IMAGINING BETTER EDUCATION: CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS 2022

Edited by Holly Bennion, Harriet Broadfoot, Keji Fan, Tong Meng, Yuanya Zhang and Qiandong Zhou

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Introduction to the Conference Proceedings

The fourth Imagining Better Education conference held at Durham University provided a valuable forum for early career researchers to engage in constructive exchange and scholarly debate on contemporary educational and social issues. The conference was a hybrid event organised *by* PGR students *for* PGR students and early career researchers across the social sciences, where we came together to disseminate current research broadly on the conference theme: *Imagining Better Education for a Better World.* The conference organisers also aimed to champion opportunities for peer support, networking, and training workshops.

Professor Catherine Montgomery delivered the keynote speech, with additional speeches from Professor Jens Beckmann and Professor Prue Holmes. There were 32 presentations by scholars locally and internationally, including contributions from the Universities of Durham, Cambridge, Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Northampton, amongst others.

In total, ten papers make up this proceedings volume. Prompted by the possibilities of *a better education for a better world,* the papers cover a range of topics, including creativity, interculturalism, social media, reading attainment, and curriculum and pedagogy. The papers are situated within various educational and research contexts, including Britain, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Portugal, and Vietnam. The publication process involved two training workshops, as well as two blind peer reviews per paper. The contributions by authors in the proceeding that follows reflects their commitment to *Imagining Better Education* for all, through rigorous research into relevant issues affecting learners in today's world.

Welcome Address from Director of Postgraduate Research, Durham University

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this year's *Imagining Better Education* conference!

The reason why I am speaking to you this morning is not that I was the one who imagined this conference, or organised it, let alone the one who is chairing it. I am merely seizing the opportunity, which was kindly offered by the organisers, to welcome you on behalf of the School of Education here at Durham University.

After all, this is a conference, by students, of students, and for students. The students who in fact have organised this conference are *Holly Bennion, Priyanka Bhatia, Harriet Broadfoot, Keji Fan, Jiarui Li, Tong Meng, Yuanya Zhang,* and *Qiandong Zhou*. The conference is primarily about students' research and for student researchers. But, of course, it is not just you, the conference attendees, who will be the beneficiary of what will be presented, reflected upon, or celebrated here at this conference. As the subtitle of this conference theme clearly indicates it is about the world. *Imagine that!*

The conference's ambitions nicely mirror the vision that I and all the other colleagues at the School of Education here at Durham University share. Our vision is a more equitable and sustainable world in which education contributes to the flourishing of individuals, communities, and societies. We work towards this vision (a) by conducting internationally excellent research with positive impact on individuals, organisations, policy and practice; (b) by creating knowledge that is useful to facilitate decision making in education, and (c) by delivering rigorous and relevant education which inspires our students to become architects of an equitable and sustainable world.

Whilst imagining that, I want to encourage you to also *remember this*: Meaningful research in education builds on embracing the diversity in epistemological, conceptual, and methodological approaches. The complex nature of the real-life problems we aim to address in education requires moving beyond the adoption of a mono-disciplinary or narrow methodological lens.

Pursuing a shared vision starts with focussing on similarities rather than getting distracted by real or imagined differences. Be curious and kindly critical when deferentially trespassing in areas beyond your expertise. At this conference and beyond, do not just talk to one another, also listen to each other. The