding teacher competences for teaching L3 in Norway and there is also a void when it comes to multilingual didactic in the Norwegian teacher education programs (Dahl & Krulatz, 2016; Surlakovic, 2014; Haukås, 2014). As a result of the limited research found from the Norwegian context, this study can give some insight within L3 research, and hopefully contribute to the existing knowledge.

The study, therefore, aimed to explore teaching techniques perceived by teachers as important in teaching English as a foreign language L3. It also aimed to investigate the influence of teachers' background variables on English language teaching among adult learners. These aims underscored examining teachers' teaching techniques and motivation elements in the process of foreign language learning.

### **Literature Review**

Considering the vast amount of research conducted on English as a foreign language, teaching and learning vocabulary and motivation stand out at the international level. There is little literature regarding teacher skills for teaching L3 in Norway, and there is also a void when it comes to multilingual didactic in the Norwegian teacher education programs (Dahl & Krulatz, 2016; Surlakovic, 2014; Haukås, 2014). The few existing ones related to regular students and not adult

minority learners found that teachers in Norway had “moderate” competence in adaptive English teaching. According to the new subject curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020), English is central for cultural understanding, technology development, communication, and identity development. English language is, therefore, an obligatory subject in both Lower and Upper secondary schools. Research shows that the vocabulary knowledge of Norwegian students in Lower and Upper secondary schools as well as adult English learners is low and even lower among minority adult learners (Olsen, 2016; Nation, 2008; Onyszko, 2019). Onyszko (2019) tested vocabulary size and found that the upper secondary school first year (VG1) students had an average receptive vocabulary of 8,338 word families and an average of 4,769 word families for their productive vocabulary size. The same study found that the students heavily relied on high-frequency words when writing in English and that the mid- and low-frequency words were used very limited, and those who performed less had negative attitudes and language anxiety towards English (Gjerde, 2020; Jakobsson, 2018). Motivation is also a widely researched area within L2 and L3 learning. But similarly, there is little research from the Norwegian context.

### **Teacher Techniques for Teaching English as a Third Language (L3)**

Teacher competences are vital to teaching English as a second language (L2) and English as a third language (L3) (Langeland, 2012; Onyszko, 2019; Dahl & Krulatz, 2016). Teacher techniques in the current study are defined as the knowledge and competence needed by teachers to be successful in teaching English as L3 in secondary schools. These techniques include teaching vocabulary, teaching grammar, enhancing positive language attitudes (L-attitudes), reducing language anxiety (L-anxiety), helping students to develop writing and reading skills as well as collaborative teaching among others. There is no single document containing all the key and effective English teaching strategies, but rather an attempt to identify useful ones. Teaching strategies and teacher competencies are considered one of the backbones of effective and successful teaching (Kuyini et al., 2016).

Research on vocabulary, Language attitudes (L-attitudes), and Language anxiety (L-anxiety) in the Norwegian context has shown varying differences in their effects on English language learning. Although vocabulary and motivation are widely studied areas on the international level, less research has been conducted in the Norwegian context. Several of the studies that are found have commented on this research gap, and their studies, along with this, lay the foundation to limit this gap.

Langeland (2012) looked at how the English vocabulary of forty 5th graders developed over three years. She tested English teaching and its effects on pupils receptive and productive written vocabulary and found that the pupils moved slowly, but not evenly, towards greater lexical richness both in their receptive and productive vocabulary through the three years. The receptive vocabulary test (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Version 4) showed an increase in mean from 122.3 to 149.4 from 5th to 7th grade. In teaching writing skills, she found that



students productive writing skills increased. In Langeland's studies it was emphasized that teachers should teach low-frequency words to increase students writing skills.

Helness (2012) conducted a study looking at 57 written texts produced by 7th graders and 57 written texts by 10th graders and compared their vocabulary variation, lexical density, and text length. She found that there was not a difference in lexical density between the two groups, and the vocabulary variation seemed to be higher in grade 10, but these results were found to be inconclusive. 7th graders, however, wrote longer texts, while L3 minority adult learners wrote shorter texts, despite having less time than 10th graders, which Helness implies can be due to the nature of the writing tasks.

Furthermore, techniques such as teamwork, peer tutoring, and collaborative teaching skills are seen to facilitate learning English as a second language (Olsen, 2016). Two master's theses help shed light on teaching English as L2/L3 and knowledge of Norwegian students in lower and upper secondary schools. Olsen (2016) focused on how an explicit focus on vocabulary can facilitate pupils' vocabulary acquisition. He investigated teachers' teachings focusing on content and teacher-initiated focus on teaching the word and found that word teaching improved students' performance in English through teamwork and collaborative learning.

Onyszko's (2019) research investigated teaching/learning English through a few techniques and found that peer-tutoring increased students' participatory responses and thereby enhancing oral presentations as well as increasing receptive and productive vocabulary size of the students. In collaboration both teachers and students harness their own creative thinking and share ideas with each other (Kuyini et al., 2016).

Motivation is also a widely researched area within L2-L3 teaching/learning. Jakobsson (2018) found as part of his study that Norwegian 10th graders' motivation toward English correlated with their grades in written and oral English, thus teacher's ability to motivate students in their teaching of L2 or L3 will enhance performance (Jakobsson, 2018). Motivation is related to attitudes towards learning. Jakobsson's (2018) investigation found that students who reported having negative attitudes towards English got low English grades and the students who reported positive attitudes attained high English grades.

Gjerde (2020) did a research on L-anxiety in oral activities in the English lessons in Norway. She investigated lower secondary English teachers' and pupils' beliefs regarding this. She found, through interviews and questionnaires, that both the teachers and pupils considered high self-exposing activities that included oral communication to be the most anxiety-provoking activities in the English classroom. Gjerde explains that the students reported the fear of making mistakes, being critically evaluated, and being mocked as the main reasons for their classmates' L-anxiety. However, some aspects helped reduce the L-anxiety, such as lower self-exposing activities, like group work, speed-dating, and group games. Additionally, the pupils found it anxiety-reducing when the teacher primarily spoke English during the lessons and if the teacher was calm and patient.

Lastly, a study conducted by Myhre and Fiskum (2020) found that the students' L-anxiety decreased when they had lessons outside in smaller groups. The pupils reported that making mistakes in oral English was one of the main reasons for why they were anxious, hence teachers who encourage working in smaller groups reduced the L-anxiety since not as many people heard the mistakes of a group member. The outdoors also helped reduce L-anxiety because of the lesser theoretical focus they experienced outside, where they could speak more freely without worrying about the accuracy of what they said. Myhre and Fiskum concluded that the students reported an increased willingness to communicate in English when they could use the language in a more realistic setting, and when they had interesting ways of learning. Literature shows that mastery of the English language by teachers makes them speak freely in the class when teaching and students emulate teachers' behaviors also to endeavor to practice their English. These identified strategies are essential when it comes to teaching English as L2/L3, however minority adult students in secondary schools have diverse backgrounds when it comes to level of English knowledge and have diverse needs which of course is a challenge for English teachers. Teachers, therefore, put forward concerns about lack of skills to support students to learn English. Studies on teaching English to immigrant students in Norway have shown that teachers are left on their own regarding effective English teaching strategies to support minority adult students (Surlakovic, 2014; Haukås, 2014). According to Spernes and Fjeld (2017), English teachers and other bilingual language teachers are less considered regarding planning of didactic work in schools. They concluded in their research that bilingual language teachers are not able to use their full potential due to little opportunity at their disposal to contribute to designing and planning of the English teaching curriculum, which in turn might have a negative effect on minority students' English learning (Spernes & Fjeld, 2017).

Norwegian teachers have expressed the need to develop competences in teaching English to adult learners. It seems that teachers who have taken courses and trained to teach English as their main subject are positive and capable of providing better instructional practices than teachers who are not trained or not have English as their main teaching subject to teach English (Damsgaard & Eftedal 2014; Dahl and Krulatz, 2016). Therefore, teachers without the requisite qualification to teach English as a second or third language should be encouraged to do so through teacher training designed for that purpose.

### **Motivation**

Teaching and learning a new language involves both intrinsic and social motivation, and intrinsically motivated students have an inherent interest in what they read and spend more time reading it (Huang & Reynolds, 2022). According to Gardner (2010), motivation is perhaps one of the most important elements in the process of foreign language learning. It has a huge impact on an L2 learner's learning outcome in the sense that an individual's willingness and ability to L2/L3 motivation research has gone through different stages, and researchers have conceptualized various L2 motivation models in the field, from Gardner's socio-

educational model (Gardner, 2010; 2019). This socio-educational model includes instrumentality, integrativeness, and attitudes to learning situations, these three constructs are positively related. It means that learners with high integrativeness see the language learning situation positively and therefore, have high levels of instrumentality (Gardner, 2019). The interrelationship of these three elements can be explained in the interaction of teachers and students in the teaching and learning process. Teachers' motivational role is to enhance students' positive language attitude while at the same time reducing their language anxiety (Huang & Reynolds, 2022). The skill to connect integrativeness, instrumentality and control of attitudes at the same time can be difficult, and the central challenge for teachers in this regard is to identify skills that are important to teach English as a foreign language to students in the classrooms for a greater learning outcome.

### **The Present Study**

Three major research questions were addressed in the study. The first question explored teaching techniques teachers considered as important in teaching English as L3 in the classroom. The second question examined teachers' background variables and their influence on the teaching techniques. Lastly, teachers were asked to identify effective ways of teaching vocabulary/learning words. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What teaching techniques do teachers of L3 consider as important and use in the classroom?
2. What is the influence of teachers' background variables on English teaching techniques?
3. What do teachers consider as effective ways of learning words to enhance minority adult student's vocabulary acquisition?

### **Methods**

#### **Research Design**

The research data was quantitative designed to measure or determine the relationships between Items used in the research to find variability (Creswell, 2003). The quantitative design was to examine relationships between variables employed and teachers' instructional behaviours and practices in the classrooms.

#### **Participants**

Using a quantitative research approach, 95 teachers from lower and upper secondary schools from two districts of Viken county in Norway were invited to and completed a two-part study questionnaire titled Perceived Skills for Teaching English as L3 Scale (PSTESL).

The participants were made up of 40 male teachers (42%) and 55 female teachers (58%). The choice of participants was based on convenience sampling where the researcher considered the willingness and proximity of the schools involved, also because of the pandemic. Out of the 95 participants 15 teachers (16%) had a master's qualification and the rest 80 (84%) had a bachelor qualification. With respect to teaching experience as many as 60 (63%) have taught for more than 10 years and the rest 35 (37%) have taught for five years or less.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Two sets of questionnaires were used to collect the data *Perceived Skills for Teaching English as L3 Scale (PSTESL)*, originally developed by Fer (2007) and modified by the author to suit this study. The first set consists of background variables such as gender, age, training, and experience. The second part consists of 15 items centred on techniques regarding teaching vocabulary, teaching grammar, debating, project work, practicing pronunciation, reading, writing, dictation, lecturing, etc.

Participants were required to rate each item from 1 = Not Important, 2 = Important, 3 = Very Important and 4 = Exceptionally Important. Teachers were required to complete and return the questionnaires to the researcher or representative in their respective schools. Since the questionnaires were to be completed anonymously, consent was implied in the completion and return of the questionnaires. In addition, an open-ended question, which asked teachers to list ways of teaching words to enhance minority adult students learning, was added to the questionnaire. This question was designed to obtain information from teachers about helping students to acquire adequate vocabulary in English.

### **Data Analysis**

The teachers' response data from the questionnaire were subjected to reliability analysis. The results showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.705, which is within the range acceptable for research (Cooksey, 2007). Data were then converted from the raw data into a structure after which the data analysis began. The data were therefore used for further analysis with respect to the study's research questions. Descriptive statistics t-tests and One-way between-groups ANOVA were used to analyze data.

### **Results**

As mentioned above, descriptive statistics and t-tests were used to analyze the data relating to teachers' techniques in teaching English as L3 and the rating of the importance of these strategies as well as the effect on teachers' background variables.

For research question one, the analysis (see Table 1) shows that 12 of the 15 strategy items were rated above 3 on a 4-point Likert-scale classification,

indicating the relative importance of the majority of techniques included in the *Perceived Skills for Teaching English as L3 Scale (PSTESL)*. However, the teachers rated strategies in Teaching vocabulary to meet students' word acquisition (M=3.80) Teaching grammar (M=3.77) and Developing writing skills of students (M=3.57), as the most important. On the other hand, techniques such as reducing language anxiety (3.21), Teamwork (M=2.92) and Enhancing language attitude (M=2.50) were rated as less important.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
4 Teaching vocabulary	95	3.80	0.360
1 Teaching grammar	95	3.77	0.354
11 Developing writing skills	95	3.57	0.548
5 Developing reading skills	95	3.56	0.515
6 Developing speaking skills	95	3.50	0.744
10 Progress assessment	95	3.45	0.623
8 Peer tutoring	95	3.41	0.564
14 Correct pronunciation	95	3.36	0.537
7 Project based work	95	3.23	0.521
13 Involving students in debate	95	3.31	0.734
12 Collaborative Teaching	95	3.22	0.855
3 Reducing language anxiety	95	3.21	0.875
2 Teamwork	95	2.92	0.690
9 Good technology skills	95	2.61	0.585
15 Enhancing positive language attitude	95	2.50	0.618

Valid N (listwise) 95

### Background Variables and PSTESL Scale

The t-test analysis that explored teachers background variables and strategies found statistically significant differences in mean scores on some items for Gender, Extra training in the English language, and Educational Qualification at the  $p=0.05$  confidence level. Details are explained below (see Tables 3 and 4).

### Gender and Teachers' Competencies

The data analysis showed that while gender had no effect on the entire scale, it did have a significant effect on six items of the scale. The items are Vocabulary teaching, Reducing language anxiety, Encouraging language attitude, Developing reading skills, Using Progress assessment information to plan lessons, Collaborative teaching, and use of peer tutoring strategies (see Table 2).

Table 2. T-test for Gender and PSTESL Items

Item		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
4 Vocabulary teaching	Male	40	3.62	0.482	0.000
	Female	55	3.81	0.470	
10 Using progress assessment	Male	40	3.39	0.717	0.000
	Female	55	3.03	0.533	
3 Reducing language anxiety	Male	40	2.74	0.718	0.000
	Female	55	3.33	0.613	
15 Encouraging positive language attitude	Male	40	3.17	0.554	0.000
	Female	55	3.65	0.437	
8 Use of peer tutoring strategies	Male	40	2.11	0.570	0.000
	Female	55	2.71	0.522	
12 Collaborative teaching strategies	Male	40	3.21	0.605	0.001
	Female	55	3.54	0.582	
5 Developing reading skills	Male	40	3.13	0.501	0.009
	Female	55	3.25	0.454	

### Teachers' Extra Training in English Teaching and Strategies

The t-test analysis for the Extra Training in English variable and strategies found statistically significant differences in mean scores on some items for those who received training and those who did not receive such training at the  $p=0.05$  confidence level. Teachers who had training considered the following strategies more important. The strategies are Item 4 Teaching vocabulary to meet the learning needs of students, Item 1 Teaching grammar, Item 11 Developing writing skills, Item 12 Collaborative teaching, Item 15 Encouraging positive language attitudes and Item 8 Use of peer tutoring strategies (see Table 3).

Table 3. Group Statistics for Extra Training in English Teaching

Extra training in English (No =1, Yes = 2)		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig
4 Vocabulary teaching	No	35	3.61	0.549	0.007
	Yes	60	3.85	0.358	
1 Teaching grammar	No	35	3.62	0.776	0.009
	Yes	60	3.49	0.711	
11 Developing writing skills	No	35	3.28	0.504	0.010
	Yes	60	3.51	0.506	
12 Collaborative teaching	No	35	3.52	0.591	0.013
	Yes	60	3.49	0.506	
8 use of peer tutoring	No	35	2.58	0.606	0.006
	Yes	60	2.85	0.358	
13 Involving students in debate	No	35	3.35	0.801	0.011
	Yes	60	2.98	0.908	
7 Project based work	No	35	3.35	0.527	0.044
	Yes	60	3.54	0.505	

### Teacher Qualification and Strategies

The t-test analysis for teachers' educational level variable and competencies, as shown in Table 4, found statistically significant differences in mean scores on some items for those with a Master's degree in English and those with a Bachelor's degree in English as minor at the  $p=0.05$  confidence level. Teachers

with a bachelor's degree rated items 10 (Progress assessment), 1 (Teaching grammar), and 11 (Developing writing skills) higher than those with a master's degree. On the other hand, teachers with a master's degree rated eight strategies items higher than those with a bachelor's degree. The techniques are items 4 (Vocabulary teaching), 1 (Teaching grammar), 11 (Developing writing skills), 6 (Developing speaking skills), 13 (Involving students in debate), 12 (Collaborative teaching), 15 (Encouraging positive language attitude), 9 (Good technology skills), (Use of peer tutoring technique), 7 (Project based work), 2 (Teamwork) and 3 (Reducing language anxiety).

Table 4. Group Statistics for Teacher Qualification

Qualification		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
4 Vocabulary teaching	Bachelor Degree	80	3.68	0.708	012
	Master Degree	15	3.98	0.552	
1 Teaching grammar	Bachelor Degree	80	3.68	0.541	0.000
	Master Degree	15	3.99	0.115	
11 Developing writing skills	Bachelor Degree	80	3.49	0.564	0.000
	Master Degree	15	3.86	0.454	
6 Developing speaking skills	Bachelor Degree	80	3.07	0.322	0.000
	Master Degree	15	3.60	0.513	
13 Involving students in debate	Bachelor Degree	80	3.63	0.541	0.000
	Master Degree	15	3.97	0.537	
8 Use of peer tutoring strategies	Bachelor Degree	80	2.46	0.605	0.000
	Master Degree	15	2.85	0.511	
12 Collaborative teaching	Bachelor Degree	80	3.71	0.503	0.002
	Master Degree	15	3.91	0.562	
15 Encouraging positive language attitude	Bachelor Degree	80	3.09	0.669	0.000
	Master Degree	15	3.59	0.859	
9 Good technology skills	Bachelor Degree	80	3.46	0.902	0.035
	Master Degree	15	3.53	0.648	
7 Project based work	Bachelor Degree	80	3.14	0.403	0.000
	Master Degree	15	3.55	0.521	
3 Reducing language anxiety	Bachelor Degree	80	2.48	0.753	0.036
	Master Degree	15	2.67	0.501	

### Experience in Teaching English and PSTESL Items Scores

A One-way ANOVA carried out for Years of teaching experience showed significance for only vocabulary teaching ( $p=0.04$ ) (see Table 5). Teachers who have taught for more than 5 years considered vocabulary teaching as more important than those with less experience. All the other items showed no significant differences with experience (see Table 5).

Table 5. ANOVA: Years of Teaching Experience and Vocabulary Teaching

	<b>Years</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Anova</b>
Vocabulary teaching	1-5	10	2.42	0.744	0.043
	6-10	25	2.54	0.732	
	11-15	40	2.70	0.712	
	16-20	10	2.92	0.678	
	21-25	5	2.83	0.810	
	Over 25	5	3.23	0.595	
	Total	95	3.04	0.732	

## Discussion

This study examined the strategies Norwegian teachers perceive as most important in their effort to teach L3 adult minority students in grade 10. The descriptive results showed that teachers rated competencies such as vocabulary teaching, grammar teaching, development of reading and writing skills, mastery of subject, and collaboration as most important. These competencies are noted as important in other studies (Bjørke, 2018; Schmitt, 2014), and also vocabulary teaching and mastery of the English subject as some of the competencies teachers lack that constitutes a low level of English teaching skills (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; De Wilde & Eyckmans, 2017). The study findings depart from a similar study in Swedish where teachers considered competencies in project work and collaboration as important (Henry, Korp, Sundqvist, & Thorsen, 2018). They further state that in projects work, teachers get entire classes caught up in a tide of motivational energy, where enthusiasm and goal-targeted behavior becomes the focus. However, very little can be conveyed by the ability to do projects and debate in English without vocabulary and grammar (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020). This is not surprising because in collaboration, teachers suggest improvements for students, while similarly students easily collaborate with each other to improve their arguments and phrasing of sentences.

Another finding of this study was the use of technology and mastery of the English language as a teaching subject in the class as an important teaching skill for teachers for both motivation and as an interactive communication tool for learning pronunciations and speaking. This finding is not surprising. In Norway, digital competence and skills are included as core elements of a national curriculum of which teachers are aware, so it is vital to be able to use computers properly both for teachers and students. This finding supports the study of Rasmussen and Damsa (2016) of a relationship between teachers' digital competence and skills as an important factor in student's learning. Teachers who are conversant and comfortable to use computers, iPad and apps can make teaching more interesting for students. Technology skills impact students' motivation to learn and is seen as a key factor that influences the rate and success of L3 learning in general (Dörnyei, 1998). Further, mastery of subject enthuse students' motivation. Specifically, motivation has an important role in the vocabulary learning process, where motivation should be present to expect the learners to "notice" the words (Nation, 2013). Indeed, students need vocabulary to be able to learn a new language.



Development of reading skills, development of writing skills and progress assessment were rated low in terms of importance. The findings of low ratings in reading and writing skills may partly be a result of students not wanting to read in class based perhaps on English language anxiety. However, this result is surprising because teachers are supposed to encourage both reading and writing skills of students. It is important to note that low scores on reading skills may impact vocabulary acquisition and teachers' competencies, and their desire to seek enhancement of such knowledge and its use in the classrooms (Nation, 2013). Similarly, language attitude and language anxiety in teaching were overlooked and not considered very important even though they constitute useful strategies in language teaching for supporting students (Dörnyei, 1998; Tseng & Schmitt, 2008).

This finding is in contrast with previous studies on the connection between vocabulary learning and L-anxiety, where it was found that L3 anxiety can influence both vocabulary learning and production and that L3 anxiety can lead to poor performances on vocabulary tests, as well as lead to a longer time to learn new vocabulary and longer time completing vocabulary test (MacIntyre, 2017; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). High levels of anxiety can often come across as fears of using the language. Teachers' scores for enhancing language attitude and reducing student's language anxiety were low even though these strategies have been found to promote learning motivation. This finding is surprising and may perhaps be explained by teachers' background variables not captured by the current study.

Teachers' background variables of training and experience in English teaching showed significant differences in the use of vocabulary teaching strategies. Findings from teachers' background variables imply that, teachers with training and experience considered these competencies more important than those without training or experience. This finding supports the fact that training increases teachers' mastery of subject appreciation of effective English teaching practices such as encouraging positive attitudes, reducing students' language anxiety and collaborative output task strategies, which have been found to be important to outcomes in English teaching (Byrne, Flood, & Shanahan, 2012; Hashemi, 2011; Ozturk & Gurbuz, 2014; Young, 1990).

### **How Words in English could be learnt to Enhance Minority Adult Students Learning**

The best ways to grasp English words fast identified by participants involved teaching through working with vocabulary strategies such as: teaching high-frequency words where students learn words through memorization, using word card, using word parts, using dictionaries effectively, connecting words to images or rhymes and rhythms, making word lists or mind maps, as well as encouraging students to watch English films, play games, and use English actively. While this mirrors previous studies (Nation, 2013; Gausland & Haukås, 2011), there is variation regarding what strategies teachers see as important and what is expected of teachers as experts in teaching English as L3 to minority adult learners.

Emphasis is being put on low- frequency and mid-frequency word learning in other studies as opposed to vocabulary strategies. The point here is that once the learners understand how to use some vocabulary strategies, the teacher can provide texts with high-frequency words, and the learners can learn new vocabulary by themselves with the help of the strategies. Studies have shown that there are only 13 different words that make up 25 percent of the words we read, and there are 100 words that make up 50 percent of the words we read. These words are called high-frequency words, and it important to teach them in language learning. Studies show that when teachers teach high-frequency words they will be covering most of the English words students need to know and also that words can be learnt out of school exposure (Nation, 2013; De Wilde, Brysbaert, & Eyckmans, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

The study provides a unique picture of the perceptions of teachers in Norway about teaching strategies required for effective instructional delivery in the classrooms. Underpinned by Gardner's motivational theory, the study explored English teaching strategies and how language attitudes and language anxiety might contribute to motivation to study English and found that when teachers are confronted by students with a range of English learning anxiety, learning becomes difficult with resulting low performance and collaborative output. In this sense the study's findings reveal teachers' encouragement of positive attitudes of students toward the learning of English through mastery of the subject by teachers. The findings also provide grounds for developing a meaningful English training curriculum in Norway and teachers teaching adult minority students based on research evidence. Participants' responses both align with and contradict literature on what works when teaching English to minority adult students. This finding supports Dahl and Krulatz (2016), Surlakovic (2014) and Haukås (2014) who found teachers using generic strategies and call for more research in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. Thus, any new training curriculum could explore those contradictions while simultaneously addressing the identified strategies. What is worth pointing out in this study is that English teaching should not be up to the individual teacher but should be part of a broad research and teacher education in English. The issue of why some strategies work for some and not all is a pointer for further research.

### **Limitations and Future Study**

This study has some limitations. The first limitation is focusing only on L3 teaching of minority adult students, which could not obtain consensus in the general teaching of L3 English. Since one of the aims of this study was to find results that could be useful for teachers in adult minority students' classrooms it was considered necessary to stick to these classes. This, could however have influenced the results since the teachers participating in this study might have been

better or worse at teaching English as L3 in general Norwegian 10<sup>th</sup> and VG1 graders.

Also, this study did not test English teacher's competencies on identified items. However, this was not the aim of the study. Given the limitations of this study, and the limited number of similar studies conducted in the Norwegian secondary school setting, further research is recommended in the general Norwegian English teachers' strategies to teach L3. It will also be interesting to investigate the connection between vocabulary knowledge, L-attitudes, L-anxiety and how these factors affect the teaching and learning of the English language.

Regardless of the limitations of this study, it aimed to address a gap in several areas of L3 research in the Norwegian secondary grade setting. It set out to investigate these areas and provide insight for teachers.

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## **Enhancing English Language Skills through a Collaborative Drama Project**

*By Ridha Mardiani\* & Merina Hanifah<sup>‡</sup>*

We have to admit that drama activities can give a variety of benefits for English foreign language learners of all ages in Indonesia. This article describes how a collaborative drama project could enhance twenty-seven undergraduate students in the sixth semester of the English education study program of a small private college in Cimahi, West Java, Indonesia. Drama, which could be considered a literary exposure for the participants, is one subject being taught as intra-curricular activities for 3 credit hours per semester, where they took the subject for the whole semester. The final assignment for this subject is a collaborative drama project in the English language. The article summarises the benefits of using collaborative drama activities to enhance the participants' English language skills and offers recommendations for the implementation of similar projects for other language instructors. Further, the challenges of organizing collaborative English language drama projects at the college will be outlined. As the final elucidation of this article, the participants' experiences during the collaborative drama project were analysed briefly through an interview as feedback on the research. Their self-perceived learning through collaborative drama is also highlighted.

*Keywords:* collaborative drama project, English language learning, undergraduate students

### **Introduction**

In the Indonesian curriculum for all level schools starting from elementary, junior secondary, secondary until tertiary, English is one compulsory subject that must be taught to learners as the first foreign language. At the tertiary level of education such as in our institution, students who are eager to prepare themselves to be English teachers could choose to study in our English study program. We offer a good arrangement and quality of English education since our curriculum has recently been adjusted to the newest governmental law of education to accommodate pedagogical content knowledge, language content knowledge, curricular knowledge, assessment and evaluation, and information computer technology in the curriculum of the English study program.

In our school context, the students are expected to be able to use English in daily life, especially for communication. Thus, English learners need to be actively using English to master it well. Students' involvement and engagement in the learning activities could help them escalate their language skills (Akbari, Naderi, Simons, & Pilot, 2016). One way to enhance students' English language skills is by performing a Drama play. Drama activities are not only useful in helping the

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students acquire foreign language skills, but they can also foster students' development of intellectual, social, and emotional skills (Schenker, 2017). Doing a collaborative drama project provides opportunities for students to engage in learning activities and foster their language skills (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020; Guliyeva, 2011; Nanda, 2016; Schenker, 2017; Uysal & Yavuz, 2018).

Previous studies have pointed out some benefits of having a collaborative drama project for students. Alasmari and Alshae'el (2020) found that drama helped students to develop their communicative skills, such as speaking fluency and stronger bonding with the teacher and their peers. In addition, students' motivation, self-esteem, spontaneity, and empathy improved during the drama activity. Another benefit is that the students increased their vocabulary acquisition (Alshraideh & Alahmadi, 2020); and social engagement and language comprehension (Nanda & Susanto, 2021). More empirical studies on the effect of drama exercises on the foreign learner are needed (Uysal & Yavuz, 2018). Thus, this study aims to describe how a collaborative drama project could enhance EFL undergraduate students' language skills, especially in terms of speaking skills at a small private college in West Java, Indonesia, where most of the students are from a homogeneous cultural background that is Sundanese. Some recommendations and challenges in conducting drama activities will also be outlined in this paper.

### Literature Review

Drama activities have been employed by teachers in classroom activities. Drama in language learning is seen as an authentic and contextualized learning approach that promotes students' engagement, which is critical for students' language development (Anderson & Loughlin, 2014; Uysal & Yavuz, 2018). Some research found that students who engage in drama activities gained positive effects, such as increased oral language use, creative writing, and reading comprehension as they involve in the activities (Anderson & Loughlin, 2014; Schenker, 2017; Stinson, 2015). Some researchers emphasize that drama provide valuable opportunities to develop students' communicative competence (Alasmari & Alshae'el, 2020; Alshraideh & Alahmadi, 2020; Anderson & Loughlin, 2014; DeCoursey & Trent, 2016; Guliyeva, 2011; Nanda, 2016; Schenker, 2017; Stinson, 2015; Uysal & Yavuz, 2018).

In this article, drama is defined as the portrayal of fictional or non-fictional events through the performance of written dialogue either prose or poetry. Dramas can be performed on stage, in film, or on the radio. Dramas are typically called plays, and their creators are known as "playwrights" or dramatists." Etymologically, the term "drama" comes from the Greek word which means an act or a play and to do or to act. The two iconic masks of drama-the laughing and the crying face- are the symbols of two of the ancient Greek Muses: Thalia, the Muse of comedy, and Melpomene, the muse of tragedy (Langley, 2019). Drama promotes students' communicative competencies through increased language use frequency. It allows them to gain more vocabulary through drama play and peer interactions, have clearer pronunciation and intonation, enhance fluency, be more expressive, and

obtain more knowledge of grammar (Gill, 2013; Schenker, 2017; Thirsk & Solak, 2012).

Additionally, the drama could boost students' communication skills through collaboration with others. Doing drama activities requires collaboration between students-students and student-teachers throughout the process (Nanda & Susanto, 2021; Stinson, 2015). The collaborative activities could help students to develop themselves in cooperating with others, which includes negotiating ideas and giving supportive feedback to achieve a shared goal (O'Toole, Stinson, & Moore, 2009). These activities are helpful to boost their emotional development, interpersonal skills, and teamwork (Dawoud, Hasim, & Saad, 2020; O'Toole, Stinson, & Moore, 2009; Schenker, 2017; Stinson, 2015; Uysal & Yavuz, 2018). As students work together, are heavily involved in the activity, and do something different from the everyday learning activities, their creativity, motivation, and self-confidence could increase along the process (Gill, 2013; Nanda & Susanto, 2021; O'Toole et al., 2009; Uysal & Yavuz, 2018). The increased creativity, motivation, and self-confidence lead to students' achievement and spontaneous language use (DeCoursey & Trent, 2016; Nanda & Susanto, 2021).

Practicing drama also allows the students to widen their perspectives by exploring a world that they never experienced, as they are stepping into others' shoes. This exploration could lead the students to practice their empathy and reflect on themselves as they see the similarities as well as the differences between them and the characters (O'Toole, Stinson, & Moore, 2009; Schenker, 2017). While performing dramatic activities, students need to observe and be aware of their surroundings, as they have to coordinate with other performers. Being aware and reflective of the situation is critical for good dramatic communication (Maley & Duff, 2005). In short, students' affection and focus are being upskilled through drama.

Despite the benefits of doing drama, there are some challenges in conducting drama activities in language learning. Firstly, there are usually not enough credit hours to practice drama in the classroom (Nanda & Susanto, 2021). Due to the limited time, it is quite difficult to set rehearsal schedules that could fit all members of the group (Schenker, 2017). Secondly, students' creativity in creating, preparing, and performing drama could also depend on the nature of the drama task itself (Jacobs, 2017). In other words, the teachers, school culture, and course expectations could contribute to the drama performance, increasing the complexity of a drama task. Thirdly, the students might have problems memorizing the lines and pronouncing the words, especially when they have to perform a drama in a foreign language (Schenker, 2017). Lastly, logistic and facilities issues could be some of the challenges in conducting a drama play (Shakfa, 2012; Schenker, 2017). Some schools or institutions might not have an appropriate venue to perform the play. In addition, preparing the props, costumes, lighting, and all logistics required for the play could be time-consuming.



## Methods

### Research Context

This study is conducted in one small private college in Cimahi, West Java, Indonesia where students who want to be English teachers are trained in an English study program. Drama is an intra-curricular subject, which is purposively included in the curriculum of undergraduate study program. The researchers perceived that the uniqueness of this study is that drama is taught to the students who do not have literary or arts background since education is the main emphasis of the English study program. The students are not prepared to be professional actors or actresses, in reverse they just learn how to appreciate literary work through drama. None of the courses in which drama pedagogies play a dominant role, on the contrary drama includes acting out any parts of the play, even some scripts were written by the students themselves. Due to the English study program's interest in artistic student performances, collaborative drama activity was implemented in the English language as a final project at the end of the semester. They would perform their own drama on the classroom stage, therefore they started to form groups, discussed the theme of their drama, wrote the scripts, and decided the content and the characters in the drama. In this phase, the lecturer helped the students direct their own drama, including the length of their performances around 30 to 40 minutes.

Actually, before preparing the collaborative drama the lecturer had explained basic theories of drama, which covered terminologies, history of drama, character and characterization, dialogue, monolog, etc. as it is outlined in the syllabus. It seemed appropriate for a first attempt at staging an entire play. The students were engaged in this activity, particularly because they are going to work in groups collaboratively, which is important in the activity. They had to practice for approximately eight weeks before performing, which made the engagement became more intense. During drama practices, the researchers observed the activity to see the peer interactions that occurred in each group and their speaking ability.

During practice, each group also prepared posters to invite their friends or lecturers to watch their performances. Reading lines was first practiced as their favourite part and discussed with the lecturer their goals and preferences for participation in the play. Before rehearsals began, the lecturer evaluated the scripts and made several cuts if it was needed considering it a challenge for students to memorize the dialogue. The first round of rehearsal consisted of simply reading the lines together. Related to the student's speaking ability, the students assessed each other and gave feedback on their peers' pronunciation, intonation, and pace. They also translated the lines to make sure that everyone in the group had a good understanding of the content, especially their own character lines. After the first round of rehearsal was completed, which took approximately two weeks, the rehearsal moved to the act of their own characters as they were about to perform on the stage. The stage was decorated in their own classroom since the main auditorium was renovated, so they had to use available rooms. It took a long time

for the students to memorize their own lines. Thus, in the first few rehearsals on the stage, they read their texts. Only after the students had memorized all the texts, they were able to act out their roles freely. It was a great challenge for some students to memorize the lines in English as a foreign language. Luckily, they collaborated with their peers in doing it and they motivated each other during the practice session.

After the second round of rehearsals, the participants were more ready to act out the roles and prepared their props and costumes. Actors, the director, and lecturers all contributed to creating and bringing props and costumes. These were important for students as they helped them improve their acting. Towards the end of the semester, as the performance date got closer, each group had its own schedule to have more rehearsals. This improved their capacity to memorize the whole dialogue, acted out their characters in the play more confidently, and performed their drama as well as they could. Some of the students even made some improvisation and gave some new ideas during the practice stage as they had a better grasp of the stories and characters. The rehearsals took half a semester since the other half was used to learn the basic theory of drama, then here it came when each group should perform their collaborative drama.

The plays were performed one Friday morning until late in the evening. The classroom was decorated based on each group's theme, so it took several minutes for each group to redecorate it when shifting from one group to the other. The lecturer, students, and the audience enjoyed the performances tremendously. Some students made improvisations on their dialogues during the play for various reasons. Everyone was proud of his or her achievement in performing their characters in the plays. The performances were a huge success. The researcher as well as the lecturer were so proud of the participants' speaking English dialogue where mostly Sundanese English accents were not as clear as it was during the rehearsals. The basic line as the main focus of this article was why some poor English-speaking students could speak English well during the performance, which the researcher guessed because of drama impact on their English learning. Reflecting, there were certainly some challenges, but also some benefits resulting from collaborative drama activity.

### **Research Site and Participants**

The study utilized a single case study methodology with some elements of ethnography. The study was located within an interpretive paradigm. Ethnographic inquiry is qualitative and naturalistic (Yin, 2018; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011) and peer was carried out without disturbing the natural setting. Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Razavieh (2010, p. 29) define case study research as "a type of ethnographic research study that focuses on a single unit, such as one individual, one group, one organization, or one program. The goal is to arrive at a detailed description and understanding of the entity (the "case")."

The selection of the study site was based on the school's reputation of maintaining its own characteristics as one school of higher learning that prepares English teachers in Cimahi, West Java, Indonesia. Besides, one researcher is one

faculty staff in the research site. The participants are the sixth-semester students divided into two classes A and B. Thus, they have learned Speaking subjects for four semesters starting from Speaking 1 (English for survival). For this study, the researchers took one class consisting of 27 students as the participants in which most of them speak Sundanese as their regional dialect or indigenous language since the majority were from several areas in West Java. Their cultural background was resemblance homogeneous Sundanese cultural background. Their English ability belongs to low-moderate level ability seeing from their grades achieved during Speaking subjects. Presumably, this lower speaking ability was caused by their inability to articulate their ideas or opinion in English.

Before this study commenced, we discussed our research project with the participants as part of our research ethics (Bickman & Rog, 2008). Although they did not fill out the consent form openly, they were all well informed about this research whether they agreed or declined to participate in this research project. In this study, the researchers played their roles as participant observers to get the 'emic' perspectives of the students throughout the project. We attended the groups' rehearsals once when they were preparing for their performance. In addition, we also interviewed some of them after their collaborative drama performance. The 27 students were divided into six groups. The name of the groups retrieved from the students' drama titles: *Loo; This Is Love? Fond of You; The Rose of My Eyes; The Puppet; and Kiznaiver*.

This study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. How does a collaborative drama project enhance students' English language skills?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of collaborative drama projects performed by the students?

## **Instruments**

Several instruments were employed to gather the data; observation, questionnaire, and interview. The observation was used to provide a detailed description (Mansell, 2011) of the students' collaborative activities and information on their speaking skills. The students' collaborative activities and peer interaction were observed and written in field notes. The students' speaking skill was observed with the help of an observation sheet that was structured from CEFR descriptions of speaking proficiency.

Twenty-seven students were observed in this study. The observation was conducted twice; once during the drama practice of each group, the other one was conducted during the final drama performance. Both of final performance and process of practicing are recorded by video recorder and audio recorder. To figure out the kind of peer interaction that existed during the process of drama performance preparation, as well as students' perception of their speaking skills before and after having a drama performance, we also distributed a questionnaire to all of the 27 participants. It was conducted to gain some insights into the students' points of view related to the peer interactions that existed during drama

performances as well as their speaking skills before and after drama. The data collected from the questionnaire was also used to provide more evidence for the findings (Yin, 2018). The questionnaire consists of 51 questions. It was divided into three sections: peer interaction in collaborative drama; speaking skills in pre-drama and drama activities; and questions related to drama performances.

Finally, to pursue in-depth information around the topic and to follow up on certain responses to the questionnaires and observations (McNamara, 1999), an interview was employed in this study. The result of the interview was analysed to support and assure the discussion from observation and questionnaire data. The interviewee was seven students who represent low, moderate, and high skills in speaking English. The interviewees were given codes such as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, etc. To abbreviate it, they will be mentioned as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, and P7 in the following sections.

All data from observations, questionnaires, and interviews were all gathered and analyzed by Creswell's (2014) thematic analysis. The data were generated into three themes: peer interaction, benefits of doing drama, and challenges. Each theme is presented in the following section.

## Results

This section is devoted to depicting the results of data analysis, which leads to the findings. We displayed the data according to the themes as the focus of the study. We implemented the ways to ensure that the research results are valid by writing the description, interpreting, and triangulating the data from the observation, interview, and questionnaires (Cresswell, 2014). Therefore, the results of data analysis were displayed from the three sources of research instruments.

### Peer Interactions

Data from students' interviews showed that peer interaction during the drama practice greatly contributed to the students' speaking and acting skills. Having peers who assessed and gave feedback on their performance during pre-activity was influential in helping them to improve their skills.

"All members of the group gave feedback and suggestions on each other's pronunciation and intonation during the practice" – P2.

Other interviewees also mentioned a similar thing. One of them was P7; she said that her group members gave feedback on other members' Speaking aspects.

"We gave suggestions and corrections on some of our friends' Speaking if there was something off" – P7.

An example of the giving and receiving feedback activity was seen in one observation of practice sessions. When P4 performed his line, he mispronounced "*chill out*" as "*child ot*," his friends immediately gave correction and said "*chill*

out” appropriately. He acquired it and said, “*oh, chill out.*” This interaction represented that the students assessed other members’ speaking skills during the practice and gave feedback to achieve the shared goals. This finding is in line with O’Donnel and Topping (1998) who mentioned that in peer learning, students could assess and be assessed by their peers to achieve a certain goal. This type of interaction was called peer assessment (O’Donnel & Topping, 1998).

The peer assessment in P4’s case above brought a positive influence since it helped him to acknowledge his mistake. The observation data revealed that P4 pronounced the phrase “*chill out*” correctly in the final drama performance. It indicated that the peer assessment also helped him to improve his speaking skill. Moreover, this finding validates Nanda and Susanto (2021) who found out that students’ pronunciation developed through drama activities.

Similarly, P1 admitted in an interview that he could have gained more knowledge on Speaking during the practice period. He added that his peers’ explanation was easy to be understood.

“I acquired a lot of knowledge related to speaking, especially about pronunciation from the drama practice. My peers’ explanation was easy to be understood for me. Also, practicing frequently and being drilled by P7 made me give more effort to performing the play.” – P1

P1’s statement above explained that he acquired more knowledge related to Speaking through more exposure to the language. Having partners to practice his Speaking skill was also indicated as a helpful aspect to bring out his best effort of his during the practice sessions. In other words, peers can enhance one’s motivation during the practice period. This finding resonates with Schenker (2017) who states that drama connects students and allows them to make a learning community.

All of the interviewed students mentioned that their teammates had a role as motivators for them. They encouraged each other to practice and to be able to perform their best. One of the interviewees, P4, said that he acknowledged his teammates as a source of his motivation.

“I see my teammates as my motivation. Whenever I see them, I have a motivation to be able to perform my character well”. – P4

The statement above explicated that there was an emotional element formed along the process of practicing the drama. It validates Anderson and Loughlin (2014) who mention that dramatic activities “engages students’ affective states” (p. 268).

Not only contributing to students’ knowledge and motivation, but peer interaction also contributed to students’ self-confidence when they performed on the stage. For instance, P3 said in the interview that she usually felt anxious when she needed to speak in front of many people. However, she felt much more confident when she performed the drama. She said that her teammates radiated confidence that affected her performance positively.

“I think my friends’ confidence affected me. I did not feel nervous on the stage and made some improvisations subconsciously. Maybe because my friends did not express too much anxiety on the stage, so I felt more relaxed and thought that everything was all right.” –P3

P3’s statement above, which said that she did some improvisations subconsciously, resonates with Nanda and Susanto’s (2021) finding. They found out that drama had enhanced students’ creativity, which led them to use the language spontaneously. It also indicated that they were constantly thinking and making decisions as they performed, not only memorizing the scripts.

Similarly, P6 also stated that her teammates’ confidence was contagious. Her confidence increased when she saw her friend make a mistake on the stage, but he kept going without any hesitation. Then, P6 said to her friends:

“He can do that; let us do what he does. We can do it as well.” – P6

P3 and P6’s statements on infectious confidence were also supported by the questionnaire data. Data from the questionnaire showed that 79% of 27 students felt that their friends’ confidence affected theirs positively. The finding echoes an agreement with Gill’s (2013) statement that students could gain more confidence through dramatic activities.

However, not all groups radiated confidence. During the observation of the final performance, we found a group that seemed anxious on the stage. All members of the group showed nervousness and were less expressive. One member of the group, P5, stated in an interview that her anxiety on the stage was more dominant than her confidence. She admitted that her friends’ anxiety affected her, but it was not the main source.

“My friends’ anxiety affected me, but that was not the main thing. The main thing was, I was nervous because I tried so hard to remember my lines and the pronunciation.” – P5

The excerpt above explained that anxiety could also be contagious. The questionnaire data also revealed that 66% of 27 students found their friends’ anxiety also affected them. In other words, one’s anxiety on the stage can increase as they see their friends also experience the same thing.

### **Benefits of Doing Drama**

The data revealed some benefits of doing drama. They are listed as follows:

- Enhance students’ motivation

It was mentioned earlier that the students’ recognized their peers as a source of motivation. Additionally, the data presented that being a part of drama activities was essential in increasing the students’ motivation since they had a role and a goal. Being involved in a drama play required students to perform in front of some

audiences. To be able to perform well, they need a lot of practice. The participants in this study said that they practice frequently, which influenced their performance positively.

“I think practicing a lot and being encouraged by my teammates had helped me to perform better on the stage.” – P3

“Drama was something new for me and I was so passionate about it. I suddenly became the ‘campus boy’ one day before performing drama; I stayed at the campus until 1 A.M to prepare everything for the final performance. It was very unusual of me. I think drama performance made me want to go to the class more than before because I am closer now with my friends in the class.” – P1

Performing well on the stage became a goal that made them put in a lot of effort during the practice period. Because of their practice, the observation data revealed that most students’ Speaking skills in the final drama performance were better than in the rehearsals. The finding indicated that doing drama increased the students’ motivation to practice a lot and helped them to enhance their stage performances.

Moreover, P1’s statement also explicates that drama could boost motivation to attend regular classes since he had more close friends. It indicates that drama is beneficial to increase students’ motivation to go to class since it promoted students’ interaction and engagement with the subject. This finding is in line with Schenker (2017) who found out that being involved in dramatic activities is motivating.

Dramatic activities included producing and preparing a drama to play into account. It required a lot of time and involved creative processes along the way. This creative process was found to be essential for students’ interest development. Some students said in the interview that they found some new interests related to literature after producing and playing drama. One of the students, P7, mentioned that she became more interested in drama plays after completing the drama project as a scriptwriter and performer.

“I have more interest in English drama now. Ever since I became a scriptwriter, I started to explore English drama plays and I want to know more about it.” – P7

Similarly, P6 also had a stronger urge to develop her creative writing skill. She said that being a scriptwriter had encouraged her to write more stories.

“I like writing stories, and the last drama project made me more enthusiastic to write more stories.” – P6

P7 and P6’s increased motivation and interest in some aspects of literature after being heavily involved in the drama production was evidence that drama could boost students’ motivation and enhance their interests.

- Enhance students’ speaking skills and vocabulary mastery

Rehearsing for the performance helped the students to increase their speaking skills. The observation data revealed that many students showed improvement in their speaking skills in the final drama performance. It was proven by the result of the students' speaking assessment level in the practice activity and final drama performance. The table of the students' improvements can be seen below.

*Table 1. Students' Speaking Level Improvement*

Students' speaking level	Practice activity	Final drama performance
Elementary	11 students	4 students
Intermediate	8 students	12 students
Upper-intermediate	8 students	11 students

The table above presented the speaking skill level improvement of 27 students in this study based on observation data. It shows that the number of students with a higher level of speaking performance increased. We found that some students spoke clearer and more fluently during the final performance. For instance, during the practice session, student P4 spoke with flat intonation, evident mother tongue, and many mispronounced words. Meanwhile, in the final drama performance, he expressed his lines with better intonation, less noticeable mother tongue, and decreased mispronounced words. To show more details on the students' speaking performance in the practice session and final performance, we presented some samples of students' observation data in Tables 2 and 3.

*Table 2. Students' Oral Presentation in the Practice Session*

No	Name	Proficiency level	Oral presentation in practice activity	Mispronounced words
1	P1	Elementary	Inappropriate pace and intonation. Evident mother tongue, many mispronounced words	Perfectly, truth, explode, expected, excuse me, face, compliment, pierced, surprised, Funny, beautiful, now, that hurt, love, someday, ok, begin, stealing, shiny, bright.
2	P2			Apologize, know, happened
3	P4			Chill out, useless, devil, daughter, apologize, excuse me, wait, about, Girl, creature, time, want, briefly, done, pleasure, out, ambush, wait, marriage, dare, realize, night
4	P3	Intermediate	Natural, smooth, clear pronunciation. Sometimes make inappropriate pace, intonation, stress, and rhythm.	Marriage
5	P5			Years, murder
6	P6	Upper-intermediate	Natural, smooth, clear pronunciation, appropriate pace, intonation, stress, and rythm. No grammatical error but there's repetition	-
7	P7			-



Table 3. Students' Oral Presentation in Final Drama Performance

No	Name	Proficiency level in drama performance	Oral presentations in drama performances	Mispronounced words or grammatical errors
1	P1	Elementary	No evident pause, loud voices but sometimes not clear, and sometimes make inappropriate intonation because the mother tongue is very evident. Missed pronunciation but better than practice activity and still understandable	Funny, face, beautiful, now, that hurt, love, explode, someday, ok, begin, stealing, excuse me, shiny, bright, truth.
2	P2			Third person
3	P4	Intermediate	No evident pauses, or loud voices but sometimes make inappropriate intonation, mother tongue is noticable sometimes. Missed pronunciation but better than Pre-Activity and still understandable	Mispronounced words: Girl, crature, time, want, briefly, done, pleasure, out, ambush, wait, marriage, dare, realize, night. Grammatical errors: Where are you want to go
4	P5			Evident pauses and hesitation, repetition but still can going comprehensibly and sounds natural. Sometimes made appropriate pace, intonation, stress and rythm. Axiety clearly shown sometimes, there are some mispronounced words.
5	P3	Upper-intermediate	Natural, smooth, clear pronunciation, appropriate pace, intonation, stress and rythm, less anxiety shown	Marriage
6	P6			-
7	P7			-

The data above showed that P3 and P4's speaking proficiency leveled up. Moreover, P1, P2, P3, and P4's fluency and clarity improved since they made no evident pauses and produced a more audible voice. This finding is in line with Davies (1990) who mentioned that drama activities promote students' fluency.

In addition, the students' statements in the questionnaire supported the finding on students' speaking improvement. Eighty-one percent of 27 students stated that they acknowledged their improvements in terms of intonation and pronunciation as they performed on the stage. It could happen due to their familiarity with the dialogues and scenes as they practiced persistently.

"I felt better when I performed on the stage because I practiced a lot and had become familiar with the dialogues and scenes." – P7

P7's statement indicated that practicing the drama repeatedly led to familiarity, which gave a positive influence on her performance, such as fluency and clarity. This finding is following Thornbury (2005) who stated that familiarity with the topic could contribute to students' fluency.

In terms of pronunciation, the observation data revealed that some students' pronunciation improved. For instance, P4 mispronounced "*chill out*," "*useless*," "*devil*," "*daughter*," "*apologize*," "*excuse me*," and "*about*" in the practice session. However, he pronounced the words appropriately in the final performance. It indicated that he had better pronunciation after practicing a lot. Moreover, data from the questionnaires showed that 95% of 27 students agreed that familiar words were easier to pronounce. In short, persistent practice led to familiarity, which resulted in improvement in some Speaking aspects. This finding resonates with Schenker (2017) who reported that students' pronunciation improved through drama performance.

Producing and performing drama also gave a positive influence on students' vocabulary acquisition. All interviewees mentioned in the interview that they had some new vocabulary as they engaged in the drama activities.

"Since I became a scriptwriter, I explored things related to drama and stories for references. I acquire some new vocabularies from doing it." – P7

"I gained new vocabulary and learned to express myself as I speak. As an example, I just knew that phrase 'cutie pie' is used in flirting. I thought 'cutie pie' referred to a cute cake." – P4

P7 and P4's statements unveiled that doing drama was beneficial for their vocabulary acquisition. This finding is in line with Alshraideh and Alahmadi (2020) who mentioned that doing drama is beneficial for students' vocabulary acquisition

- Enhance students' interpersonal skills

Being engaged in drama activities required them to have more interaction with peers. The participants admitted that social presence during practice sessions had strengthened their bond. They felt more emotionally connected after performing the drama. For instance, P7 and P3 said in the interview that the members of their group felt like a family.

"I feel more affection towards my group members, for instance, I could see P4 and P1 as my little brothers now. Since I get closer with them, they feel like my family." – P7

"I feel like they are my family now." – P3

This finding explained that the students built community and interpersonal relationships as they engaged in a drama project with their peers. It is in line with Schenker (2017) who mentioned that drama allows students to connect.

All of the interviewed students also stated that they discussed many things with their groups during the practice sessions. The students' communicative competence was also enhanced because they had to share thoughts, ideas, and feedback.

"I learned more on how to give and accept feedback, even though some feedbacks were hard to be accepted." – P2

P2 said that she learned more about acceptance, which indicated that she tried to negotiate herself with the feedback from her peers. Similarly, P5 added that the activities during the project performance made them learn more about appreciating others.

“I learned more values from doing drama. I learned how to appreciate my friends when we were going to make the practice schedule, how to motivate the unconfident ones, and how to complete each other on the stage.” – P5

P5 tried to be more appreciative and supportive during the practice session, which was essential to develop her interpersonal skills. Likewise, P6 stated that through drama activities, she understood more about her peers’ personalities.

“I acknowledge more of my friends’ personalities and characters. I could see it during the drama activity and I figured out how to handle and treat them.” – P6

P6 unveiled that she learned to read her peers and deal with them. It explained that she tried to adjust herself in interacting with her peers.

P2, P5, and P6’s statements were following Stinson and Wall (2003) about the interpersonal skill that developed in drama. They mentioned that drama led students to develop their ability in offering and accepting suggestions, as well as collaborating with others to achieve a shared goal.

### **Challenges**

Having challenges in doing dramatic activities was inevitable. The participants in this study mentioned some challenges in performing drama in the interview. P5 mentioned that her group had a short time to memorize all of the drama scripts, which affected their performances.

“My group only had one week to memorize the whole drama script. So, from the middle until the end of the performance, we made many improvisations. It was difficult to memorize lots of dialogues in a short time.” – P5

The first challenge that we noted from P5’s statement was the short time of preparing the drama. This finding resonates with Nanda and Susanto (2021) who said that having a short time to prepare a drama was an obstacle in conducting the drama itself.

Secondly, P5’s statement above also mentioned that memorizing the lines was challenging for her and her peers. This finding validates Schenker’s (2017) statement that memorizing lines was a challenge in performing drama.

The obstacle led them to make some improvisation during the play. However, as she improvised, she made some evident pauses and hesitation, as well as repetition while performing (see Table 2) due to her anxiety. She admitted that trying to memorize the dialogues and the correct pronunciation as she performed made her nervous.

“I was nervous because I tried so hard to remember my lines and the pronunciation.” – P5

Realizing the fact that she could not memorize everything made her nervous. Similarly, P2 also said that she was nervous when she forgot her lines.

“When I forgot the words for my dialogues, I was nervous.” – P2

Both P5 and P2’s statements indicated that forgetting their dialogues could make them nervous and hesitate in performing their play. This finding revealed the third challenge of performing drama in this study; a speaker’s affective factors could determine someone’s fluency. It is in line with Thornbury (2005) who mentioned that anxiety could give a negative effect on one’s speaking performance.

## Discussion

The results showed that certain activities in collaborative drama activity such as peer tutoring and peer assessment contributed a lot to the enhancement of participants speaking English and acting skills. It should be acknowledged that memorizing lines of dialogue in a foreign language was challenging for some students. English was not their mother tongue and they had low exposure to the language.

Some students frequently mispronounced sounds of [f, v, dʒ, θ, ʃ, tʃ, and ʒ] (see Table 2). We believe that it has something to do with their strong Sundanese language background. The sounds [f, v, dʒ, θ, ʃ, tʃ, and ʒ] are absent in Sundanese, which made them difficult to pronounce words with those sounds and led to mispronunciation (Raharjo, 2010). Meanwhile, as English department students, they were expected to be able to pronounce those sounds, regardless of their ethnic (Fauzi, 2014).

However, the findings pointed out that the students could pronounce the words with better pronunciation in the final performance. For instance, P1 mispronounced ‘*perfectly*’ in the rehearsals as ‘*perpekly*.’ However, he pronounced it correctly in the final performance. It showed his improvement in pronouncing [f] sound. Similarly, P2 and P4 mispronounced ‘*apologize*’ as ‘*apologaij*’ in the rehearsals, but they pronounced it correctly in the final performance. It was an evidence of their improvements in pronouncing [z] sound. We could conclude that the persistent practice, peer assessment, and peer tutoring that they have got during the practice session of drama-based learning contributed greatly in their pronunciation improvements. Not only pronunciation, the students’ pace and intonation were also better in the final drama performance than in the practice sessions (see Table 2 and 3). In other words, conducting a drama-based activity was helpful to help Sundanese students in developing their English Speaking skills (see Gill, 2013).

From the data analysis, we found out that drama activity promoted students’ motivation, speaking skills (e.g., pronunciation, clarity, and flow of speech), vocabulary mastery, and interpersonal skills. In terms of students’ motivation, we found that drama could increase their motivation since they were heavily involved in the entire dramatic activity. It is relevant to Schenker’s (2017) statement that involving students could be motivating, which is a benefit of doing drama activities.

The results also presented that peer tutoring contributed greatly to the participants’ speaking and acting skills. For speaking, the peer tutoring contributed

to their ability in pronouncing English words correctly. It was surely beneficial for the lower-level students. They said that having peers as their tutors were very helpful during the first round of rehearsal. Particularly when they practiced reading lines and memorized their characters' lines because they assessed each other and gave feedback on their performances. This finding is relevant to Nanda and Susanto (2021) who found out that students' pronunciations improved through collaborative drama activity.

Having peers to practice students' speaking skills brought about the best effort during rehearsal sessions, as to motivate them, which caused them to connect and establish a learning community. It also revealed that they had built strong emotional bondage among them during the first round and the second round of rehearsal sessions, which engaged students in affective states (Anderson & Loughlin, 2014). Moreover, it also enhanced participants' confidence. Data from questionnaires showed that their peer's confidence affected them positively, which confirmed that participants gained more confidence through collaborative drama activity (Gill, 2013).

Implementing collaborative drama activity gave some benefits for both students and lecturers since it enhanced students' motivation. Being involved in collaborative drama activity helped participants to enhance their speaking skills and vocabulary mastery. The results of the participants' speaking assessment level in the first round of rehearsal and final drama performance.

In terms of speaking skills, we found some factors that contributed greatly to students' improvement: practicing a lot, drilling with friends during the practice sessions, having partners to speak in English, and students' intrinsic motivation to be able to give the best performance. This finding is relevant to Thornbury (2005), he stated that cognitive factors (e.g., familiarity with the topic, familiarity with the interlocutors), affective factors (e.g., feeling towards the topic and self-consciousness), and performance factors (e.g., mode, and degree of collaboration) are the speech conditions that could contribute to students' speaking fluency.

By all the findings and theories, we summarize some factors that influence students' speaking ability in this study:

1. Practice frequency
2. Peers' drilling
3. Having partners to speak in English
4. Speakers' knowledge
5. Motivation
6. Affective factors

We also found out that the students not only developed productive skills such as speaking, but they also developed interpersonal skills. They stated that they learned more about appreciating others, how to give and receive feedback, and self-positioning. This finding was in line with Stinson and Wall (2003) who mentioned that cooperation as well as offering and accepting feedback supportively are some skills that could be enhanced through drama. We also figured out that

those developed interpersonal skills strengthen the bond among the students, which also increased students' motivation to go to class.

### Conclusions

We found out that doing drama could influence both students' cognitive and affective sides. For instance, the students performed better Speaking skills in the final drama performance than in practice and regular classroom activities. It was due to their persistence in practicing their Speaking and acting skills, which also resulted in a less noticeable Sundanese accent during the final performance. In terms of cognitive aspects, the students demonstrated better pronunciation, clarity, fluency, and vocabulary enhancement. In terms of the affective aspect, drama allowed students to be more motivated. The drama also provided room for them to develop empathy and communicate their thoughts, which resulted in their development of interpersonal skills. It is recommended to apply drama-based pedagogy in EFL classrooms since it offers various benefits for the students. However, teachers might not have sufficient time to conduct drama activities if they only depend on formal teaching hours.

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## **An Analysis of English Writing Errors of Freshmen Students' Essays: The Case of 'Aleksandër Moisiu' University**

*By Miranda Enesi\* & Anisa Trifoni<sup>‡</sup>*

One of the most important elements of English language is the writing skill. It is a competence which human beings are not born with; on the contrary, it is learnt with practice and experience. In this respect, the focus must be on the hard work of English instructors, who deal painstakingly with the four skills, emphasizing writing, by means of comments, advice, explanations etc. In Albanian Educational system, foreign languages are given a considerable space. In high school students study up to two foreign languages. In 'Aleksandër Moisiu' University, apart from the courses that are related to the students' profile of study, a specific importance is given to English Language as well, which helps to enhance their English Language competences. This leads us to believe that students' progress in English is satisfactory; however, this is not always the case with all the skills. Even though students are very good at listening and speaking, when it comes to writing, many of them have serious problems, which are noticed while analyzing their written work. In this respect, this study aims to explore and analyze students' errors through the procedure of error analysis. More specifically, a sample of 100 short essays of our freshmen students from different branches of study have been analyzed with this purpose in mind. This article analyses the types of errors and their frequency of occurrence in English language writing. Based on the research analysis, it was concluded that the mechanical errors, verb tense errors, preposition errors and to some degree article errors, resulted to be more problematic than the other categories. The importance of identifying and analyzing errors is to give English lecturers feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching techniques, information on what is to be reviewed and further notice on what parts of the syllabus need modification. Making errors is an essential part of learning and English teachers should view them from the perspective of improving their teaching approaches and techniques.

*Keywords:* error, error analysis, grammatical mistakes, language learning

### **Introduction**

Writing is a problematic process in students' mother tongue, as well as in the foreign language. While writing in a foreign language, students encounter challenges and difficulties at all stages, especially in writing essays of various types. When students hand in essays, what is frequently noticed is that most of them keep translating word for word from Albanian to English, which leads to strange sentences that do not sound natural in English. The challenge for the English instructors is to find ways to activate the dormant knowledge of

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the writing skill in students and assist them to proficiency. This is found in Wachs (1993) who points out that teachers of writing classes in secondary state schools encounter students who have memorized a good amount of English vocabulary and grammar rules, but have seldom put that knowledge to practice. Contrary to what people believe, having a sound knowledge of grammar, spelling and punctuation rules is not sufficient to guarantee success (Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2020). Creative thinking and correct inner organization are also important in expressing a message in the written form. In the context of foreign language teaching it is often the language itself which presents a barrier in this aspect since it makes English instructors focus mostly on mechanical aspects of writing, and skipping in this way the major aim which is to achieve successful communication by means of the written text. Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 303) point out that —The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas, but also in translating these notions into legible text.

A better understanding of the L1 influence in the process of English writing would help teachers perceive earlier students' difficulties in learning English, which is supported even by Hidayat et al. (2020). It will also aid in the adoption of appropriate teaching strategies to help learners acquire English writing skills better. We should not remember to focus into the dynamics of writing, as it is a skill not only needed to pass international language exams, but also a skill that students should acquire and show in academic contexts.

The primary objective of this research is to help both teachers and students find the most effective means to deal with the problem of errors in the writing of English as a foreign language. More specifically, the objectives are presented in stages further on:

1. To analyze students' errors in the essays handed in as class or home assignment.
2. To classify them into various categories (such as: grammatical errors, articles, prepositions, spelling, punctuation etc.).
3. To discover the most problematic areas which require reinforcement.
4. To provide suggestions for students and teachers of English.

### **Classification of Errors**

#### **• Individual Errors**

Individual errors are known as erratic cases. Individual errors are common to both native and second language learners. They are due to nervous reaction to personal physiological or psychological conditions.

#### **General Errors**

General errors are common to all learners irrespective of differences in source language structures. These errors are like language learning universals. According to James (1998), "Errors are evidence of the learner's strategy during their learning process of the target language. These are defined as global errors,

which inhibit understanding, and local ones, which do not interfere in communication.”

- ***Errors of Performance and Errors of Competence***

Corder (1971) classified errors into two types:

- a. Errors of Competence and
- b. Errors of Performance.

According to Corder (1971), L2 learners can recognize and correct errors of performance, but not errors of competence. This can be taken as a major factor differentiating both the types of errors mentioned above.

Van Els et al. (1984, p. 52) have approved the distinction between errors of competence and errors of performance pointed out by Corder (1971) in the following way: —Errors of competence are the result of the application of rules by the L2 learner which do not (yet) correspond to the L2 norm: errors of performance are the result of mistakes in language use and manifest themselves as repeats, false starts, corrections and slips of tongue. Van Els et al. (1984) however, modified Corder’s (1971) proposal. They have classified the error of competence as interlingual, morphosyntactic and lexical errors.

- ***Interference Errors***

A learner when faced with the need to communicate will have recourse to whatever linguistic knowledge he has at his command which will increase the likelihood of successful communication. If he lacks the requisite knowledge of the target language to achieve successful communication, then he will have recourse to Native language or any other language he knows to compensate this deficiency, beg, borrow or steal. The greater is the deficiency, typically at the beginning of a course, the greater is the amount of borrowing.

- ***Intralingual Errors***

Richards (1974, p. 7) discusses errors which do not derive from transfers from another language. These errors are intralingual errors. Interlingual errors, are caused by the interference of the learner’s mother tongue. Intralingual errors occur regardless of the learner’s language background. The origin of the intralingual or developmental errors is within the structures of the target language. In English, for example, these errors might be expected from anyone learning English as a second language. These are systematic errors and cannot be attributed to failure of memorizing a segment of language or lapse in performance owing to memory failure, fatigue, etc. In some learners they represent final grammatical competence. In other learners they represent an indication of transitional competence. The cause of these errors is very often in the strategy adopted to learn the second language. Richards (1974, p. 179) call such errors ‘developmental errors’.

- ***Systematic Errors***

According to Jain (1974) and Richards (1974), errors which seem to fall into definable patterns which show a consistent system which are internally principled and which are free from arbitrariness are systematic errors. The systematic errors are rule-governed in the sense that these follow the rules of

grammar that the learner has learnt. The other types of errors are those that are not consistent, are not rule patterned, are not internally principled and yet are not wholly arbitrary. These are the result of hypotheses of the learner which in his system has not for one reason or the other assumed the status of rules.

- ***Redundant Errors***

These errors, according to Corder (1971) are normal to the teaching and learning process and are caused by erroneous teaching and erroneous learning.

- ***Covertly Erroneous, Overtly Erroneous***

According to Corder (1971, p. 35) superficial formless is no guarantee of freedom from error. For this reason distinction has to be done between sentences overtly erroneous i.e., superficially erroneous and covertly erroneous i.e., apparently acceptable but so by chance, or inappropriate in one way or another.

## **Sources of Errors**

### ***1. Interlingual Errors***

A number of linguistic and language teaching experts are of the view that the influence of mother tongue is perhaps the most powerful source of error in the use of second language. Terms like interference Weinrich (1953) interlingual errors Richards (1971) language transfer Selinker (1972) have been widely used to refer to this type of influence. Interlingual influence seems to manifest itself in different ways and may be held responsible for errors due to fossilization by which it is meant the linguistic item, rules, systems which speakers of a particular target language tend to keep in their interlanguage Selinker (1972). Non-existent category is another instance where the absence of an equivalent category in the native language of the learner results in errors. One aspect of this category as pointed out by McEldowney (1977) is the understanding of the message but not the code. The other extreme of this is the presence of more than one equivalent category with different implications leading to confusion between two codes and areas of overlap. The other causes are envisaged in translation, spoken form, code switching and redundancy reduction.

### ***2. Intralingual Errors***

The error source language transfer has already been described. Adding to this, Richards (1974, p. 75) identified the following sources of intra-lingual errors or developmental errors negative transfer within second language learning. They are:

- a. Over generalization
- b. Over simplification of the target language
- c. Ignorance of rule restriction
- d. Incomplete application of rules

- e. False concepts hypothesized.

**a. Over generalization**

On the basis of the experience of learning English the learner creates a deviant structure or forms a rule in place of other structure or rules. This is due to negative transfer e.g., having learnt the rule that many verbs in English inflect to the past tense form (greet-greeted), due to the lack of observation or convenient forgetting, the learner forgets the counter example that some verbs do not inflect in the above-mentioned manner (cut-cut) and forms a rule. All past tense forms of verbs add 'ed' to the present tense forms. This is what we call over generalization.

**b. Over simplification of the target language**

All languages have redundancy, which means they tend to make use of a greater number of signals than are strictly needed to carry a message. For example "These two boys came yesterday." There are three signals to indicate plurality – 'these', 'two', 'boys'; and two signals to indicate the past: 'came' and 'yesterday'. But even if a learner says — "This two boys come yesterday." though incorrect, conveys its meaning. The extra signals which the sentence carries produce the redundancy, which act as a check over a breakdown of communication, even if some signals are left out. But a language learner has a tendency to avoid redundancy and oversimplify the language. To throw extra signals as a learning burden is common. For example: "This is pencil." is a common utterance among English learners wherein the error may be due to over-simplifications, in some cases or due to mother tongue interference in other.

**c. Ignorance of rule restriction**

Closely related to the generalization of deviant structure is failure to observe the restriction of existing structures that is, the application of rules to contexts where they do not apply for example: "I asked him to do it." - a correct sentence "I made him to do it." - a wrong sentence. The learner encountering the infinitive form with 'to' with one type of verb, attempts by analogy to use the same preposition with similar verbs and hence the error.

**d. Incomplete application of rule**

Under this category, the presence of structures whose deviancy represents the degree of development of the rules required to produce acceptable utterances, is noted. The most common example is the learners' inefficiency in framing questions correctly. For example, instead of asking: "Did you come to my house yesterday?" there is a tendency to ask in this manner: "You came to my house yesterday?" in the tone of a question.

### **e. False concepts hypothesized**

This category of developmental errors is derived from faulty comprehension of distinction in the target language. For example, the form ‘was’ may be interpreted as a marker of the past-tense and hence we have the faulty construction “One day it was happened.” Another example is the present progressive understood as a narrative tense; but the tense used for actions seen as a whole and for events that develop according to a plan or a sequence of events taking place at the present moment are brought out only in the simple present tense. Ignoring the second concept, the present progressive is being used nowadays in bringing out a sequence of actions, for example, “The lift is going on. Ram is getting out of it... He is leaving the building....” This is not the normal use in English. It is worth mentioning that some verbs which speak of sensory feelings like taste, smell, etc. do not take ‘ing’ to form progressive forms of verbs in sentences. They are often used wrongly with ‘ing’ to indicate feeling, example: “I am seeing something burning.” Thus the second language learning strategies employed by the learners are mostly responsible for the incidence of intralingual or developmental errors. Hence, it is more appropriate to classify and illustrate the causes of those errors in terms of the processes mentioned above. The spectrum of error sources can be widened by including ‘avoidance strategy’ which the learner resorts to under duress of pressure and indecision, —exposure to advertisement and sign boards and holophrase learning referred to by Jain (1974) and Hendri et al. (2018) may also be used as an aid in reducing the burden of learning by the students leading to errors. Apart from the other sources, it is also possible that errors are due to inherent difficulty of the second language itself. Yet another source is hypercorrection. Besides these intralingual sources, it is also possible that the teacher and the course material unintentionally contribute to promoting errors by faulty selection and sequencing (Al-Ghabra & Najim 2019).

## **Methodology**

### **Research Questions**

The aims of this study will be investigated through the following research questions:

1. What are the typical types of errors in English language writing of freshmen students in ‘Aleksandër Moisiu’ University, Durres?
2. How frequent are these errors in their English language writing?

### **Research Method**

Since this study is research on students’ errors in the skill of written communication (in English) and since the focus of the study is only the essays’ analysis and no other forms of written assignments, it was considered

reasonable to use the Error Analysis, being a quantitative method of research, which helps to study as fully as possible the problem in question. Error analysis is considered an important source of information. By means of error analyses, English instructors obtain valuable information on learners' errors which helps them considerably to correct learners' errors and also to improve the effectiveness of their language classes. Without this research method, the study of errors would have been misleading, but on the contrary, counting correct responses and wrong ones creates a clear idea of which items are acquired by the learner and which are not. As a specific division of Applied Linguistics, Error Analysis has two main functions. The first one describes the learner's actual knowledge of the learner in the foreign language. It also gives important clues about the connection between 'knowledge' on one hand and 'learning' the student has acquired on the other hand. Whereas the second function is to overcome the discrepancy between the knowledge of the student and the situation. In our case, the errors analysis method provides a more practical approach to answering the research questions raised and has a greater potential in application as the issue is examined thoroughly.

### **Sample and Population**

The samples for this study include essays from students of the first year in Aleksandër Moisiu University. These essays were collected through a period of 1 month, more specifically 5 October 2019 - 5 November 2019. We extended this period to 1 month (not less) because not all the assignment given to students were in the format of the essay, some of them were letters (formal or informal), descriptions etc. Since our study was focused on essays, we could not include these other formats here. More specifically, we collected 100 short essays which belonged to students of four different classes. All the samples were chosen randomly in order to receive valid and authentic results.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

All the necessary ethical procedures were followed to usefully collect the data. We contacted the English lecturers or instructors who taught in those four classes, explained the scope of the study to them and the purpose to enlighten English lecturers on the errors that need remedial work so that time is not wasted on teaching grammatical items or any other linguistic features which present little or no problems to the vast majority of the learners in relation to writing. Each essay was given a code and was analyzed like that, not including the name of the student, his/her gender and other confidential information.

### **Data Analysis and Error Classification**

Data analysis has to do with trying to discover patterns or trends in data sets, whereas data interpretation has to do with trying to provide an explanation

for them. The techniques scientists use to analyze and interpret the data enable other scholars to both review the data and use it in future research (Carpi & Egger, 2009, p. 1). The 100 short essays were read and analyzed for errors. At first, we corrected the essays and dealt with the identification of errors. In the following stage, we classified the errors according to their features. Next, we quantified the frequency of each type of errors encountered there. The error identification was done consistently in each paper with the aim to find the differences or similarities of error types and their frequency. Each error was recorded only once even if it reoccurred, as it is sometimes the case. The analysis was conducted based on Ellis (1997, p. 20). As a result, the following error categories were selected for analysis:

**1. Tenses (with the following subcategories):**

- a. Present progressive instead of present simple
- b. Present simple instead of present perfect
- c. Past simple instead of present perfect
- d. Past simple instead of present simple
- e. Present simple instead of past perfect
- f. Present simple instead of past simple

**2. Prepositions (with the following subcategories):**

- a. Omission of preposition
- b. Unnecessary insertion of preposition
- c. Misuse of preposition

**3. Articles (with the following subcategories):**

- a. Omission of article 'the'
- b. Omission of article 'a /an'
- c. Misuse of articles

**4. Omission of plural ending with 's'**

**5. Misuse of possessive 's'**

**6. Subject-verb agreement**

**7. Word-order**

**8. Mechanical errors (with the following subcategories):**

- a. Spelling
- b. Punctuation

## Data Analysis and Discussion

The data are presented in the level of categories and subcategories. The objective is to find out the type and frequency of errors made by freshmen students. More specifically, the following types of errors:

1. Typical types of errors in English language writing
2. Frequency of these errors in English language writing
3. Examples of errors found in the essays

### Types of Errors Documented by Means of Error Analysis

After reading and correcting every single essay, each error found there is documented. The categories and the subcategories these errors belonged to, were designed and classified accordingly. The errors were counted and presented in percentage in tables or graphs. Since the error analysis used in our study was mainly based on grammatical errors, without considering other writing skills, such as creative expression, organization, coherence, and cohesion, the essay scoring included error counts for grammatical errors only. Table 1 presents the classification of error types.

Table 1. Categories and Subcategories of Errors

Example of the Error Identified	Definition of Error Category
<b>Verb Tenses</b>	
Not found	Tense: Present progressive instead of present simple
Not found	Tense: Present simple used instead of present perfect
It's just that we didn't actually planned anything special.	Tense: Past simple utilized instead of present perfect
After walking in there we felt so hungry, so we decided to took a rest.	Tense: Past simple form used instead of present simple
They come here in memory of the old times.	Tense: Present simple instead of past perfect
We sit in our places and the bus start the journey.	Tense: Present simple instead of past simple
<b>Prepositions</b>	
I went there with my cousins and arrived $\Lambda$ about 10:00 am.	Omission of preposition
Visiting in other beaches of our city is the best thing because you can explore beauty of our country.	Unnecessary insertion of preposition
She is 11 years old and now goes at school.	Misuse of preposition
<b>Articles</b>	
We are staying in a campsite in the middle of $\Lambda$ desert but we are not cold.	Omission of article 'the'
She has long and black eyelashes, $\Lambda$ small nose and the skin is in the color of wheat.	Omission of article 'a/an'
I don't even remember when we met for a first time, but it was many years ago.	Misuse of articles



<b>Omission of Plural Ending with 's'</b>	
We have been walking for hour but it was exciting because we saw some penguins and some seals.	
<b>Misuse of Possessive 's'</b>	
Entela $\Lambda$ friend told us to leave immediately.	
<b>Subject-Verb Agreement</b>	
All loves her and want to be her friends.	
<b>Word-Order</b>	
It is a small town with people friendly.	
<b>Mechanical Errors</b>	
The nature was fantastic, inspirenig.	Spelling error
Finally $\Lambda$ I must end now because I can't write anymore.	Punctuation error

### The Frequency of Errors

After counting the errors in students' essays, we found a total of 523 errors. As you can see in table no. 2, the most common grammatical errors were as follows: Mechanical errors (39%), Tenses (20.8%), Preposition (18.5%) followed by Articles (9.7%). The result of the analysis points out that students' most problematic area is related to Mechanical errors which consist of two subcategories, namely spelling and punctuation, but the real problem was spelling with an extremely high number of words or phrases written incorrectly.

Table 2. The Frequency of Errors

Types of Errors	Number of Errors	Percentage of Errors
Tenses	109	20.8%
Prepositions	97	18.5%
Articles	51	9.7%
Omission of plural ending with 's'	28	5.3%
Misuse of possessive 's'	8	1.5%
Subject-verb agreement	11	2.1%
Word-order	14	2.6%
Mechanical errors	205	39.1%

The Graph 1 is a summary of Table 2 and displays all the error types recorded from the students' essays and their differences.

Graph 1. The Frequency of Errors



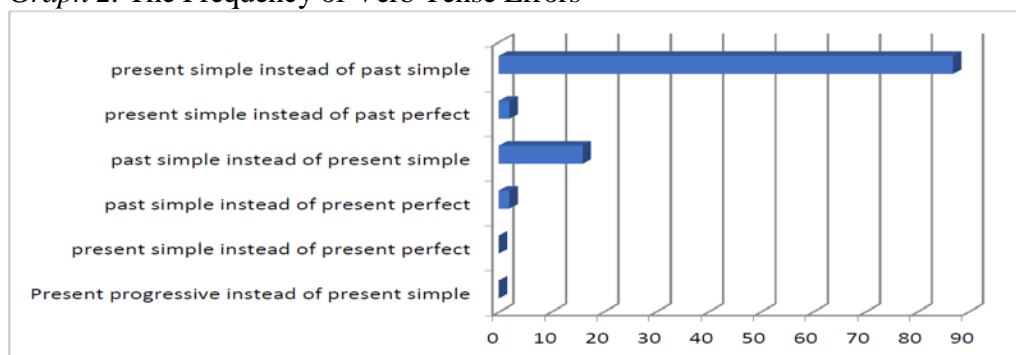
## Tense Errors

In our study, the Tense Errors were analyzed by dividing them into six subcategories in order to understand better which tenses cause problem for the students. The tenses analyzed are as follows:

‘Present progressive instead of present simple’, ‘Present simple instead of present perfect’, ‘Past simple instead of present perfect’, ‘Past simple instead of present simple’, ‘Present simple instead of past perfect’ and ‘Present simple instead of past simple’.

Out of the six subcategories, for the first and the second one were not recorded any errors. For the subcategories ‘Past simple instead of present perfect’ and ‘Present simple instead of past perfect’ were recorded only two mistakes in each one. Whereas for the remaining two: ‘Past simple instead of present simple’ and ‘Present simple instead of past simple’ the situation was far more serious. The result of the analysis about tenses is displayed in Graph 2.

Graph 2. The Frequency of Verb Tense Errors



### Examples of Present Simple Tense Utilized Instead of Past Simple Tense

Table 3. Examples of Present Simple Tense Utilized Instead of Past Simple Tense

	Present Tense utilized instead of Past Tense (P –Pr)	
	Error	Correction
(Pr –P)	I and my family visit Vlora for one day.	[visited]
(Pr –P)	We eat lunch in Jala in front of the sea, make a lot of photos and tasted that special place.	[ate], [made]
(Pr –P)	All over the way we talk about the place, laugh a lot and listen to music	[talked], [laughed], [listened]
(Pr –P)	I think he was bitten by a jellyfish.	[thought]

High error percentages in this subcategory indicate that the use of present simple in English language was a major learning difficulty for the freshmen students. The analysis shows that they are not clear when and how to use the tense and the form of the verb. It can only be justified by the incomprehensibility of the correct form and usage of the tense. In the 100 essays analyzed were found 87

errors related to this subcategory. Learners who make this type of error do not seem cautious about the essential function of the verb in the sentence and how carefully should the verb tense be chosen in order to convey the right meaning or the intended message. What becomes clear from the examples in Table 3 is that without doubt they are more focused on the content they want to express than on the appropriate language they should use to express the message. Examples:

“We start the journey at 5 in the morning and arrived at 10 p.m.” or

“He was so surprised that immediately came to hug me because he know that I had prepared everything.”

### Examples of Past Simple Tense Utilized Instead of Present Simple Tense

Table 4. Examples of Past Simple Tense Utilized Instead of Present Simple Tense

Past Tense utilized instead of Present Tense (P –Pr)		
	Error	Correction
(P –Pr)	First, I want to ask you about the content of this cream, especially if the cream had chemicals.	[has]
(P –Pr)	After walking in there we felt so hungry, so we decided to took a rest.	[take]
(P –Pr)	I looked around and I couldn't believed my eyes	[believe]
(P –Pr)	I and my family decided to travelled to my hometown.	[travel]
(P –Pr)	We ate lunch and went to relaxed.	[relax]

Based on the examples presented in Table 4, it seems that the students do not understand well the difference in usage between *Past tense* and *Present Simple*. Even though compared to the previous subcategory the cases are not so numerous, still it is something that needs to be covered again by the English teacher in order to find an appropriate strategy to clarify the usage. Other examples:

“We decided to organized a picnic in the mountain the other day.” [organize]

“She studied at ‘Scanderbeg’ gymnasium and now is in the second year.” [studies]

### Preposition Errors

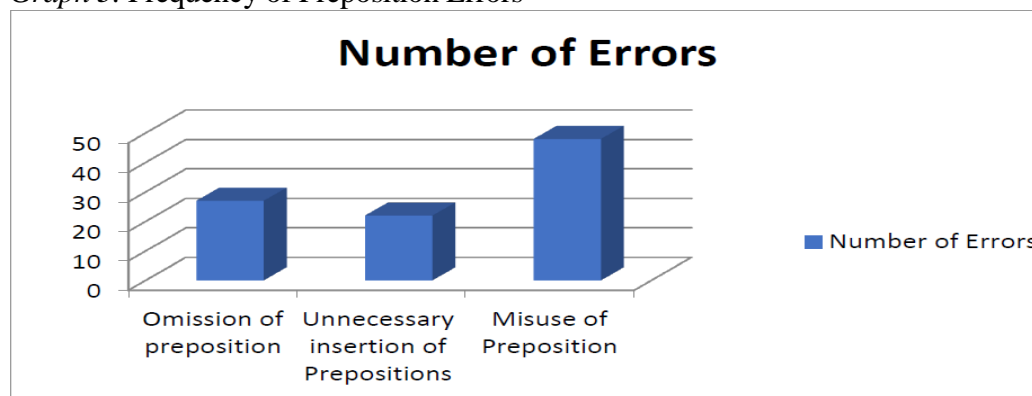
The correct use of preposition in English language may have a direct impact in the quality of information conveyed through writing. It is not uncommon to see that the use of English preposition in freshmen students reflects Albanian structures — that means that students make literal translations from Albanian to English. The differences between the Albanian and English system concerning prepositions are believed to constitute the problem of numerous Albanian students in learning and using correctly English prepositions. Many students feel overwhelmed by the fact that English has numerous prepositions denoting a great deal of relationships from which to choose from and therefore base their choice on their first language (L1) resulting frequently in wrong choices. A preposition is a type of a word or group of words often placed before nouns, pronouns or gerunds to link them grammatically to other words. Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 414) indicate that “Prepositions may express meanings such as direction (for example from home), place (for example in the car), possession (for example the capital

city of Namibia) and time (for example after hours)”. The result of the analysis about preposition errors is displayed in Table 5 and Graph 3.

*Table 5.* Frequency of Preposition Errors

Type of preposition errors	Number of errors	Percentage
Omission of preposition	27	27.8%
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	22	22.6%
Misuse of preposition	48	49.4%

*Graph 3.* Frequency of Preposition Errors



### Examples of Preposition Errors

Prepositions are used extensively among numerous languages. The same preposition can denote a completely different meaning when moving from one language to another. In order to understand the why of the frequency of this type of error, we can refer to García (1993) who points out that the great number of prepositions in English and their high degree of polysemy make it almost impossible the systematization of the task. This is noticed in various English language textbooks, where not always is emphasized the important fact that a certain preposition has more than one meaning depending on the context or the verb associated with. Fernández (1994, p. 52) remarks that students learn verbs without paying attention that they sometimes require a specific preposition to convey a certain meaning.

It can be assumed that if a learner makes a lot of errors concerning prepositions, it is direct evidence that he/she finds this part of speech quite problematic. However, it is also true that the absence of errors in this category does not necessarily mean that the learner has no difficulty with prepositions. Kleinmann (1977) highlights the fact that the learner might actually be avoiding prepositions whose usage is not clear to him/her. However, in the case of prepositions, this strategy does not necessarily apply. In the same line is even the study of Tiarina (2017). The great number of prepositions along with their respective functions in the sentence makes avoidance almost impossible. Consequently, a prevalence of preposition errors is an indicator of the difficulty of the learner in learning the foreign language. The more frequent the error, the more problematic that area of learning. Example:

“We went at the hospital and she stayed there for two days.” [to the hospital]

Following, in Table 6, you will find other examples of preposition errors divided in three subcategories.

Table 6. Examples of Preposition Errors

Preposition errors		
Type of error	Example of error	Correction
Omission of preposition	I have to listenΛ her and her imaginary love stories	[to]
Omission of preposition	The journey to Istanbul started Λ about 8.00 from Mother Theresa airport.	[at]
Omission of preposition	I was in a good mood and I figured Λ that I would easily finish my first patrol at 8.00 p.m.	[out]
Omission of preposition	That was the most important decision I had taken Λ my life.	[in]
Omission of preposition	I went there with my cousins and arrived Λ about 10:00 am.	[at]
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	We arrived after two hours and decided to hang out together those holidays because my grandparents lived near of her house.	[not needed]
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	Visiting in other beaches of our city is the best thing because you can explore beauty of our country.	[not needed]
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	I am glad at it didn't happen something bad.	[not needed]
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	We arrived after two hours and decided to hang out together those holidays because my grandparents lived near of her house.	[not needed]
Unnecessary insertion of preposition	We hurried to back home.	[not needed]
Misuse of preposition	It was one on a lifetime thing to do	[in]
Misuse of preposition	The first day everything was okay, but in night we decided to tell scary story.	[at]
Misuse of preposition	It was a beautiful spring day when I and my friends decided to go in Bjeshkët e Namuna.	[to]
Misuse of preposition	At the end, I took the cat at my grandmother's house and I cared at her	[about]
Misuse of preposition	The party will be organized in my home	[at]

### Article Errors

In spite of the general idea that article errors do not interfere in the readers' understanding, lack of knowledge about their usage might cause distraction while reading. According to Wulandari and Harida (2021), the problem learners have with articles might be of various natures. There are learners who do not understand the rules, others do not remember how to use them, and other learners might have cognition problems and so on. But we should not blame only the students. According to Celce-Mercia and Larsen-Freeman (1999, p. 271) the article system results to be bothersome for teachers as well. Consequently, some of them do not prefer to spend time in class dealing with them. They would rather choose to work with other grammatical issues, considered more useful from the communication perspective.

The errors pertaining to the category of articles can also be attributed to the difficulty in the use of articles in English Ginting (2019). The students sometimes

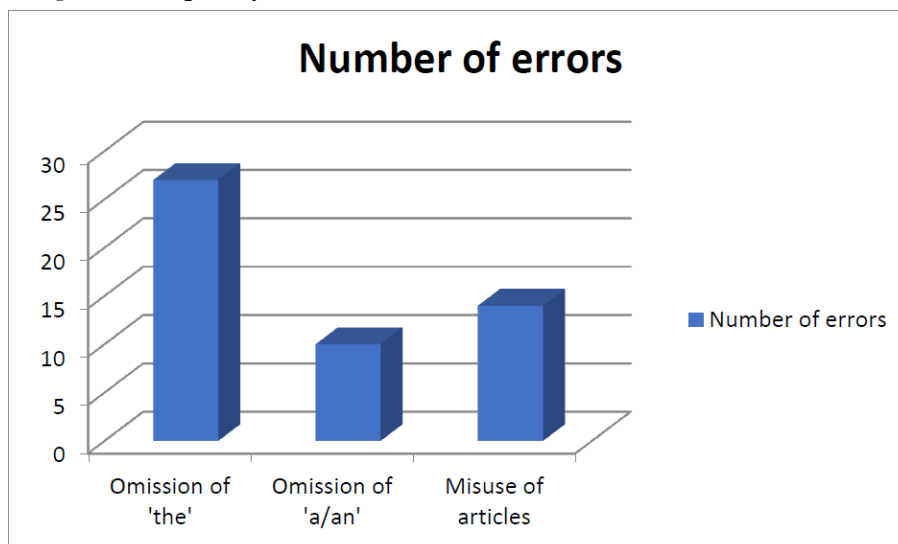
try hard to make a difference between proper and common nouns which leads mostly to guessing the article needed. Other times they are not able to distinguish between countable and uncountable nouns which sometimes results in the wrong usage of the article. On the other hand, the ‘omission’ of the article shows insufficient understanding of the article system by the students.

In Albanian language for instance the definite article ‘the’ is positioned after the noun, differently from English, where it is placed before the noun, and causing problems for the students. The result of analyzing 100 essays indicates that the most typical error in this category is the omission of ‘the’ which accounts for nearly 52% of all article errors, followed by the misuse of articles with 27.4% and the omission of ‘a/an’ with 14 errors, accounting for 19% of all article errors. The result of the analysis about article errors is displayed in Table 7 and Graph 4.

*Table 7.* Frequency of Article Errors

Type of article errors	Number of errors	Percentage
Omission of ‘the’	27	52.9%
Omission of ‘a/an’	10	19%
Misuse of articles	14	27.4%
Total	51	100%

*Graph 4.* Frequency of Article Errors



### Examples of Article Errors

As we know, English language makes use of 3 articles: the definite article ‘the’ and the indefinite articles ‘a’ and ‘an’. Despite the fact that there are only three articles, Yule (2009) states that they account for nearly 10% of the word frequency in various texts. But the problem that students face is not related to which article to use, on the contrary, it is mostly related to whether they have to use an article or not. As a matter of fact, Al-husban (2017) believes that the better we understand the sources of article errors, the better English teachers can help students in this respect. The correct usage of the definite and indefinite articles above depends

primarily on the word that follows them. As a rule, the indefinite article ‘a’ is used in front of a word starting with a consonant, for example, ‘a school’ or a vowel with a consonant sound, for example ‘a uniform’ and ‘an’ is used in front of words starting with a vowel sound, for example ‘an orange’ and words starting with mute ‘h’, for example, ‘an hour’. The definite article ‘the’ is found in cases when a person or thing is already referred to. The sentences in Table 8 illustrate the wrong usage of articles as opposing to the rules described above.

Table 8. Examples of Article Errors

Article errors		
Type of error	Example of error	Correction
Omission of ‘the’	All the day we stayed in $\Lambda$ cave exploring, eating and playing.	[the]
Omission of ‘the’	In the middle of the road, $\Lambda$ storm started again.	[the]
Omission of ‘the’	It was $\Lambda$ first day of my holidays there.	[the]
Omission of ‘the’	I hope things have been going well for you at $\Lambda$ office	[the]
Omission of ‘the’	In our way to Dajti mountain, we started singing on $\Lambda$ bus and laughing with Ana’s jokes.	[the]
Omission of ‘a/an’	She is $\Lambda$ very cheerful woman, always smiling and always giving positivity.	[a]
Omission of ‘a/an’	That is $\Lambda$ beautiful place to visit	[a]
Omission of ‘a/an’	It was $\Lambda$ sunny day when we decided to visit Berat.	[a]
Omission of ‘a/an’	My mom is very happy because we are together after $\Lambda$ long time.	[a]
Omission of ‘a/an’	It was such $\Lambda$ marvelous place that we had a great time together	[a]
Misuse of articles	She is eighteen and she lives with her family in apartment in Tirana	[an]
Misuse of articles	The advert also mentions an high quality of the battery.	[the]
Misuse of articles	I don’t even remember when we met for a first time, but it was many years ago.	[the]
Misuse of articles	Anyway, as you know, I am working with the project.	[a]
Misuse of articles	It’s an big flat and designed so well	[a]

### Omission of Plural Ending with ‘s’ and Other Plurality Problems

Another subcategory analyzed is the omission of plural ending with ‘s’. In our research, the percentage of errors pertaining to this category is not high (28 in total or 5.3%) compared to the other categories analyzed. Still, it is something that requires attention as the Albanian students are sometimes confused concerning the difference between regular and irregular plural nouns. Sometimes, they tend to keep the irregular plural as singular when actually it is plural. Examples:

“We have been walking for hour but it was exciting because we saw some penguins and some seals.” [hours]

“Everyone can visit museums, theatre and historical place that our country has to offer.” [theatres], [places]

Another tendency noticed is the addition of 's' to uncountable nouns as in the example:

- “The wind was playing with our hairs.” [hair]
- “I love this place and its peoples.” [people]
- “We saw some leopards, some variety of deers and plenty of other wild animals.” [deer]

An explanation for this phenomenon is that learners try to over-generalize the rule by adding (s) to all plurals. Errors of this type belong to over-generalization and simplification strategy from the students. Budiarta, Suputra, and Widiastara (2018) have noticed in their study that students tend to simplify things by sub-categorizing countable nouns as uncountable and vice versa. Other students tend to leave out the 's' of plurality from countable nouns, others often insert the 's' of plurality in singular countable nouns as well as uncountable ones. This view is supported by Littlewood (1994) cited from Fornkwa (2013, p. 56) who states that overgeneralization errors happen because students have either over-generalized a rule to cover an exceptional item within a given category, or because learners have over-generalized a rule to cover an item that is not within the category covered by the rule as in the case of 's' for plurality. In both cases, learners must therefore need to learn an exception to the general rule or construct a new category. Other examples of errors in plurality:

- “She is a sportive person and doesn't like dress and tight clothes.” [dresses]
- “Anila doesn't like music but she loves animals, especially dog.” [dogs].
- “The next day, one of my friend was not home.” [friends]
- “Also, at the periphery of Tirana they can find natural garden and small forests.” [gardens].

### **Misuse of Possessive 's'**

In our study we also came across the phenomenon of the misuse of possessive 's'. As a matter of fact one of the sources of errors in this category is related to the option of using the possessive 'of' alongside with possessive 's'. Research shows that sometimes it is possible to find rules of possessive 'of /s' among native speakers of English and teach it to students, even though at times they are interchangeable. However, we should admit that such a flexible usage might lead to confusion among teachers and learners. This can be considered one of the causes found in the analyzed essays. Anyway, according to the error analysis, were found only 8 errors of this type, equivalent to 1.5% of all errors.

It shows that freshmen students have mastered quite well this grammar issue. Another explanation for this percentage is received if we have a look at the Albanian language. We would notice that in our mother tongue, the concept of possessive 's' is expressed through the genitive case articles which are 'i', 'e', 'të' 'së'. As we can see in Albanian we have four different forms whereas in English only two, namely possessive 'of /s'. This may account for the good grasp of the concept in question. Examples:



“Entela friend told us to leave immediately.” [Entela’s friend]

“We asked the owner to see the dogs’s puppies.” [dogs’ puppies]

“Another important element is Tiranás’ cuisine, which consists of many well-known traditional dishes.” [Tirana’s cuisine]

### Subject-Verb Agreement Errors

Errors of subject-verb agreement constitute another type of error noticed during our error analysis. This is the case when the subject and the verb or verb phrase in a sentence should agree in number and person but they do not. Based on the analysis, it was found that this type of error is not very problematic.

Actually, the errors in this category were only 11, pertaining to 2.1% of all errors. In Albanian, the subject must agree with the verb that follows, in other words, if the subject is masculine, the verb should correspond to it and the same applies to the feminine, if the subject is in the singular, the verb that follows should correspond to that, the same applies to the plural. A possible explanation why those few learners have the tendency to add ‘s’ after plural, or skip ‘s’ after singular may be the result of overgeneralization of the rule. They overgeneralize the plural by adding the plural ‘s’ to the verb that follows and skip the ‘s’ in the verb if the subject is singular. This indicates clearly that students confuse the plural ‘s’ with the third person singular (-s) and tend to add ‘s’ to the verb if the subject is plural and omit -s if the subject is singular.

Examples of errors belonging to the category of subject-verb agreement are as follows: - Plural subject does not agree with singular verb:

“What are the advantages that makes IphoneX so preferred by people?” [make]

“I thought my English skills was good enough for the exam.” [were]

“We was all happy because it was different from other days.” [were]

Singular subject does not agree with plural verb:

“There are an unbelievable number of bars and restaurants who offering everything from Albanian food to Indian and Chinese.” [is]

“My sister decorate the tree very beautifully.” [decorates]

### Word Order Errors

The acquisition of word-order is a very important aspect in foreign language learning and there are times when it can become quite problematic, especially in the case of differences between mother tongue and foreign language. Actually, English word order has frequently been described as fixed. The following elements in the sentence structure to be distinguished are: subject (S), verb (V), object (O), complement (C), and adverbial (A). English language follows a strict word order in order to express the grammatical relations in declarative sentences. Cases when this Subject-Verb-Object word-order is not respected include questions, sentences with infinitives, sentences with relative clauses, gerunds and participles. Research suggests that there is evidence of transfer in studies related to word order (Celce-

Murcia & Hilles, 1988; Putri, 2019; Farooq, Uzair-Ul-Hassan, & Wahid, 2020). The point is that learners do not master all the language units in the sentence equally well in the same time interval and this leads to positive or negative transfer. Referring to the analysis of 100 essays from the freshmen students, we notice that they constitute 2.6% of all errors, all in all 14 errors. Examples of errors belonging to this category of are as follows:

- “Most of the time we spent at the beach.” [We spent most of the time at the beach]
- “Tom has wanted to expand the activity, but without being you here it is impossible.” [you being here]
- “It is powerful enough to work or play computer games?” [Is it]
- “We are having a very good time here and I hope this summer holiday will finish never.” [will never finish]
- “Have you decided where will you go on holiday?” [you will]
- “It is a small town with people friendly.” [friendly people]

### Mechanical Errors

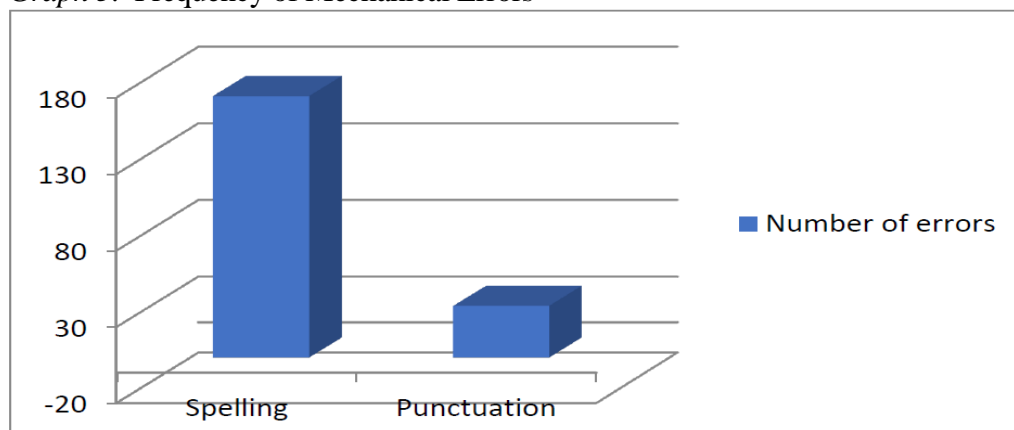
Mechanical errors are errors related to orthography (spelling and capitalization) and punctuation. As a matter of fact, according to Mantarli (2019) they rarely interfere with the comprehension of a piece of writing, but may convey a negative impression of the writer, especially in formal settings. Furthermore, research suggests that this type of error may lead to problems such as confusion while reading a certain text and incorrect interpretation of its meaning (Nuraini, 2019; Nguyen, Nguyen, & Phan, 2021). For this reason, when writing, students should pay attention, among other elements, even to the mechanics of writing; namely spelling, capitalization and punctuation. What they could focus is the right placement of punctuations, capitalizations, and spellings. If they fail to do that, the readers for sure might be confused and not catch the message of the writer.

According to Stilman (1997) while the reader tends to find the misspelling easily, when it comes to a misplace of punctuation it gets difficult for readers to discover the ideas in text. In our study we analyzed only spelling and punctuation. The result of the analysis about mechanical errors from 100 essays of freshmen students is displayed in Table 9 and Graph 5. As you can notice from Table 9, spelling errors surpass various times those of punctuation.

*Table 9.* Mechanical Errors

Type of mechanical errors	Number of errors
Spelling	171
Punctuation	34

Graph 5. Frequency of Mechanical Errors



### Spelling Errors

Errors of spelling are listed the first amongst all other types of errors, either grammatical or lexical ones. It makes no difference if the writer is a native speaker of English or somebody who studies English as a foreign language (Leacock et al., 2002; cf. Liu, 2015, p. 1628). Learning English as a foreign language is very common in many parts of the world, which means that its learning is frequently affected by language transfer. As we know, transfers are of two types: positive and negative. According to Figueredo (2006), positive transfer happens when between the L1 and L2 exist common features, whereas negative transfer happens when specific knowledge in the L2 is required but has not been acquired by the learner, which leads to knowledge of spellings in the first language to be applied in the wrong way in the spellings of the second language. The spelling errors are divided in two types: typographic errors and cognitive errors. In the first category are included: letter insertions, letter omissions, letter substitutions and transpositions, whereas the second category stems from phonetic similarities such as writing \*acedemy instead of academy (Yanyan, 2015). Examples of spelling errors found in the essays analyzed are:

“Our room has a huge balcony with agorgeus view of the lake.” [gorgeous]

“It was still hot and sunywhen we went for a walk. [sunny]

“The nature was fantastic, inspirening. [inspiring]

“I promise I will write again to tell you about everythink. [everything]

“As you might remember, here is a quite village with very good weather and fresh air. [quiet]

“I took a fork on the flor and threw it out of the window hoping that it would scare the fox. [floor]

### Punctuation Errors

Punctuation includes the use of special marks added in order to separate phrases and sentences. Using punctuation correctly is very important since it helps the reader understand easily the meaning in writing without the need to look at the

expression of the individual who wrote the message. As we said previously, if the writers misuse punctuation, this will change the idea of the piece of writing. To support this view we can refer to Harmer (2007) who points out that the use of proper punctuation can define the quality of writing. According to Hasa, and Munandar (2018) misusing the commas, full stops, dash, quotation, etc. can make an ambiguity to the text. To write well means among other things to punctuate well. The functions of punctuation marks are to separate words and phrases within a sentence according to their meanings. Misused punctuation, for instance, a question mark (?) instead of a full stop (.) at the end of a sentence may convey a different meaning (Ruminar, 2018). Examples of punctuation errors noticed in the essay of freshmen students include the following:

- “As we were eating under the shadow of a beautiful tree Melisa decided to climb it.  
[tree, Melisa]
- “Luckily we had taken other clothes.” [Luckily, we]
- “By the time we arrived I meet my cousin Tomi.” [arrived, I]
- “However tourists think that Shèngjin is an underdeveloped and noisy city.”  
[However, tourists]
- “When we arrived at our destination we opened our backpacks. [destination, we]

As we may notice from the above examples of punctuation errors, in all the cases the errors we have to do with the omission of commas, not with other punctuation marks.

### **Discussion**

Kampookaew (2020, p. 267) provides empirical evidence on the grammatical errors made by Thai EFL students in an EAP writing class. The most frequently errors found were errors at word level, including errors on nouns, articles, verbs, word classes, and prepositions, while mechanical errors and errors at sentence level occurred much less frequently whereas in our research the most problematic category were the mechanical errors.

Özkayran and Yılmaz (2020, p. 55) in their study write that the first three most frequent error types were prepositions, verb ‘to be’ and misspelling errors. In our study these errors come to the front but the difference is that the prepositions error are listed in the third place, verb tense errors in the second place whereas misspelling comes in the first one.

According to Alghazo and Alshraideh (2020, p. 7), the most frequent errors were related to the verb tense, articles, word order, noun ending, sentence structure and grammatical errors. Even in our study these errors were frequent. The verb tense was ranked the second after the mechanical ones. On the whole, writing in a foreign language is a difficult task and both the teachers and the students should be aware of the possible difficulties they can face. Teachers should be well prepared of effective instructional strategies in order for their students to succeed.

## Conclusions

The main objectives of our study were: analyzing students' errors, classifying them into different categories, discovering what were the most problematic areas which needed reinforcement and providing suggestions for students and teachers of English. As a result of the analysis, in the essays of freshman students were found a number of various grammatical errors. In order to simplify the presentation of the results we classified them into categories and subcategories. More specifically, there were eight major categories (some of them with their subcategories) as follows: 1- verb tense (with its subcategories), 2- preposition (with its subcategories), 3- article (with its subcategories), 4- omission of plural ending with 's' and other plurality problems, 5- misuse of possessive 's', 6- subject-verb agreement, 7- word-order, 8- mechanical errors (with its subcategories). After analyzing the errors in the essays, it was found that the way freshmen students composed their essays indicated serious weaknesses in various components of English grammar. **The most problematic category is the one of mechanical errors, which accounts for 39% of all errors, corresponding to 205 errors.** In this category 2 main subcategories were included. The one which students find more difficult here is spelling where we noticed errors of miscellaneous types including letter substitutions, letter insertions, letter omissions, transpositions etc. This finding is also supported by research made in a number of countries. **In the second place are listed the verb tense errors. They account for 20.8% of errors, which correspond to 109 errors.** In this category 6 subcategories were included in order to see which tenses are most often confused. They are as follows: 1- present progressive instead of present simple, 2- present simple instead of present perfect, 3- past simple instead of present perfect, 4- past simple instead of present simple, 5- present simple instead of past perfect and 6- present simple instead of past simple. Out of the six subcategories, number 4 (with 16 errors) but especially number 6 (with 87 errors) were the ones where students had made a considerable number of errors. **In the third place is the category of preposition errors, which accounts for 18.5% of all errors and corresponds to 97 errors.** In this category are included 3 subcategories which are as follows: 1- omission of preposition, 2- unnecessary insertion of preposition and 3- misuse of preposition. From these three subcategories, the essay analysis indicates that students have more difficulties with number 3 (misuse of preposition – 48 errors). It means that the use of wrong prepositions is far more serious than their omission or unnecessary insertion. **In the fourth place, even though not in a high percentage are listed the article errors. They account for 9.7% of errors, which correspond to 51 errors in total.** In this category are included 3 subcategories (as in the other cases) which are as follows: 1- omission of 'the', 2- omission of 'a/an' and 3- misuse of articles. From these three subcategories, based on the analysis it is clear that students errors are more related to the omission of article 'the' (27 errors recorded) and to some degree to the misuse of articles (14 errors recorded). **Following, are listed the category of omission of plural ending with 's' and other plurality problems which accounts for 5.3% of errors (28 errors), the category of word-order which accounts for 2.6% of errors (14 errors), the category of subject-verb**

agreement which accounts for 2.1% of errors (11 errors) and last is ranked the category of misuse of possessive 's', which accounts for 1.5% of errors (8 errors).

### **Suggestions and Recommendations**

In the field of English language learning, the tendency to view the errors negatively is frequently noticed. As a matter of fact, they are usually perceived as an indication of inadequacy in teaching as well as in learning. Nevertheless, nowadays it is generally accepted that making errors is an essential part of learning and English teachers should view them from the perspective of improving their teaching approaches, techniques, procedures etc. Errors give teachers feedback on the efficiency of their teaching methodologies and techniques that require further attention

Based on the results of this study, some suggestions related to the aspects that teachers should focus more in the classroom should be taken in consideration. First of all, English teachers and specialists whose responsibility involves the design of syllabi and choice of textbooks should be more careful in their work, by giving the writing skills the space and attention that it deserves. Textbooks should involve more free and controlled writing activities, in order to assist students in their writing.

Moreover, it would be a good idea for English teachers and instructors to vary their approaches in teaching with the aim to enable their students to write competently. In my opinion, writing errors could be minimized if teachers used modern techniques in teaching this skill. After all, it is evident that grammatical errors require more attention than the others.

Finally, it should be emphasized that research in the field of errors and mistakes is on-going, since teaching and learning are both complex processes. While the results of the analyses of 100 essays from freshmen students have provided an insight into the most typical types of errors made by them along with their frequency of occurrence, the findings can only be considered as suggestive.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations to this study that make a great difference in the discussion of the results and also in the validity and reliability of our research questions. The first limitation was related to the amount of time available to conduct this study. If we had more extended time, we could find additional resources to help answer the research questions. We would also prepare a questionnaire about activities that teachers use in classroom and their direct effect in writing. However, it remains a future priority.

A second limitation is related to the survey sample. Due to the limited number of participants, we were not able to have a broader range of responses.

The study was intended for freshmen students at various universities in Albania. However, due to the pandemic situation it was restricted only to the

students of “Aleksandër Moisiu” University, which contributed to a generalized conclusion. It would be useful if it could involve more students, from different levels which would yield more specific data.

Another limitation is related to the instruments used in the study, which means that the study could have generated more reliable results with multiple data sources, as for example interviews with students and teachers of English, whose opinions are always valid for a better study. Using data from different sources would have enabled a better perspective to the issue addressed. Finally, as researchers we assume that another limitation can be attributed to the small number of detailed studies in the Albanian context pertaining to this topic. This has also led to difficulties in comparing the obtained results in the light of studies conducted in other countries.

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## **The Influence of Gifted and Talented Programs on Students' Self-concept**

*By Ghina Kalaji\* & Nadera Albornoz<sup>‡</sup>*

The purpose of this research is to explore the influence of high school gifted and talented (GT) programs on students' self-concept from the students' perspectives in the UAE. A qualitative, exploratory, interview-based study was employed to answer the following question: How gifted and talented programs influence students' self-concept? Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Ten GT students from grades 8-12 were interviewed from three different GT programs in UAE schools. Analysis revealed that students exhibited positive self-concept in three dimensions: general, academic, and social. The GT programs in the UAE seem to influence students' self-concept positively by nurturing their strengths, valuing their efforts, developing their skills, and emphasizing their future roles in the community.

*Keywords:* self-concept, BFLPE, acceleration, enrichment, gifted and talented

### **Introduction**

Parents and educators are often concerned about gifted and talented (GT) students' academic progress and many researchers seem to focus on the development of their creativity. However, we need to hear those students' voices and understand their perspectives. GT students are often viewed as the brightest, smartest, and highest achievers, yet how do these students perceive themselves?

There is a plethora of research conducted on GT students' self-concept that is how a person perceives oneself influenced by different factors (Bain & Bell, 2004; Colangelo, Kelly, & Schrepfer, 1987; Hoge & Renzulli, 1993), and a variety of models are explored to explain how GT students view and perceive themselves. That is, taking in consideration their accelerated development academically, psychologically, and emotionally. Also, different studies demonstrated various effects of GT programs on students' self-concept (Cunningham & Rinn, 2007; Fiddymont, 2014; Hertzog, 2003). What happens when GT students are enrolled in special programs with alike students and how this is reflected in the development of their self-image are important points to explore.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of GT programs on students' self-concept from the students' perspectives. There are several facets to be explored such as the influence of the GT programs on students' general, academic, and social self-concepts. This study is an opportunity to examine

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students' experiences to reveal: how gifted and talented programs influence students' self-concept in the UAE?

**Significance**

In many similar studies (Cunningham & Rinn, 2007; Dai, Rinn, & Tan, 2013; Preckel, Rach, Scherrer, 2016), quantitative methods such as Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Likert-type scale were applied to measure the influence of various GT programs on students' self-concept. The self-concept literature is packed with studies applying self-report questionnaires such as: Self-Description Questionnaire II, developed by Marsh; however, few studies have explored deeper by employing interviews to find out more about students' perceptions about themselves and how they develop their self-concept. As a result, a qualitative approach was employed to explore the students' thinking process and how they perceive the influence of being enrolled in GT programs on their self-concept's various facets.

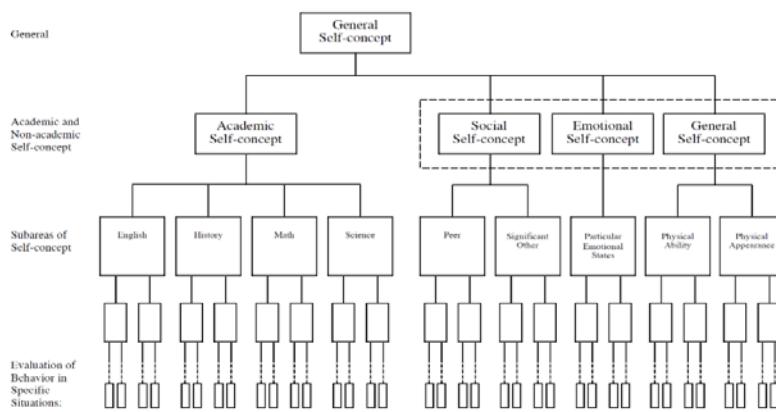
**Literature Review**

**Understanding Self-concept**

In broad terms, self-concept is a person's perception about oneself. Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) in their attempt to integrate different self-concept definitions, concluded that the perceptions we hold about ourselves are formed through our experiences with our environment and are influenced by reinforcements and significant others.

Prior to 1980, self-concept researchers noted the need for a theoretical model and appropriate measurement instruments. To address this need, Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) reviewed existing research, theories, and instruments and introduced their initial hierarchical model of self-concept (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Model of the Structure of Self-concept



Source: Shavelson, R. J., Hubner, J. J., & Stanton, G. C. (1976). Self-concept: Validation of construct interpretation. *Review of Educational Research, 46*, 407-441. Reprinted by permission.

Seven critical features comprise the foundation of this model. A first feature is that self-concept is organized and structured allowing a person to categorize the different information he/she holds about him/herself and connect the categories to one another. A second feature is that self-concept is multifaceted. Figure 1 shows how self-concept has two main facets: academic and non-academic (Social, Emotional, General). Those facets reveal the categorization system adopted by certain individuals or shared by a group. A third feature is that self-concept is hierarchical. That is, general self-concept is divided into two main categories: academic and non-academics and both are further divided into more categories such as subject matters, peers, and significant others. Then, each category such as subject matter is further divided into specific areas. A fourth feature is that general self-concept is stable, and it requires many situation-specific instances that are inconsistent with general self-concept to change. For example, getting a low grade in a math exam might affect the self-concept at math level. However, it will not change the general self-concept. A fifth feature is that as individuals develop from infancy to adulthood, self-concept becomes multifaceted and more structured. That is, infants do not differentiate themselves from their environment. As they grow up and learn from their experiences, they tend to construct their own conceptual framework. A sixth feature is that self-concept is descriptive and evaluative. For example, one can describe him/herself (I am happy) and evaluate him/herself against an absolute standard or against peers' performance. A seventh feature is that self-concept can be differentiated from other theoretically related constructs such as academic achievement (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976).

### **Gifted and Talented Educational Programs**

Various educational programs were designed to meet GT students' needs in different educational systems. Ability grouping, acceleration, and enrichment are examples of these programs. In many systems, there is a mix of multiple strategies. Hence, there is no clear cut in defining each program in the literature. Those strategies are not only implemented in fully dedicated GT in-school programs, they can be also implemented in summer schools/programs.

#### **Ability Grouping**

In general terms, ability grouping implies grouping students for instruction by ability to reduce the heterogeneity and construct homogenous groups. Ability grouping created controversy in the literature and researchers did not agree on its definition. Slavin (1987; 1990; 1991) did not have a clear definition for the ability grouping and included many types such as: ability-grouping class assignment, tracking, Joplin Plan (between-class grouping), and many other types. He concluded that there is no evidence to support the use of ability grouping for students generally (Slavin, 1987) and for gifted and talented students specifically (Slavin, 1991).

Fiedler, Lange, and Winebrenner (1993) argued that ability grouping should be distinguished from other types of grouping especially tracking. Tracking means dividing students into groups based on preassessment or observation for their

abilities and achievements. This results in rigid tracks that allow little or no movement between tracks during a school year or from one school year to another. However, ability grouping means grouping students having similar learning needs for the length of time that works best for them targeting a common instructional level. For example, students at the secondary level may be assigned to high ability groups in the areas that they are gifted in such as math and assigned to average ability groups in other subjects. They can be regrouped during the school year based on their development. Kulik and Kulik (1987) emphasized that ability grouping for gifted and talented students in this form affect their academic achievement moderately.

### Acceleration

“Acceleration is an educational intervention that moves students through an educational program at a faster than usual rate or younger than typical age” (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross 2004, p. 5). There are various acceleration strategies that include but not limited to: advancement placement classes, curriculum compacting, early college entrance, early entrance to school, individualizing curriculum, radical grade-skipping, and subject area acceleration (Siegle, Wilson, & Little, 2013). Wells, Lohman, and Marron (2009) emphasize the effectiveness of accelerative strategies especially on GT students’ academic achievement and further explain that accelerated students are able to perform better than their older peers.

Despite all the research supporting academic acceleration and proving its positive impact on academic achievement, it remains an underutilized strategy. That is because of different reasons such as: teachers’ and parents’ perception about acceleration as pushing children through childhood, the educators fear on accelerated students’ social adjustment, and the teachers’ belief that accelerating students diminishes the self-esteem of other students (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004). Some studies showed that accelerated students demonstrated higher social competence than non-accelerated students. However, there was no difference in general self-concept between both groups (Hoogeveen, Hell & Verhoeven, 2009). Nevertheless, Siegle, Wilson, and Little (2013) reported the need for additional research concerning the social and emotional impact of academic acceleration.

### Enrichment

Enrichment programs focus on introducing GT students to advanced content. In-depth activities and broader topics explored aim to develop higher order thinking skills and provide opportunities for creative production. Enrichment clusters is an enrichment strategy, where students are categorized according to interest and investigate real-world problems. The program is based on constructivism and focuses on inductive, collaborative, and authentic learning. Enriching students’ learning in this strategy is achieved through three types of staged activities. The first stage aims to spark student interest in the topic. The

second stage develops higher level thinking processes and skills through exposure to in-depth topics and materials. This leads to the third level where student self-select an independent project, manifesting newly constructed learning experiences (Fiddymont, 2014; Kim, 2016).

Enrichment programs positively affect both GT students' academic achievement and socio-emotional development (Kim, 2016). According to Hertzog (2003), GT students reported that they felt adequately challenged by content, were exposed to various instructional methods, and had opportunities to explore their interest. Also, attending enrichment programs resulted in improved socialization skills in GT students' school lives (Morgan, 2007).

In addition to the aforementioned in-school programs, GT students can get opportunities of extracurricular academic. Classes are often planned during summer or on weekends. Acceleration, enrichment, or a combination of both strategies are implemented in these summer/weekend programs. Parents of GT students reported positive effects academically, socially, and emotionally. One downside of these programs can be the reluctance of schools to award academic credit despite students' tests scores indicating the mastery of the content during summer courses (Swiatek & Lupkowski-Shopluk, 2003).

It is worth mentioning that each GT program set criteria for students' selection depending on the type of the program and various preferred indicators of talent and giftedness. However, there are several problems concerning the identification such as: false assumptions and prejudices, observational errors, lack of knowledge about the developmental conditions, and the failure to identify high risk groups, e.g., highly gifted students with behavior problems, economically disadvantaged and minority gifted learners, or gifted immigrant children and youth. These problems might result in wrong identification or missing out highly GT students, which in turn would disturb the system and students' learning (Heller, 2004).

### **Social Comparison Effect**

Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory indicates the role of the social environment in the formation of one's self-concept. Therefore, understanding this theory will inform the endeavor of exploring students' self-concept, particularly the GT. The theory is centered around the notion that there is a drive within humans to gain true self-evaluation through objective means. In the absence of the objective means, individuals evaluate their abilities and opinions by comparison to other people. This comparison is only done with people who individuals perceive as alike. Humans tend not to compare themselves with people perceived as different in abilities and opinions.

Marsh (1986) developed and tested the Internal/External Frame of Reference Model. This model evolved from research designed to test the Shavelson model of self-concept and introduced the external reference that further explains the social comparison theory. The frame of reference is a set of internal and external criteria that individuals measure their abilities against. Initially, the Internal/External Frame of Reference Model described how verbal, and math self-concepts are

formed. For the internal comparison, which is also called dimensional comparison, students compare their self-perceived verbal ability with their self-perceived math ability and use their internal impression as a basis of their self-concept in each domain: math and verbal. For the external comparison, the social comparison, students compare their own self-perceptions of math and verbal abilities to their peers' perceived abilities and use their external impression as a second basis of their self-concept in each domain. Later, the Internal/External Frame of Reference Model was developed to account for age-developmental and cross-cultural differences (Marsh et al., 2015). Möller et al. (2016) introduced a general reference model that applied to all self-concept dimensions (see Figure 1) and explained the formation of different self-concept dimensions in the same way math and verbal self-concepts are formed.

Marsh and Parker (1984) studied the effect of social comparison on students' academic self-concept and introduced the Big-Fish-Little-Pond-Effect (BFLPE). That is, students form their academic self-concept by comparing their academic performance against their peers in their own classroom or their school. They do not compare themselves to a broader reference such as community-wide or national standards. For two students of equal abilities, The BFLPE predicts lower academic self-concept for the student who is enrolled in a school for high achievers only. On the contrary, the student who is enrolled in heterogeneous school exhibits higher self-concept. It is important to note that BFLPE does not imply that higher-achieving students will have lower academic self-concept. However, it proposes that for any given student, enrollment in higher average skill educational setting tends to form lower academic self-concept and results in lower grades and occupational aspirations (Marsh, 1991).

Marsh, Kong, and Hau (2000) realized the importance of cultural differences in the formation of GT students' self-concept especially for a collectivist society compared with individualistic. Therefore, they suggested that social comparison has negative impact on self-concept whereas reflected-glory effect has a positive effect and the BFLPE in this case is the net effect of the two counterbalancing processes.

There is little mentioned in the literature about the effect of BFLPE on GT students in the long run, whether the decrease in academic self-concept is permanent or temporary in nature. Also, there is little mentioned about the effect of counseling by school's teachers, counselors, and parents on the change in students' self-concept and how to reduce the negative effects of the social comparison.

## **Methodology**

This study employed an exploratory qualitative research approach to investigate and understand the students' perspective about the effect of enrolling in GT programs on their self-concept. The aim is to explore how students interpret their experiences to construct and develop their self-concept and what meanings they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant using Zoom platform. Interviews were recorded with participants' and parents' permissions. Zoom audio transcription was utilized to transcribe the interviews and later were transcribed manually to fill in any gaps and to make corrections.

To ensure confidentiality, anonymity was assured through using pseudonyms throughout the research process and any documentation. When communicating with participants' parents, they were assured that their children's identities will remain concealed. Also, during the interviews, students were notified that their identities, school names, and any desired personal information will not be revealed. Additionally, students' and their parents' consent were obtained to record the Zoom interview for the purpose of self-reference and data analysis only. They were informed that participation is voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw or refuse to answer any question. Thus, the aim was to establish trust and rapport with the participants and ensure retaining ethical standards and the integrity of the research practice (Baez, 2002).

### **Participants' Selection**

Participants were secondary students in eighth to twelfth grade. At this age, their self-concept stands a good chance of being reasonably developed and structured in contrast to younger students, who might be unable to differentiate themselves from their environment (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). 75% of the participants were locals and 25% were expatriates

In this study, participants belonged to three different GT programs based on school of choice. The first program is the Elite Stream which is provided by the UAE Ministry of Education in corporation with the American College Board to create an educational environment for creative and outstanding students. The stream targets students from grade five to grade twelve. It focuses on mathematics and sciences, which are all taught in English in contrast to all other streams provided by the Ministry. The Elite Stream depends on accelerating students one higher grade ("Elite Stream").

The second program is provided by Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Centre for Giftedness and Creativity. The center provides training courses and workshops targeted to Emirati GT students, who are tested through different diagnostic tools and placed in suitable programs. There are plenty of topics and subjects that are covered and correspond to the students' need and the world's continuous development. The center provides enrichment courses in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics along with personal and thinking skills ("Hamdan Award")<sup>2</sup>.

The third system is implemented in one of the private schools in Dubai and it was designed by the school itself. GT students are identified by a test, and they are offered enrichment courses, mostly in science subjects. Additionally, the school arranges a conference at the end of the school year. GT students who want to participate fill a questionnaire. Then, after being guided by their teachers, a specific subject is chosen for each student to research. At the end of the year, each

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.ha.ae/>.



student presents the topic in the conference in front of the guests and some chosen society members.

Participants were all girls from grades 8 to 12. Table 1 depicts their grades and the programs they are enrolled in. Students will be referred to by letter designations to protect their privacy.

*Table 1. GT Students' Grades and Programs*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Elite Stream</i>	<i>Sheikh Hamdan Centre</i>	<i>Private School GT Program</i>
A	10	✓	✓	
J	8		✓	
W	12	✓	✓	
L	9	✓	✓	
S	10	✓	✓	
K	8	✓	✓	
N	12		✓	
R	9		✓	
M	8			✓
P	11			✓

### **Limitations**

Several limitations were identified in the study regarding the pool of available participants. To begin with, all the interviewed students were females, since the selection was done by the program administrators and as there was no choice in recruiting the participants. Therefore, this study does not account for gender differences. Additionally, all the interviewed students who are enrolled in the Elite stream are also enrolled in Sheikh Hamdan Centre. Findings and insights might have been different if students were enrolled in the Elite stream, but not in Sheikh Hamdan Centre. Furthermore, the three GT programs focus on scientific subjects, and they do not account for giftedness and talent in art subjects.

It is important to note that GT programs are novel and limited in Dubai schools. According to many teachers and administrators, schools seem to identify students as gifted and talented for the sake of possible differentiation in the classroom, but they fall short of enrolling them in any specialized program. Additionally, in the current COVID-19 pandemic schools seem to focus resources on providing solutions for equitable access opportunities for all students rather than investing in GT departments.

### **Data Analysis**

The data consisted of the transcribed interviews as well as the video recordings of all the interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain the importance of simultaneous data collection and data analysis. Therefore, a journal was kept to write reflections, any emerging themes, and any idea that developed after each interview. The data were read and the interviews were viewed multiple times.

Then, the analytical coding started; creating codes based on reflection and interpretation of meaning. To aid that, a color-coded system was used to identify these codes. Then, these codes were categorized allowing related three main themes to emerge, the general self, the academic self, and the social self, which will be discussed in the following sections.

## Results

### The General Self

This theme portrays how students perceive the influence of the GT program on their self-image. When students were asked how GT programs influenced their self-image, both positive and negative effects were mentioned based on students' perceptions. A, N, P, and J indicated that being enrolled in the GT program boosted their self-confidence. J added, "I know that we all have potentials, and I am not shy to show mine. I know that I can do a lot... I know now how to express my thoughts and opinions". Additionally, L indicated that GT program promoted her sense of competition and gave her the victory feeling in different situations. She reported: "I always like to present my project and defend what I did. I love the wow feeling when I do it right!". M and L both expressed how the program made them independent. L mentioned that after joining the Elite stream, she gained her parents' trust as she was able to make more sound decisions in their opinion. Also, she was able to accept and benefit from the constructive feedback she receives. Moreover, J indicated that Sheikh Hamdan programs broadened her perspectives that now she thinks about topics and subjects that students at her age do not think about. J and S mentioned that being enrolled in Sheikh Hamdan Centre taught them a lot of skills. These skills for them are the tools that will help S reach her dreams and goals and will allow J to help others. J said:

We had a project to design a website. This project made me think of starting a new project where I combine several educational platforms in one place and I am working with my teacher to see how we can implement it. I always think how I can better serve and help others especially students.

As for the negative influence, J and S felt that the intellectual gap is widening between them and their peers. S said: "They do not understand my ideas and they say I am a dreamy person. Some people tell me your ideas will never materialize, although I work hard on them. This disappoints me". However, criticism is a factor that had little effect on most of the students interviewed. K and M never recalled that they were criticized before. A, L, W, S, N, and R mentioned that they are always criticized from mostly peers and relatives. The criticism is mostly about the amount they spend studying and to others, what they do might seem a waste of time. However, they responded differently. A said: "I am working for my future, and no one will do it for me. I need to do it for myself." L, S, and N reported that they ignore criticism. L added that she listens to the constructive feedback as she needs to work on having the best version of herself. S mentioned that people who

only criticize her might be jealous of what she does. While N added that she only cares for those who support her. W said that the work she is always criticized for, is what she likes and enjoy doing. She added: “this is why gifted students are different than normal students”. Sometimes, R finds herself defending what she does in front of the people who criticize her because according to her, they need to know that we all should not waste our time and we have to work on developing ourselves and adding to our experiences. J said that since she opened her social media channels publicly, she fears criticism and abusive words although she never received one.

### **The Academic Self**

This theme represents how student viewed the influence of the GT program on their academic self-concept. As for the academic influence of the GT program, students mentioned how it widened their perspectives about cutting edge sciences. Students who are enrolled in Sheikh Hamdan Centre participated in workshops about robotics, programming in different languages, artificial intelligence, etc. R mentioned that Sheikh Hamdan Centre offers different workshops in the recent developing sciences that they would not get exposed to if they were not enrolled in the center. S reported: “before joining Sheikh Hamdan Program, I used to spend my time on simple things but now, I like research. In summer vacation, when I have plenty of time, I research about topics I like... I read to add to my knowledge”. Also, students mentioned that GT program allowed them to excel in their academics as they were taught accelerated and enriched subjects. K stated that having workshops about programming made her like it and when it was introduced in school, it was already easy for her. Also, N reported that participating in Arabic, Mathematics, and technology workshops in Sheikh Hamdan Centre helped her improve her grades in school. R said: “so many subjects when introduced in school, we know them already”. Another academic effect of the GT program as P mentioned is, “I feel I am academically confident. Especially if I know something, I can apply it more now”.

Additionally, students mentioned that they faced academic challenges being enrolled in the GT programs. A, J, W, N, and R said that when they first joined Sheikh Hamdan Centre, they were overwhelmed with the amount of studying they had to do for both their school and the program. However, it only lasted for a semester until they learnt how to manage their time and prioritize their tasks. Only J, who joined Sheikh Hamdan Centre in 2019, said: “I still have problems with time management. I think I am getting better and hopefully I will overcome it soon”. K faced a problem with English being the main language for studying in the Elite stream. Before entering the Elite stream, she was studying all the subjects in Arabic. She said: “I faced difficulty with English as it was a move from Arabic to English as I started in the Elite stream”. Moreover, M reported: “Sometimes, it is hard to maintain academic excellence. There is simply no motivation to do projects, but you have to keep it up”. Another challenge reported by N and R is the choice of programs in Sheikh Hamdan Centre. They mentioned that sometimes they are overwhelmed with the pressure that they need to keep up with all sorts of

programs. This seemed to confuse them, and they would just pick one program hoping that they will get another chance to register for the other one. Additionally, P said that: “Being in the GT program last year caused me a lot of stress... I needed to speak constantly to my parents and friends about it”. Finally, W said: “not everyone likes scientific subjects, and some students are forced to be in the program by their parents”.

When students were asked about the effects of being compared to their peers, most of them indicated temporary effects. All the girls reported that when someone does better than them academically, they feel bad about it only for very short time. For example, R said: “I blame myself as I might have wasted my time doing something useless”. Then, many of them like R, J, and P said they reflect on what happened and they try to see what went wrong as a lesson for the future. S said:

Even if I ranked the third this time, I can do better the next time. I start thinking why I did not study well enough for this exam or that. I start asking myself a lot of (Why's?), but I think I got used to it. I start blaming myself for some time but then, it is fine.

While M mentioned that she constantly compares herself to others as she is scared to fall behind and this is a way to improve her academic performance “I cannot say I am doing well and that is it”. Some of the students like N said she does not compare herself to others. She dedicates her time to studying in addition to plenty of extracurricular activities that sometimes might affect her academic performance. She added that she is fine with that as long as she knows that she is doing her best.

### **The Social Self**

When I asked students about the effect of being in such programs on their social life, there were a variety of responses. Students expressed being influenced socially by their GT programs. A and W focused on the idea that the program taught them a lot of communication skills that allowed them to enhance their relationships with others. J and P said that the program made them more social. Also, J, S, and R said that the program allowed their parents to understand their needs and how they think. This resulted in a better relationship with the parents. L added: “now they trust my decisions because they know I am responsible for my actions”. S, W, and P emphasized that their parents’ support increased since they joined the GT program and they all like it. S mentioned that she used to fear dealing with people. However, she is better now creating more connections. Also, N emphasized that the program allowed her to “create strong bonds with others and preserve them”. J and R shared the same thought of being able to make more friends now. Additionally, R mentioned how she trust her teachers more now. Finally, P mentioned how the GT program made her more confident in her relationships in the classroom.

In summary, analyzing and coding the data revealed three facets of self-concept: general, academic, and social. As for the general facet, students depicted

both positive and negative effects of the GT programs, with more emphasis on the positive ones. As for the academic facet, students mentioned the positive effects and challenges they encountered being part of the GT programs and how they overcame these challenges. As for the social facet, they presented the positive influence of the GT programs on their social self.

### Discussion

This study aimed to explore the influence of the gifted and talented (GT) programs on students' self-concept from the students' perspectives through interviewing ten GT students enrolled in different GT programs. The findings show that students exhibit positive self-concept in three dimensions: general, academic, and social. Two students showed relatively moderate social self-concept. However, their general and academic self-concepts were relatively high. Also, the findings may support the reflected glory effect. That is, when students know that the program is highly selective based on giftedness, their self-concept tends to increase because of highly regarded group association (Cunningham & Rinn, 2007). All students from the three programs developed a sense of pride being enrolled in a GT program, which in turn developed an elevated perception of the individual self. This positive self-concept was evident in students' self-confidence, their view of their academic achievements, and their beliefs of the importance of their future role in the society. Also, the three GT programs provided the students with opportunities to explore new topics and subjects and try new experiences, which widened their understanding and perspectives about various world issues, boosted their self and academic confidence, and equipped them with practical life skills such as independence and effective communication.

On the other hand, the findings did not support the Big-Fish-Little-Pond (BFLP) Effect, which suggests that if students are placed in an environment with students of equal or higher ability, their self-concepts will decrease, similar to the results of Cunningham and Rinn (2007) and Preckel et al. (2019) and opposite to Tokmak, Sak, and Akbulut (2021). This contradiction may be due to one or several factors that mitigate against the BFLP effect. First, although the interviewed students are enrolled in GT programs, their frame of reference for social comparison is not limited to other GT students. They may consider their school peers when forming their frame of reference. With this, their environment does not account only for equal or higher ability students. They form heterogeneous groups and that is consistent with Marsh (1991); the student who is enrolled in heterogeneous school exhibits higher self-concept. Second, the findings may support what Marsh, Kong, and Hau (2000) suggested that social comparison has negative impact on self-concept whereas reflected glory effect has a positive effect and the BFLPE is the net effect of the two counterbalancing processes. In the case of the participants, the positive identification as GT students along with the reflected glory effect offsets the negative impact of the social comparison when made with other GT students and yields positive self-concept. Although as mentioned earlier, there is limited literature about the effect of counseling, the third explanation may be

linked to the counselling provided to the students as part of their enrollment in the GT programs. Eight out of ten interviewed students are enrolled in Sheikh Hamdan Centre, and they always conduct personal and thinking skills workshops. These workshops develop the students' internal frame of reference regarding their abilities and perceived self-concept; possibly diminishing in return the importance for external frame of reference. In other words, they probably no longer form their self-concept based on the social comparison with their peers. Instead, their perceived self-concept may be formed based on their personal achievements and perceived abilities. This was evident in the students' description of their academic achievements compared to their peers and how they reacted to criticism. Finally, few challenges only were mentioned by the students, and this could be due to the students' conscious/unconscious need to maintain a certain self-image. It could be also due to the excitement of being part of a new initiative in the UAE.

### **Conclusion**

GT students form their self-concept in their unique way based on their special needs. Planning the GT programs may not only focus on their academic needs. Thinking about GT students holistically (academically, socially, emotionally, etc.) will develop various aspects in their personality and yield a balanced character with adequate self-concept that is able to understand the world and form the right social relationships. In conclusion, the GT programs in the UAE seem to influence students' self-concept positively by nurturing their strengths, valuing their efforts, developing their skills, and emphasizing their future roles in the community. However, it is worth noting that hypersensitivity and perfectionism are unique GT characteristics (Freeman, 1983) that were noticed in few interviewed students. Also, many students shared identical views that might indicate a highly prescriptive program, where theoretically, GT students have to be offered free thinking programs with guided mentorship. Furthermore, there was no access to the identification criteria, hence, the assumption is that each GT student had equal chance to enter the program being appropriately assessed.

The current study only examined GT students' self-concept at one point in time and while they are enrolled in the GT program. It would be interesting to study the effects of the program at the point when student leave the program and move on with their university life and examine if these effects will last. Also, it would be intriguing for future studies to explore the main driver behind the positive self-concept. For example, whether being placed in a GT program is the main cause for positive self-concept or there are other factors such as curricular, emotional or social differential programming.

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### **Appendix A: Interview Guide**

**Research Question:** How do gifted and talented programs influence the students' self-concept?

1. As you know, my study is about self-concept, so let me begin by asking you how you would describe yourself?
2. How do you feel about being part of the GT program? Please tell me about the subjects you like.
3. I understand you completed a few projects in the GT program, how did that make you feel?
4. What extracurricular activities do you like to do (or join) during your summer vacation? Is this different since you joined GT program?
5. How do you describe your relationship with your parents? Did it change after joining GT program? How?
6. How do you feel about the classroom/school environment since you joined GT program? (Probe: Safe/comfortable to show abilities. Relationship with peers)
7. How do you describe your self-image? Did it change after joining GT program? How so?
8. What challenges have you faced since you joined the GT program? How did you deal with them?
9. Have you faced any criticism since you joined GT program? From peers or adults? How does such criticism make you feel? What do you do about it?
10. How does being a part of the GT program make you feel about yourself? Did you always feel that way before? Why do you think this happens? Do you compare yourself to your peers who perform at the same level in classes? (feeling?)
11. Is there anything you would like to tell me about the GT program that I haven't already asked?

## **Birth Order Differences and Overall Adjustment among First Year Undergraduate Students in One Selected University**

*By Peter JO Aloka \**

The study examined the effect of birth order differences on adjustment among first year undergraduate students in one selected university in Kenya. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. The sample size comprised 213 first year students selected using both stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The adjustment questionnaire was used to collect data. The inferential statistics such as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Tukey's post hoc tests were used to analyze data. The ANOVA results indicate a significant effect, [F (5, 207)=8.279, p=0.000], of order of birth of first year students on their level of overall adjustment. The Tukey's HSD Post Hoc test results indicate that 1<sup>st</sup> born students presented a significantly higher overall adjustment compared to the rest. The study recommends that staff at university counseling centers should develop specific orientation programmes to enhance the adjustment of first year students who occupy later orders of births in their families apart from first born students.

*Keywords:* birth order, overall adjustment, first year, undergraduate students, university

### **Introduction**

Transition from secondary school to higher education institutions has been a challenge to students for decades. Arnett (2013) argues that the shift from secondary school education to the university corresponds with the developmental transition from adolescence to young adult stage. Thus, first year students struggle to adjust to the university environment on various aspects. Adjustment to university is defined as the ability to effectively adapt to the various challenges encountered in the new environment (Credé & Niehorster, 2012). Moreover, Julia and Veni (2012) define adjustment process as the way in which individuals try to cope with stress, conflict, tension, and meet their needs. Therefore, university students with good academic performance, psychological wellbeing and are involved in the university activities are perceived to have developed successful university adjustment (Julia & Veni, 2012). Thus, students are able to make adjustment by having sufficient academic performance, passing all subjects, and meeting graduation time, while those who do not adjust to college well are characterized with the contrast criteria; their achievement is not satisfactory, marginal, failure, as well as the tendency to drop out. Dyson and Renk (2006) and Bernier, Larose, and Whipple (2005) all reiterate that there are differences on how first year students

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adjust to the university as some fair on very well but other students are challenged and find it difficult to cope with the new demands of the university environment.

Student adjustment is modelled within the identity development as proposed by Chickering (1969). By focusing on identity development, Chickering identified seven vectors of development namely, developing autonomy achieving a sense of competence, developing a sense of purpose managing emotions, establishing one's own identity, interacting with others with increasing tolerance, and clarifying a personal and consistent set of beliefs. The shift from secondary school learning environment to the university has with it new experiences, changes and expectations and new responsibilities which require adjustment process among first year students (Buote, 2006). When first year students are admitted to university, they are expected to fit to the new demands that are presented by the university environment and also to maintain a harmonious relationship with the new environment and other students (Abdullah & Elias, 2009). There are four dimensions of adjustment to university including academic, social adjustment, personal emotion, and institutional aspects (Taylor & Pastor, 2007; Arnett, 2013). Academic adjustment refers to how well students cope with the demands of education, such as satisfaction with academic environment, academic effort and motivation to complete academic requirements (Salami, 2011). On the other hand, social adjustment includes student involvement in social activities, interaction with others and satisfaction with the various aspects of lecture experience (Salami, 2011). Moreover, personal-emotional adjustment involves students handling their emotions appropriately when responding to issues that they face while the institutional adjustment indicates students' satisfaction with their general experience in the university (Salami, 2011).

Previous researchers have focused on several other factors that affect adjustment among first year students at university including, personality, home related factors, institution based factors and parental socio-economic status. In this study, the effects of birth order on the adjustment among first year students at university were examined. However, very scanty research has been done on birth order of students and adjustment at university. According to Lemay (2004), birth order is defined as individual's rank in their sibling constellation- first born, middle born, last born or only born or twins. Research indicates that children growing up as the only child typically are dominant, verbal, and a perfectionist. Moreover, the only children in families are typically not jealous because their position in the family has never been threatened. Other traits common among only children include preference for solitude, eagerness to please authority figures, withdrawn, observant, independent, eccentric (Konig, 1963; Ha & Tam, 2011). On the other hand, first-born children are ambitious, driven, meticulous, conscientious, and experience more jealousy and envy. Moreover, first born children have preference for law and order, are generally authoritative, academically successful than siblings, prideful, independent, protective, natural-born leader, cautious, conventional, domineering, overbearing, obedient and impatient (Forer & Still, 1976). However, middle-born children are more likely to possess negotiation and diplomatic skills, very resilient, supportive, unconventional, friendly, rebellious, passive and creative (Konig, 1963; Ha & Tam, 2011). The last born children are

always playful, spoiled, charming, good companions, pampered, lighthearted and indulgent. In certain instances, the last born children tend to be irresponsible, lack motivation, problematic and are popular among peers (Forer & Still, 1976).

### **Adler's Theory of Birth Order**

This study was informed by the Alfred Adler's theory of birth order. This theory of birth order was developed in the 20th century and it argues that the order in which a child is born shapes their development. Alfred Adler was the first to publish a theoretical discussion of birth order effects in 1928 (Srivastava, 2011). According to Adler (1928), birth order leaves an indelible impression on the individual's style of life. Adler believed that the position of the child in the family introduces fairly definable problems which tend to call forth certain types of solution (Issacson, 2004). Adler (1928) argues that the situation into which children are born and the way they interpret it influences their character and hence adjustment to new environments. Adler also opined that though children have the same parents and grow up in nearly the same family setting, they do not have identical social environments (Srivastava, 2011). Adler categorized the order of siblings into five groups such as the first-born, the second child, the middle child, the youngest child and the only child. Each position has a different psychological characteristic (Adler & Brett, 2009).

According to Adler, birth order has lasting effects on one's personality and thus the way in one adjusts to new environments. Adler argues that birth order differences in personality are mostly due to siblings trying to compete for the attention of their parents by claiming certain niches or roles within the family (Adler, 1964). Therefore, within a family, individuals compare themselves to their siblings in order to decide what role they play. If first-borns are extremely intelligent and subsequent siblings believe that they would not be able to achieve that level of intelligence, they would find another role to play, such as the most sociable child or the most creative one, in order to earn their parents' attention. According to Rohrer, Egloff, and Schmukle (2015), firstborns, who are physically superior to their siblings at a young age, are more likely to show dominant behavior and therefore become less agreeable. Later-borns, searching for other ways to assert themselves, tend to rely on social support and become more sociable and thus more extraverted. This theory was relevant for the present study because it indicates how children of different birth orders have varied personalities and therefore levels of adjustments to new environments such as university.

### **Literature Review**

Literature on birth order and adjustment exists in varied contexts with different results. Earlier research by William (1959) on birth order and adjustment indicated that the older in a family of two was significantly better adjusted than the younger in a family of two and also better adjusted than all other first born. The

middle child of a family of three proved to be better adjusted than all other children born in an intermediate position. The results imply that good adjustment is positively related to being born first, particularly in a family of two, with being born as the middle child in a family of three, and with being the last born in truly big families. Gallagher and Cowen (1977) showed that for emotional progression, there was a significant difference seen at Birth order level. In a study of 196 undergraduate students at Stanford University, Herrera, Zajonc, Wiczorkowska, and Cichomski (2003) found that people characterized firstborns as the most intelligent, obedient, stable, responsible, and the least emotional and only children were characterized as being the most disagreeable. Middle-borns are believed to be the most envious and the least bold and talkative and last-borns were characterized by being the most creative, emotional, extraverted, disobedient, irresponsible, and talkative. Similarly, Labay and Walco (2004) indicated that birth order of the child with is associated with less positive adjustment. Fergusson et al., (2006) reported that the intrafamily dynamics initiated by birth order may have a lasting effect on the individual in terms of later educational and achievement outcomes.

In another study, Fergusson, Horwood, and Boden (2006) in New Zealand concluded that the intra-family dynamics initiated by birth order may have a lasting effect on the individual in terms of later educational and achievement outcomes. However, Borne and Mears (2009) study reported no significant sibling ordinal position effects on the children's behaviors. Wong et al., (2010) found small but significant effects indicating that older siblings had a greater influence over time on younger siblings' identity development than, particularly when the older sibling was of the same gender. Sambul (2011) study among undergraduate students from Rowan University showed that two subjects who were depressed were not first-borns, yet middle and last-born. Nissenbaum (2012) found that only-borns and middle-borns held the lowest scores for academic and social success. In another study, Hotz and Pantano (2013) reported that children's school performance and adjustment declines with birth order, as first born children have higher adjustment while the last born children have the least score in adjust adjustment attributed to decline in the toughness of their parents' disciplinary actions. Moreover, De Haan, Plug, and Rosero (2014) reported that there are positive and persistent birth order effects on achievement; that is, first-born children lag behind in educational achievement from infancy to adolescence, evidently due to mothers spending less quality time with first-borns, and breastfeeding them for a shorter period than later-born children.

In agreement, Rohrer, Egloff and Schmukle (2015) reported that firstborns scored slightly higher on intelligence and intellect, but we observed no differences in extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness, or imagination. Similarly, Priya and Raina (2016) indicated that male later born students had better social adjustment as compared to male first born students, but female first born students had better social adjustment as compared to female later born students. In addition, Preeti and Navin (2016) indicated that first-born children are more likely to display a perfectionistic self-presentation and from scheduled interviews, we understood that paternal influences were stronger when it came to decision-making and display of conscientiousness. Coşkun, Çikrikci, and Topkaya (2017)

study reported that the youngest siblings compete for the teacher's interest and are inclined to attract attention and remain unresponsive due to acceptance difference; the oldest siblings conceive attracting attention as a way of compensating for loss of family interest.

In Nigeria, Ekeh and Iyomaterere (2016) revealed that there is no significant influence of first and second born positions on students' social adjustment, and there is no significant influence of first and second born positions on students' social adjustment. Similarly, Moshoeshe (2016) study indicated that there is a negative correlation between birth and educational attainment, and this is highest among first born children while it's the least among last born children. Moreover, Ramesh (2018) study found that there is no significance difference between first born, second born and third born students on home, social, emotional and health adjustment. In another study, Joy and Mathew (2018) showed that there is a significant difference between the emotional maturity and general well-being of adolescents belongs to different birth orders such as first born, last born and single child as well as there is a significant relationship between emotional maturity and general well-being of adolescents. Kanu and Gayatri (2018) reported that birth order does not seem to play its significant role on emotional adjustment of adolescents. Kieron (2018) study showed that later-born children in large families particularly benefit from educational expansion due to the longer average birth interval between the first and last child in large families, meaning that the supply of educational opportunities increased to a greater extent in the intervening period.

In another study, Easey et al., (2019) reported that higher birth order was associated with poor adjustment levels while first born children are well adjusted. Yehui and Zhiqiang (2019) found that the only child has significant higher educational outcomes comparing to a child who has siblings, the middle child has the lowest educational outcomes of a family while last born child has higher educational outcomes than their siblings. Esposito, Kumar, and Villaseñor (2020) study reported that birth order variables display negative and highly significant coefficients on adjustment. Kieron, Torkild, and Dalton (2021) suggest that parental birth order influences offspring educational outcomes through the parents own educational and socioeconomic attainment. The study further reported that having a later-born parent reduces educational attainment to a small extent, a second- or fifth-born mother reduces educational attainment. Hoang and Quang (2021) established that birth order has a significant, negative effect on child educational attainment, although that effect seems to vanish with the youngest sibling. Kaemra and Singh (2021) showed that there is no difference in adjustments of first born and second born. Cayubit et al., (2021) revealed that those who are psychologically firstborns tend to endorse the mastery-approach goal orientation while those who are psychologically youngest or lastborn endorses mastery avoidance. Similarly, Fukuya et al., (2021) reported that the resilience and adjustment was highest among last-borns, followed by first-borns, middle-borns, and only children. Another study by Alabbasi, Tadik, Acar, and Runco (2021) showed that first-borns had higher adjustment as demonstrated by divergent thinking than later-born children but no significant difference was found between only children and first-born children with siblings. In Kenya, Chege (2015)

concluded that there is a statistically significant relationship between procrastination and the respondents' birth position and that most of those who procrastinated were last borns' and a few middle borns'.

In the Kenyan context, there is reported low adjustment among first year students at public universities. In a recent study, Osoro, Nyamwange, and Obuba (2020), reported that, the first year students in public universities in Kenya face several adjustment issues including low academic achievement, increased suicidal cases, unplanned pregnancies, students killing each, drug abuse all of which lead to drop out when not addressed in a timely manner. From literature review, very scanty information was available on differences in adjustment on the basis of birth order. Moreover, the reviewed studies did not focus on the combined aspects of adjustment, while the present study had combined aspects of adjustment together. In addition, the results from the existing literature on birth order have largely varied results and a confirmation of the same was necessary and this warranted the present research. Therefore, the present study sought to examine effect of birth order differences on adjustment among first year undergraduate students in one selected university in Kenya.

### **The Present Study**

The present study examined effect of birth order differences on adjustment among first year undergraduate students in one selected university in Kenya.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypothesis was tested:

Ho1: There is no significant effect of birth order differences on adjustment among first year undergraduate students in one selected university

### **Methods**

#### **Research Design**

A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for this study. In cross-sectional survey, a researcher collects information from a sample drawn from a population, and the data collection takes place at one point of time. This design enabled the researcher to observe two or more variables at the point in time and was useful for describing a relationship between two or more variables (Breakwell, Hammond, & Fife-Schaw, 1995). Therefore, the design was appropriate in assessing the relationship between birth order and adjustment among first year university students.

## Research Participants

The study participants comprised 120 (56.3%) females and 93 (43.7%) males who were first year students at one university in western Kenya. From a population of 2130 freshmen, the final sample size of 213 first year students was obtained using the 10% criteria according to the recommendation by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Their ages ranged from 17 to 30 years, with a mean age of 19.5 years ( $SD=1.5$ ). The birth order of the respondents was distributed between 1st and 7th inclusive, with the highest proportion of them being first-borns as reflected by 56 translating to 26.3% of the surveyed students. This was followed by sixth-borns at 54 (25.4%) and the respondents in the second born position were 41 (19.2%) of the participants, while the rest of the respondents were distributed among third (12.7%), fourth (11.3%) and fifth (5.2%) born in their families. The students were drawn from various faculties within the university. In the selection of the first year students, both stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used.

## Research Tools

The adjustment questionnaire was used to collect data from first year university students. The first section of the adjustment had information on birth order of the respondents captured with options of first born, second born, last born, only child and middle born child. The adjustment questionnaire measured the academic, social, emotional and psychological aspects. The academic adjustment sub-scale contained 10 items and it sought the students' opinions on academic adjustment at the university. Some of the items in the academic adjustment sub-scale include; "I feel confident and relaxed while in lectures", and "Thinking about the grade I may get in a course interferes with my classwork". The social adjustment sub-scale had 10 items and it gathered relevant information regarding the level of social adjustment among first year students. Some of the items in the social adjustment sub-scale include; "Being ignored, or being socially awkward at school, would reduce my sense of self-worth", and "My self-esteem is affected by my status as a first year".

The emotional adjustment sub-scale had 10 items and was used to measure the feelings and emotions of first year students about their confidence level, how people rate them, their looks, and sense of humor among other factors. Some of the items in the emotional adjustment sub-scale include; "My eyes get wet on seeing the difficulties of others", and "I feel very much frightened even in minor frightful places". Finally, the psychological adjustment sub-scale had 10 items and it measured the level of psychological adjustment of first year students. Some of which were; "I feel very jittery when taking an important test", and "Even when I am well prepared for reporting to school, I feel very anxious". Each of the sub-scales of Adjustment had a 5-point Likert response scale such as; *Strongly Agree* (5), *Agree* (4), *Neutral* (3), *Disagree* (2) and *Strongly Disagree* (1). The reliability of adjustment questionnaire was ascertained by internal consistency method, and an alpha of .736 was reported which confirm that the questionnaire had an acceptable reliability standard. The internal validity of the adjustment



questionnaire was ensured by Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin (KMO) indices and results indicate that all measures of the questionnaire have KMO values above 0.5 implying adequate validity.

### **Procedure**

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Academic Registrar of the selected public university in western Kenya. The appointment was made to collect data from the first year students at the selected university. The students were sampled from various faculties and assembled at the assembly hall; then the aim of the study explained to them after which those who agreed to participate in the study were issued with consent forms. After signing consent forms, they were issued with questionnaires to complete after which the researcher collected the questionnaires back. The questionnaires were presented to first year students from various faculties in different orders to nullify a systematic order effect. The students took about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaires, thereafter they were debriefed.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data from questionnaires was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The inferential statistics such as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Tukey's honestly significant difference post hoc tests were used to examine the differences in adjustment on the bases of birth order of the first year students. The use of ANOVA was appropriate because there was one independent (birth order) variable with six levels (groups) and one dependent continuous variable (Overall Adjustment). Scores on the overall adjustment scale was ranging from 0.50 to 2.87 with high scores indicating higher levels of adjustment. The level of significance ( $p$ )-value was set at 0.05 level. The level of significance ( $p$ )-value was set at 0.05 level.

## **Results**

### **Birth Order Differences and Overall Adjustment**

The study sought to investigate the birth order differences on overall adjustment among first year university students. This was done by use of a One-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA). Birth order variable was a recoded variable by grouping the order of birth into six levels namely: Group 1: 1<sup>st</sup> born up to Group 6: 6<sup>th</sup> born. Scores on the overall adjustment scale was ranging from 0.50 to 2.87 with high scores indicating higher levels of overall adjustment. The results of descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Results on Overall Adjustment

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min.	Max.
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
1st Born	61	2.0426	0.43922	0.05624	1.9301	2.1551	1.09	2.87
2nd Born	41	1.6433	0.37684	0.05885	1.5244	1.7623	1.10	2.59
3rd Born	29	1.7246	0.39668	0.07366	1.5737	1.8755	1.09	2.38
4th Born	22	1.5767	0.35047	0.07472	1.4213	1.7321	0.93	2.12
5th Born	11	1.7484	0.29354	0.08851	1.5512	1.9456	1.09	2.18
6th Born	49	1.7020	0.36217	0.05174	1.5980	1.8060	0.96	2.44
Total	213	1.7808	0.42157	0.02889	1.7238	1.8377	0.93	2.87

From the results of the descriptive statistics in table 1, it is evident that the students who were 1<sup>st</sup> born had the highest mean overall adjustment level ( $n=61$ ,  $M=2.04$ ,  $SD=0.44$ ), while the 4<sup>th</sup> born had the least overall adjustment rating ( $n=22$ ,  $M=1.58$ ,  $SD=0.35$ ). The rest ranged in between from a mean of 1.64 to 1.74.

One-way ANOVA was used to establish whether there are significant differences in the overall adjustment mean scores among first year university students across the six groups of birth order. The ANOVA results are summarized as shown in the SPSS output in Table 2.

Table 2. ANOVA Results on Differences on Overall Adjustment on the Basis of Birth Order

Overall Adjustment					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.279	5	1.256	8.279	0.000
Within Groups	31.398	207	0.152		
Total	37.677	212			

The ANOVA results in Table 2 indicate a significant effect, [ $F(5, 207)=8.279$ ,  $p=0.000$ ], of order of birth of respondents on their level of overall adjustment. This indicates that there were significant differences on the overall adjustment on the basis of birth orders of first year students at university. Therefore, since the ANOVA results were significant, post-hoc tests was used to ascertain and test where differences in overall adjustment lie on the various categories of birth orders. The results of Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc test are presented in Table 3.

The results of Tukey's HSD Post Hoc test presented in Table 3 revealed a statistically significant difference between the overall adjustment of the 1<sup>st</sup> born respondents ( $M=2.07$ ,  $SD=0.48$ ) and the overall adjustment of other order of births. However, a significant difference was not established among other order of birth. This suggests that only 1<sup>st</sup> born respondents presented a significantly higher overall adjustment compared to the rest. Given that a statistical significance difference was established, the effect size was calculated using eta squared. The resulting eta squared value is 0.17, which according Cohen (1988) and Brydges, (2019) would be considered a large effect size. Therefore, the null hypothesis that; *there is no significant effect of birth order differences on adjustment among first*

year undergraduate students in one selected university, was rejected. It was concluded that order of birth affects overall adjustment of first year university students, with 1<sup>st</sup> born students tend to adjust more/faster than their younger siblings. Order of birth accounts for 17% ( $\eta^2=0.17$ ) of the variability in overall adjustment among the first year university students.

Table 3. Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test Results on Differences on Overall Adjustment on the Basis of Birth Order

(I) Order of Birth	(J) Order of Birth	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1st Born	2nd Born	0.39926*	0.07865	0.000	0.1730	0.6255
	3rd Born	0.31800*	0.08785	0.005	0.0653	0.5707
	4th Born	0.46587*	0.09686	0.000	0.1873	0.7445
	5th Born	0.29421	0.12758	0.196	-0.0728	0.6612
	6th Born	0.34059*	0.07471	0.000	0.1257	0.5555
2nd Born	1st Born	-0.39926*	0.07865	0.000	-0.6255	-0.1730
	3rd Born	-0.08126	0.09450	0.955	-0.3531	0.1906
	4th Born	0.06661	0.10293	0.987	-0.2295	0.3627
	5th Born	-0.10505	0.13225	0.968	-0.4855	0.2754
	6th Born	-0.05867	0.08243	0.980	-0.2958	0.1785
3rd Born	1st Born	-0.31800*	0.08785	0.005	-0.5707	-0.0653
	2nd Born	0.08126	0.09450	0.955	-0.1906	0.3531
	4th Born	0.14787	0.11011	0.761	-0.1689	0.4646
	5th Born	-0.02379	0.13791	1.000	-0.4205	0.3729
	6th Born	0.02259	0.09125	1.000	-0.2399	0.2851
4th Born	1st Born	-0.46587*	0.09686	0.000	-0.7445	-0.1873
	2nd Born	-0.06661	0.10293	0.987	-0.3627	0.2295
	3rd Born	-0.14787	0.11011	0.761	-0.4646	0.1689
	5th Born	-0.17166	0.14382	0.840	-0.5854	0.2420
	6th Born	-0.12529	0.09995	0.810	-0.4128	0.1622
5th Born	1st Born	-0.29421	0.12758	0.196	-0.6612	0.0728
	2nd Born	0.10505	0.13225	0.968	-0.2754	0.4855
	3rd Born	0.02379	0.13791	1.000	-0.3729	0.4205
	4th Born	0.17166	0.14382	0.840	-0.2420	0.5854
	6th Born	0.04638	0.12994	0.999	-0.3274	0.4202
6th Born	1st Born	-0.34059*	0.07471	0.000	-0.5555	-0.1257
	2nd Born	0.05867	0.08243	0.980	-0.1785	0.2958
	3rd Born	-0.02259	0.09125	1.000	-0.2851	0.2399
	4th Born	0.12529	0.09995	0.810	-0.1622	0.4128
	5th Born	-0.04638	0.12994	0.999	-0.4202	0.3274

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

## Discussion

The study examined effect of birth order differences on adjustment among first year undergraduate students in one selected university. The study findings reported that order of birth affects overall adjustment of first year university students, with 1<sup>st</sup> born students tend to adjust in better ways than their younger siblings. This finding agrees with William (1959) that indicated that good adjustment is positively related to being born first, particularly in a family of two, with being born as the middle child in a family of three, and with being the last

born in truly big families. In agreement, Hotz and Pantano (2013) reported that first born children have higher adjustment while the last born children have the least score in adjust adjustment attributed to decline in the toughness of their parents' disciplinary actions. In addition, Preeti and Navin (2016) indicated that first-born children are more likely to display a perfectionistic self-presentation and from scheduled interviews, we understood that paternal influences were stronger when it came to decision-making and display of conscientiousness. Similarly, Joy and Mathew (2018) indicated that there is a significant difference between the emotional maturity and general well-being of adolescents belongs to different birth orders such as first born. In agreement, Easey et al., (2019) reported that higher birth order was associated with poor adjustment levels while first born children are well adjusted. Another study by Esposito et al., (2020) reported that birth order variables display negative and highly significant coefficients on adjustment. Similarly, Hoang and Quang (2021) established that birth order has a significant, negative effect on child educational attainment, although that effect seems to vanish with the youngest sibling. Finally, Alabbasi, Tadik, Acar, and Runco (2021) also agreed that first-borns had higher adjustment as demonstrated by divergent thinking than later-born children but no significant difference was found between only children and first-born children with siblings. This finding also agrees with Adler (1964) theoretical argument that birth order differences affect adjustment levels of students due to siblings trying to compete for the attention of their parents by claiming certain niches or roles within the family.

However, the findings of the present study are contrary to that of Borne and Mears (2009) which reported no significant sibling ordinal position effects on the children's behaviors. In addition, Ekeh and Iyomaterere (2016) revealed that there is no significant influence of first and second born positions on students' social adjustment, and there is no significant influence of first and second born positions on students' social adjustment. Similarly, Kanu and Gayatri (2018) reported that birth order does not seem to play its significant role on emotional adjustment of adolescents. Moreover, Ramesh (2018) found that there is no significance difference between first born, second born and third born students on home, social, emotional and health adjustment. In addition, Kaemra and Singh (2021) showed that there is no difference in adjustments of first borns and second borns. Similarly, Fukuya et al., (2021) reported that the resilience and adjustment was highest among last-borns, followed by first-borns, middle-borns, and only children. The differences in the results of the present study and these reviewed studies could be attributed to varying contexts and research participants.

## Conclusions

The study concludes that order of birth affects overall adjustment of first year university students, with 1st born students tend to adjust in the academic, social, emotional and psychological aspects than other students occupying other ordinal positions in their families; their younger siblings. The study also concludes that second born first year students struggled in all aspects of adjustments at university.

Therefore, order of birth explained a significant variability in overall adjustment among the first year university students. The study concludes that birth order of an individual plays an important role in their lives as it affects their internal energy on how they adjust to the new environments such as the university. The first born students are more internally equipped with cognitive, behavioral, psychological and emotional strategies of adjusting to new environments and challenges.

### Implications

The results of the study have implications to university students, department of counselling at universities, parents and university administration. This study recommends that the staff at university counseling centers should develop support services for new students in the institutions to help them adjust appropriately on transiting to higher education. Moreover, counseling staff at universities should be trained on cognitive behavioural therapies to enhance the adjustment of new students at the institutions. Universities should develop appropriate student services to improve orientations for new students in the institutions. Further research should be done on institutional based factors affecting adjustment of first year students in public universities.

### Limitations

This study has one limitation in that it only focused on birth order among other possible psychological factors which could affect adjustment among first year students at university. Future studies could focus on other psychological factors influencing adjustment among first year students.

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## **The Use of E-learning During COVID-19 Pandemic Era**

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Communication in teaching and learning space has never been the same following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis of COVID-19 has brought about the urgency for most higher education institutions to adopt e-learning. This response was to save the academic year. Hence, this study explores how e-learning has aided African universities to engage their students in teaching and learning. A quantitative research method was adopted for the collection of data. The survey was made up of 400 questionnaires which were randomly administered to the second-and third-year students in the selected South African university. The findings of the study show that e-learning trends before COVID-19 were unappreciated and unaccepted. Meanwhile, following the outbreak of the coronavirus, e-learning has become one of the most sort-out phenomena. However, several factors such as unawareness, lack of funding, and poor internet connectivity, amongst others have always hindered the use of e-learning platforms. Hence, the study recommends amongst others that adequate awareness be made to educate both lecturers and students on the importance and the continuous use of e-learning. Also, funding should be made available for institutions of learning to enable them to adapt to e-learning. The gains achieved must be maintained and continue post-COVID-19.

*Keywords:* African universities, COVID-19, Coronavirus, e-learning

### **Introduction**

The recent trend in the development of digital technology has advanced rapidly changing the way we communicate and operate in the business world as well as the academic field. For instance, the concept of e-learning has brought wide development in our educational system. Yakubu and Dasuki (2018) as well as Tossy and Brown (2017) argue that e-learning is assisting the higher institution of learning by enhancing the quality of education provided and minimizing various educational costs. Pham et al. (2019) opine that the adoption of e-learning at higher institutions of learning has the potential of assisting the institution by creating solutions to the problem of limited lecture space and allowing students to earn at their convenience to digital course content.

Akoi et al. (2021) and Saragih, Cristanto, Effendi, and Zamzami (2021) believe that there are several mitigating factors hindering institutions from being able to equip their students. Vis-à-vis, there are other factors hindering students from being equipped with digital devices that promote e-learning. The study conducted by Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh, and Althunibat (2020) on factors hindering universities and students from being equipped for e-learning show four factors

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which hinder e-learning, and these are technological factors, individual factors, cultural factors and course factors. Previous studies conducted by Aung and Khaing (2015), as well as Dhawan (2020), indicate that insufficient technical support, poor internet connectivity and lack of e-learning policies are factors that hinder universities from equipping lecturers and students from the use of e-learning.

Azmi, Kamin, Noordin, and Nazir (2018) mentioned that in the educational sector, awareness regarding the 4IR is relatively low because it is a recent aspect that involves the inclusion and use of technologies in teaching. On the other hand, the issue of the fourth Industrial revolution (4IR) tends to be receiving very minimal recognition in the African continent, in different systems and parastatals, inclusive of education (Uleanya & Yu, 2019). Aristovnik et al. (2020) opine that with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the subject of the 4IR tends to have received due attention abruptly, especially in the education system. Naidoo and Israel (2020) aver that the COVID-19 disruption has indeed led higher education to the reordering of priorities, with a focus on how to salvage the academic year. They further state that the traditional delivery of pedagogy had to be placed on hold, and e-learning perhaps became the only medium of choice for universities (Naidoo and Israel, 2020).

Suffice it to say from the views and discussions of previous scholars, it has shown that e-learning is significant to the growth of the educational system and cannot be without it in our institution of learning. Furthermore, in this 21st century, students need to acquire the necessary skills to be able to compete and meet the demands of the global world. Therefore, the study investigates the use of e-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic at two universities as a case study.

## **Literature Review**

The need to consider previously conducted research within the scope of this study is crucial as it helps to give a guide. It also helps to indicate similar practices or happenings in the field in other parts of the world following previously published works of scholars, especially those in the field. In the context of this study, the literature review is guided by specific headings concerning the subject matter. These headings include Learning Management Systems (LMSs), blended e-learning, advantages of e-learning, disadvantages of e-learning, e-learning in South Africa, and the challenges universities experience when equipping students for e-Learning. This is followed by the conceptual model of the study, research methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

### **Learning Management Systems**

Naidu (2020) explains that the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted many higher institutions of learning to shift their learning practices from the traditional style of learning to online learning. This can be viewed from the area of the use of e-learning platforms such as MOODLE Learning Management Systems (LMS),

and Blackboard, amongst others which were relatively in low usage, receiving little or no attention before the outbreak of COVID-19 (Herayanti et al. 2018). In addition, Chaka (2020) added that the recent outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has provided the opportunity for e-learning not only in the business and education world as well as other spheres of human endeavours such as politics, and the economy, amongst others. Furthermore, through e-learning, various meetings, conferences, seminars, and symposia, amongst others are being held online using various platforms like Zoom, Skype, Cisco WebEx Meeting Center, Microsoft Teams, HighFive, BigBlueButton, ON24, and Zoho Meeting amongst others (Chaka, 2020).

Murshitha and Wickramarachchi (2016) indicated that because of the pandemic, has created an opportunity for LMS (Learning Management System) which is an ICT platform through which teaching and learning are delivered. Uziak Oladiran, Lorencowicz, and Becker (2018) add that LMS provides an opportunity by which teaching and learning occur electronically and provides multiple content functionalities. Moorhouse (2020) views that the use of LMS in higher institutions of learning will enhance teaching and learning activities between the lecturer and the student as well as assist in improving the academic performance of the students. Davis, Kong, McBride, and Morrison (2017) opine that LMS provides a significant function in higher education such as the elimination of physical location for teaching and learning, providing access to information and creating an attractive learning environment. Nadeem, Malik, and Noreen (2021) observe that the use of LMS in higher education creates a virtual environment which creates and delivers course content to the students as well as monitors the students' involvement during lectures. Pappas (2020) notes that LMS provides students with the possibility to interact through its features such as video conferencing, threaded discussion and discussion forums. Turnbull, Chugh, and Luck (2019) argue that the main attribute of LMS is the delivery of educational materials and assessment of learning activities. Ghilay (2019) mentions some of the benefits that the higher institutions of learning enjoy using LMS such as lecturer and students access to learning materials and content at anytime and anywhere, a unified place of learning, an increase in student effectiveness in terms of assignment submission and good learning analytics. Nevertheless, having considered LMS, there is a need to gain clarity as regards the term blended learning.

### **Blended E-learning**

Saragih, Cristanto, Effendi, and Zamzami (2021) describe blended e-learning as the combination of face-to-face learning, synchronous and asynchronous. Harahap, Nasution, and Manurung (2019) indicate that this kind of e-learning is used in the facilitation of efficient and effective delivery of courses through the combination of the use of digital technologies and face-to-face teaching techniques. Medina (2018) explains that concerning this type of setting, both the face-to-face and online presences happen continually amidst lecturers and students. Kristanto (2017) and Medina (2018) indicate that blended learning

involves the incorporation of traditional ways of learning and online ways of learning.

Furthermore, diverse educational experts have reported that blended learning is an efficient method of learning because it incorporates both traditional methods of learning and online learning style. Shu and Gu (2018) observe that the combination of traditional face-to-face instruction, asynchronous e-learning and synchronous e-learning will assist lecturers to gain access to interactive communication between lecturers and students using communication devices. According to Tsai and Tang (2017), Dwiyogo (2018) and Lestari, Rahman, Wirjawan, and Hidayat (2019) show that blended learning assists students to develop both their digital skills and communication skills which enables them to search and download online materials by themselves and communicate freely with other classmates. Anthonysamy, Ah-Choo, and Soon-Hin (2019) add that since blended learning comprises a mixture of online and face-to-face learning, this will assist and interest students to learn at their speed and on their own time. Sahni (2019) notes that if blended learning is appropriately integrated, it is an alternative form of learning which will enhance students' academic excellence and student retention. Blau, Shamir-Inbal, and Avdiel (2020) believe that blended learning presents students with diverse learning materials which can be used to communicate and share information with lecturers and classmates. However, this can result in plagiarism. Nevertheless, note that blending learning can add to lecturers' work schedules thereby making it difficult for lecturers to choose the proper learning style. While there may be challenges experienced by the institution, lecturer and students there are also many advantages that e-learning offers.

### ***Advantages of E-learning***

E-learning has brought numerous advantages through its adoption in the educational sector, especially higher education. Akoi et al. (2021), Raspopovic, Cvetanovic, Medan, and Ljubojevic (2017) and Algahtani (2011) concur that e-learning has a wide range of advantages compared to the traditional mode of learning if it is used properly. Govender and Khoza (2017) and Anwar (2017) reveal that e-learning is significant in the educational sector because it centres on the necessities of each student as an essential factor in the activity of learning instead of the instructors or the institutional needs. Ismael et al. (2021) maintain that many of the advantages of e-learning are centred on students. Azzi-Huck and Shmis (2020) and Shahzad, Chin, Altaf, and Bajwa (2020) opine that e-learning has surfaced as an essential and crucial influence in academic institutions of learning and institutions should endeavour to shift to this learning service. In this regard, Ali et al. (2021) opine those potential challenges such as lack of a venue for gatherings, shyness on the part of students, and fears experienced by students when having physical contact and conversation with people, amongst others are eliminated using e-learning. Suffice it to state that in the advent of the recent COVID-19 outbreak, e-learning in this instance helps to ensure the health and safety of lives as physical contacts which can allow transmission of the Coronavirus disease from one person to another are avoided.

Al Rawashdeh et al. (2021) explains that e-learning helps to motivate and encourage students to interact with one another, thereby expressing their opinions and exchanging views over issues. In this regard, the interaction between students and lecturers is duly encouraged. Jamal (2021) notes that students get to freely express themselves over the subject of discourse, especially those who tend to struggle when interacting with their lecturers. Pande, Wadhai, and Thakare (2016) state that lecturers get to easily communicate with their students as barriers such as classroom management are avoided in this instance.

Pande, Wadhai, and Thakare (2016) indicate that the cost of e-learning is effective because it enables students to avoid travelling long distances. Uleanya, Gamede, and Uleanya (2019) consider the distance between students' homes and campuses as a learning challenge that hampers the learning abilities and academic performances of students. However, with the use of e-learning, such challenges would be avoided. Similarly, distance to campus also poses a challenge to lecturers. Thus, with e-learning, lecturers can overcome such challenges. Baczek et al. (2021) view that e-learning enables institutions to save costs and expenses in erecting structures for teaching and learning. However, with e-learning, such challenges would be catered for, without the nation having to bother so much with required physical facilities and resources.

### ***Disadvantages of E-Learning***

A review of a study conducted by Al Rawashdeh et al. (2021) as well as Yusuf and Al-Banawi (2013) shows that e-learning has some disadvantages such as students having low motivation towards study. Favale et al. (2020) note that students who have bad study habits or are slow in assimilation may fall behind in their academics. Furthermore, some students might get confused regarding the course content or class activities when there is no proper class situation. Pande, Wadhai, and Thakare (2016) view that e-learning can create laxity on the part of students who may be less interested in following the lecture. Dhawan (2020) opines that physical contact in a teaching and learning setting has a way of ensuring the participation of students regardless of their disposition at that very moment. However, in the case of e-learning, this tends to be difficult or impossible in some instances (Dhawan, 2020).

Aslan, Ochnik, and Çınar (2020) note that with the use of e-learning, it may be difficult for a lecturer to spot students who are emotionally stressed and fail to participate in class activities especially in small classes compared to what is obtainable in an e-learning platform. For example, a tired and sleepy student may easily be motivated to stand and take part in-class activities in a physical contact setting, compared to an e-learning setting

Pande Wadhai, and Thakare (2016) opine that e-learning may negatively affect students who may be academically knowledgeable and sound but poor in the use of online communication skills. This adversely affects the learning abilities of such students and puts them in a disadvantaged position. Similarly, Rucker & Downey (2016) as well as Schmidt, Tschida, and Hodge (2016) opine that lecturers may be knowledgeable and well-grounded on the subject to be taught but may lack the skills to teach using e-learning platforms.

Puljak et al. (2020) indicated another disadvantage which involves assessing students using e-learning in some instances may be difficult or impossible. For instance, assessing students on practical courses may be difficult or impossible when they are expected to role-play in class or perform certain activities which require physical contact with others. Pathak and Vyas (2019) view that e-learning tends to create room for students to cheat compared to when they are assessed through the traditional face-to-face method. A review of the works of Dhawan (2020) and OECD Policy Responses to COVID-19 shows that despite the disadvantages of e-learning, it still has a lot of advantages that inspire users to continue its usage and limit its disadvantages. Following the focus of this study which centres on South Africa, there is a need to explore the trend of E-learning in South Africa. Hence, the next sub-heading gives a brief on e-learning in the nation: South Africa.

### **E-Learning in South Africa**

According to the report from the Department of Education (2003), South Africa is trying all its efforts to become one of the leading countries in Africa in the use of ICT. Government Communication and Information System GCIS (2002) explains that the South African government sees e-education as an important approach to becoming competitive in this global world. As a result of this, the South African government adopted the white paper on the e-Education policy which was instituted in schools to implement ICT in transforming teaching and learning (Department of Education, 2004). South Africa's e-Education policy states that:

“Every South African learner in the general and further education and training bands will be ICT capable (that is, use ICT confidently and creatively to help develop the skills and knowledge learners need to achieve personal goals and to be full participants in the global community) by 2013.” (Department of Education, 2003, p. 19).

The works of Bagarukayo and Kalema (2015) as well as Venter, van Rensburg, and Davis (2012) show that South Africa like many other nations within Sub-Saharan Africa has adopted the use of e-learning systems and platforms. A review of the work of Naidoo, Madida, and Rugbeer (2019) shows that the student population in South Africa is rapidly changing and there are an increased number of students that are considered digital learners. These students tend to crave digital applications; thus, any other older method or process of learning seems to be very reluctantly embraced. Hence, this makes the task of the Department of Education (2004) on the implementation of ICT in transforming teaching and learning crucial. The work of Naidoo, Madida, and Rugbeer (2019) further indicate that students enjoy learning that has a seamless and uninterrupted flow of information. However, e-learning has remained a slowly growing phenomenon in South Africa as well as other African societies. According to Uleanya and Gamede (2019), the slow growth of e-learning in South Africa like other developing and underdeveloped nations is hinged on several factors such as the high rate of poverty, ignorance, low level of exposure, and low acceptability rate, amongst others. However, in the

subject of e-learning, there is a need to explore some of the factors mitigating South African universities in equipping their students for e-learning. Hence, the following sub-heading identifies and explains some of the factors hindering universities from equipping their students for e-learning in South Africa.

### **Challenges Universities Experience when Equipping Students for E-Learning**

In the context of South Africa as is the case with many underdeveloped and developing nations across the globe, which are predominantly African, even with the e-education policy on the implementation of ICTs in schools across the country, there are still gaps in the policy and challenges in their implementation (Mdlongwa, 2012). According to the report from PanAf (2008-2011), and Nkula and Krauss (2014) indicate that despite the significance of e-learning in education, many institutions in South Africa still have challenges in acquiring adequate e-learning facilities. The study conducted by scholars in South Africa on e-learning revealed that the main problem is not because of a lack of ICT resources, but because many instructors are not competent to implement and maximize the possibilities of ICT resources for teaching purposes. Instead, it is being used for administrative purposes such as typing lecture notes, conducting tests and entering marks (Howie and Blignaut, 2009; PanAf, 2008-2011; Mofokeng & Mji, 2010; Ndlovu & Lawrence, 2012; Makgato, 2012). Olasina (2019) conducted a study on the effect of human and social factors on affecting the decision of students to accept e-learning at KwaZulu-Natal University. The findings of the study revealed that attitude, social influence, perceived usefulness, and perceived satisfaction are essential to students' behavioural intention to accept e-learning.

Almaiah Al-Khasawneh, A., and Althunibat (2020) identified several factors or challenges related to the integration and implementation of e-learning and have been classified into four categories namely: individual, course, technological, and cultural factors. Furthermore, in their explanation, these factors or challenges vary from one country to another due to readiness to accept e-learning, diverse cultural beliefs and environment. For instance, Aung and Khaing (2015) observed that poor network facility, poor content development and lack of digital learning and skills are the major challenges in the adoption of e-learning in many developed countries. Suffice to say that there are quite a lot of challenges which influence the implementation of e-learning.

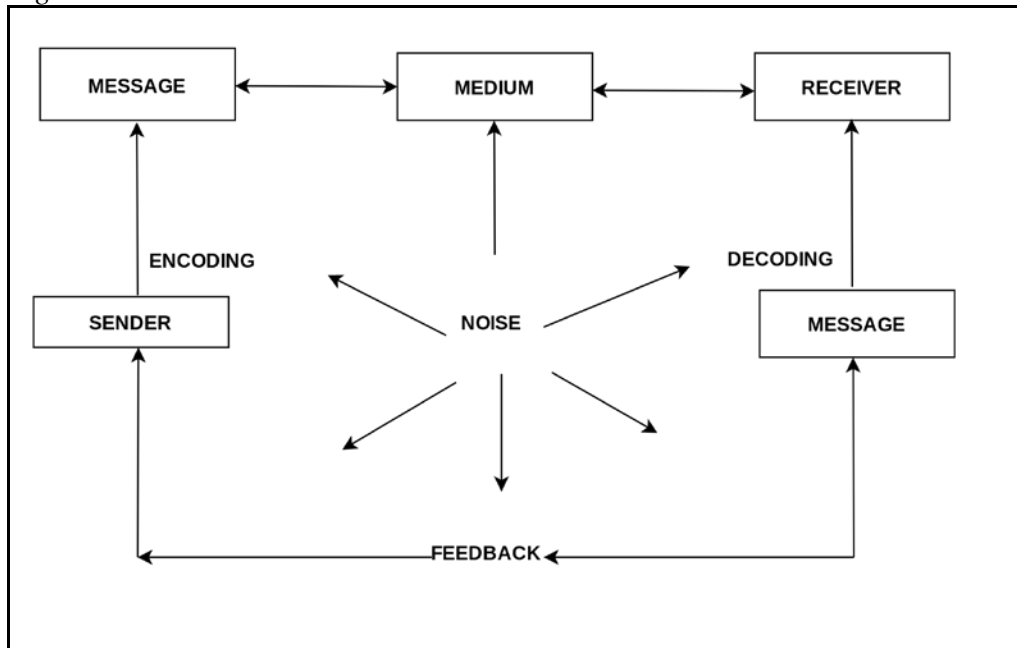
The foregoing shows that the e-Learning channel of communication in African universities is pivotal, however, challenges are hindering the adoption of such. Thus, this study attempts to examine e-learning as a channel of communication in African universities and the challenges deterring universities in Africa from equipping their students for e-learning, using South Africa as a case study. To achieve the focus of this study, the effort is made to proffer answer(s) to the research question guiding it: What are the factors hindering universities in equipping students for e-learning in the selected South African university? The study is crucial as it focuses on two distinct categories of South African universities: semi-urban and rural, which tends to make it peculiar. This is because different studies tend to focus on the subject matter from the perspective of urban institutions of learning.



### Conceptual Model

In this study, the Shannon and Weaver Model of Communication was adopted. Drew (2021) states that the Shannon and Weaver model aims to describe how communication can be processed and received. Pearhtres (2016) explains that a proper or structured communication model should adopt the following elements: Source, Message, Encoder, Channel, Receiver/Decoder, Feedback, and Noise.

Figure 1. Shannon and Weaver's Model of Communication



Source: Adapted from Hartley and Bruckmann (2002, p. 12).

The diagram in Figure 1 shows the processes involved in the flow of communication which begins with the sender. The sender, according to Kapur (2020) in the process of communication, is regarded as the most significant person in initiating communication. Nordquist (2019a) adds that when the sender initiates communication, it needs to be in a friendly manner. The next is the message which Kapur (2020) refers to as information that is transmitted from the sender to the receiver which can be embedded in oral, non-verbal, and written forms. Karmin (2016) sees a message as an idea that the sender is transmitting to the receiver. This means that the message in communication is the crucial point, idea or focus for which a sender and a receiver meet. Channel is referred to as a means through which a message or information is delivered (Eke et al. 2020). Umeozor (2020) adds that the channel of communication could be oral, or electronic, the use of public address systems, mobile technology, and video conferencing. In the context of this study, the channel can be the adoption of technology.

The receiver in the opinion of Umeozor (2020) refers to the recipient of the information who decodes the message for it to be understood. Eze, Chinedu-Eze, Okike, and Bello (2020) note that the ability of a message to be properly decoded relies on the receiver's ability to interpret it correctly. In the context of this study,

the recipients serve as the students in the selected institutions of learning. While feedback assists the sender to know how the receiver interprets the message (Umeozor 2020). Eunson (2012) observes that feedback allows interaction between the sender and the receiver of the information. In this study, the feedback can be considered as the reactions and responses from students to lecturers and the university community at large concerning the transformation being experienced following the experiences in the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), especially concerning the transition from onsite to online learning.

Lastly, Nordquist (2019b) refers to noise as any unwanted thing in the process of communication. Umeozor (2020) refers to noise as any obstacles or interference which distort the flow of information from reaching its destination. Suffice it to state that noise results in failure in the communication process. In this study, factors hampering the flow of communication from the university community to the students are classified as noise.

In the context of this study, Shannon and Weaver's model of communication is adopted to trace how communication is processed and received in the context of the selected South African universities. This is considering attempts made by the selected universities in equipping the students for e-Learning, especially as it concerns the 4IR, following all the components of the adopted model: Source, Message, Encoder, Channel, Receiver/Decoder, Feedback, and Noise.

### **Research Methodology**

A quantitative method was adopted for this study which provides access to the collection of larger data which aids the generalization of the results. Kumar (2019) explains that quantitative methods can be used in a study to gather information from large sample size and allows generalization of the results. Creswell (2014) views the Quantitative method as a process where data are collected from a large sample in a numerical format. A survey method with the use of a structured questionnaire was adopted to identify e-learning as a channel of communication in the selected South African universities. A purposive technique was adopted in selecting the institutions: semi-urban and rural, as well as the levels: second and third years. These levels of students were selected because they are not new to the systems of the selected institutions. The respondents were randomly selected. This was an attempt to ensure that all who qualify to participate in the study are allowed to do so following the submission of Kumar (2019).

## Data and Sampling

The currently estimated enrolment statistics of students in the selected universities at the time of this study were 33,000, and 16,118, respectively. Thus, following the submission of Du Plooy (2009) which indicates that a 370 sample size is sufficient for a population between 10000 and 49999. Meanwhile, the total estimate of enrolled students at the time of this study in the two selected institutions was less than 49999.

## Analysis

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.

## Ethical Consideration

The researchers endeavoured to adhere to ethical principles. Thus, ethical clearance certificates were obtained from the two selected institutions of learning. The researchers ensured that the consent of the respondents was sought before proceeding with the data collection. Anonymity was followed and respondents were free to withdraw from the study at any point if ever they felt uncomfortable.

## Findings

The result of the analysed data is presented following the research question guiding the study: What are the factors hindering universities in equipping students for e-learning in the selected South African University?

*Table 1.* Factors Militating Against Equipping Students for E-learning

S/ N	Variable	University of Zululand			Durban University of Technology		
		True	False	I do not know	True	False	I do not know
1.	The curriculum hinders me from preparing for digital learning	101 50.5%	44 22.0%	55 27.5%	137 68.5%	38 19.0%	25 12.5%
2.	Lack of exposure hinders me from preparing for digital learning	113 56.5%	60 30.0%	27 13.5%	139 69.5%	43 21.5%	18 9.0%
3.	The modules that I do hinders me from preparing for digital learning	122 61%	50 25.0%	28 14.0%	143 71.5%	43 21.5%	14 7.0%
4.	My relationship with my lecturers hinders me from preparing for digital learning	106 53.0%	64 32.0%	30 15.0%	118 59.0%	55 27.5%	27 13.5%
5.	Policies on campus do not promote digital learning	87 43.5%	49 24.5%	64 32.0%	116 58.0%	42 21.0%	42 21.0%

Table 1 depicted the plans that militated against equipping students for e-learning. The first factor was whether the curriculum hindered students from preparing for e-learning; 50.5% from UNIZULU and 68.5% came from DUT to support the assertion. 22% and 19% of the students disagreed while 27.5% and 12.5% from UNIZULU and DUT were neutral. Also, in terms of whether lack of exposure hinders students from preparing for e-learning; 56.5% of students from UNIZULU and 69.5% from DUT supported this claim. Meanwhile, 30% from UNIZULU and 21.5% from DUT were not in support and 13.5% from UNIZULU and 9% from DUT remained undecided. On the issue of whether the modules that students did hinder them from preparing for e-learning received the wholesome agreement of 61% of the students from UNIZULU and 71.5% from DUT.

Additionally, considering the factor of the student-lecturer relationship, 53% of students from UNIZULU and 59% from DUT affirmed that their relationship with the lecturers hindered them from preparing for e-learning. Meanwhile, 32% from UNIZULU and 27.5% from DUT did not agree with the statement, and 15% from UNIZULU and 13.5% from DUT were undecided.

Furthermore, with regards to whether policies on campus promoted e-learning, the findings showed that 43.5% of the respondents from UNIZULU and 58% from DUT believed it did not, 24.5% from UNIZULU and 21% from DUT agreed that it did, while 32% from UNIZULU and 21% from DUT were neutral. This suggests that policies influence the adoption and use of online learning platforms in universities. This implies that more of the respondents hold the opinion that policies on campus did not promote e-learning. In other words, institutions are expected to investigate making policies that promote e-learning in the selected institutions of higher learning, otherwise, disruption is inevitable.

## Discussion

Findings from Table 1 following Shannon and Weaver's model suggest curriculum is a message passed from curriculum designers to the school precisely educators who function as receivers as well as intermediaries communicating to students. When educators communicate with students, they can be considered senders while students in such instances would be the receivers. The finding from the study on curriculum serving as a factor that hinders students from preparing for e-learning aligns with the findings from the works of Eze, Chinedu-Eze, Okike, and Bello (2020) and Otuka (2010) who hold the view that most curricula in higher institutions of learning are inadequate because it lacks the development and design of how to use e-learning embedded into it. In congruence, Elumalai et al. (2020) add that lack of alignment between curriculum and e-learning can hinder students from being equipped with e-learning. Meanwhile, Holmes and Prieto-Rodriguez (2018) had earlier mentioned that a lack of adequate curriculum content can affect the use of e-learning in teaching and learning. The finding also coincides with the work of Eze Chinedu-Eze, Okike, and Bello (2020) which suggests that the curriculum needs to be designed for both the lecturers and students on how to improve their digital skills. In support, Van Nuland, Hall, and Langley (2020) state that the curriculum in terms of course components need to be

designed and aligned with e-learning. Moreover, the government is expected to assist in developing a strategy through which e-learning is embedded into the curriculum so that the quality of teaching and learning is improved. Suffice it to state that the curriculum plays a pivotal role in ensuring the equipping of students for embracing e-learning.

Sequel to the Shannon and Weaver's model, the subject of lack of exposure can affect distinct categories of people which can be categorised as either sender or receiver. For instance, in the context of this study, the sender being the educator can lack exposure in situations, similarly, the receiver can be considered a student. The finding of the study on lack of exposure hindering students from preparing for e-learning agrees with the work of Sino Cruz, Nanlabi, and Peoro (2019) which suggests that proper exposure to the use of e-learning tools can assist its users as well as increase the use of these tools. This is also supported by Longhurst et al. (2020) who state that a lack of exposure to technological tools can hinder students from preparing for e-learning. This also aligns with the deduction from Shannon and Weaver's model which indicates that when the needed technological tools ordinarily should serve as a channel for sending a message from sender to receiver, the flow of communication is bound to be distorted. Suffice it to state that the need for availability of technological tools in equipping students in the selected universities for e-learning is critical.

Furthermore, the content of the modules can be described as the message following Shannon and Weaver's model. The educators (sender) prepare the message (the content of the module) and transmit it to the students (the receiver). The findings of this study on whether the modules (inclusive of their content) affect equipping students for e-learning aligns with the findings of the works of Bovill (2020) and Bovill and Woolmer (2019) that state that lack of adequate module content preparation or design can hinder the students from accessing the modules or not understand the module content. Thus, there is a need for the module contents to be adequately prepared and designed in a manner that is easy for students to comprehend.

One of the findings shows that the student-lecturer relationship can be a hindering factor. In this instance, the student can serve as both sender/receiver depending on the communication flow. Similarly, lecturers can also serve as senders or receivers following Shannon and Weaver's model. Meanwhile, the way and manner their relationships are managed determines the type of feedback to be received: positive or negative. Moreover, a bad student-lecturer relationship can be tantamount to noise which would be a barrier to learning, as the students are likely to be distracted and fail to learn. The finding on the student-lecturer relationship hindering the equipping of students for e-learning corroborates the work of Dhawan (2020) who notes that it may be impossible for lecturers to relate with and help their students in their learning activities especially when the students fail to come forth to seek help. In congruence, Zhong (2020) adds that the lack of a proper relationship between the lecturer and students is another major concern associated with e-learning. In agreement, Uleanya (2019) states that the existing relationship between students and lecturers contributes to their learning abilities, and self-esteem, consequently possibly increase in their level of socialization.

Thus, the foregoing indicates that the student-lecturer relationship is crucial for students to be assisted and successfully adopt e-learning.

Furthermore, following Shannon and Weaver's model, policies can constitute noise if not well designed and implemented as they are capable of distorting communication flow from the sender (educator) to the receiver (student). On the contrary, if well designed, and implemented, they can aid positive feedback as the teaching and learning process would be enhanced. In this study, the findings on whether policies on campus promoted e-learning suggest that policies influence the adoption and use of online learning platforms in universities. This implies that more of the respondents hold the opinion that policies on campus did not promote e-learning. In other words, institutions are expected to investigate making policies that promote e-learning in the selected institutions of higher learning, otherwise, disruption is inevitable. This finding agrees with the work of Aung and Khaing (2015) who state that policies can disrupt the promotion of e-learning. Also, the findings of Saeed Al-Marouf, Alhumaid, and Salloum. (2021) show that a lack of proper policies and strategic plans can hinder the adoption and promotion of e-learning. In addition, Khalil Awan, Afshan, and Bano Memon (2021) suggest that adequate strategic plans and policies need to be put in place to enhance the successful promotion and implementation of the e-learning system in higher education. Suffice it to state that the policies put in place and implemented by the institutions of learning have the capability of making students embrace or neglect the use of digital platforms in learning.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study reviewed e-learning as a channel of communication in African societies, with an emphasis on universities. The subject of e-learning as a channel of communication was considered from the perspective of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. A review method was adopted for the study; hence, relevant kinds of literature were studied. The findings of the study following the reviewed relevant works of literature show that many African nations lagged in the use of e-learning platforms as a medium of communication in teaching and learning environments such as universities. Nevertheless, the outbreak of the pandemic spurred many into action in adapting one form of e-learning platform or the other. However, despite the desire to adopt the use of e-learning as a channel of communication in teaching and learning environments, many universities in Africa and nations are affected by the different challenges they seem to be experiencing. These challenges include issues such as technical ability, poor funding, and access to the quality of education provided, amongst others.

Sequel to the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- The curriculum should be revisited to ensure its alignment with the need of the student and current happening revolving around e-Learning as a subject. This can be done by curriculum designers considering the current practices in e-learning when revising the curriculum for suitability.

- The policies of institutions of higher learning should be revised to ensure that e-learning is embraced and promoted, especially considering the current happenings and need in the global world. This would help the institutions of learning such as universities to prepare for the uncommon normal which is now the order of the day following the outbreak of the Coronavirus which lead to COVID-19. Making e-learning compulsory will also contribute towards preparing institutions of learning for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) which is fast becoming the norm across the globe.
- Funds should be made available by the government to ensure that the necessary technological tools needed to promote e-learning are made available. This will help in promoting the quality of provided education which will be useful for students, and consequently enhance development in African societies.
- Adequate monitoring channels should also be made possible. In this case, the way messages are sent from the receiver who is lecturers in this case and how they are received by the receivers such as students should be checked. This will make students more disciplined in the use of e-learning platforms. It will also help to make lecturers more committed to the use of the provided e-learning platforms.

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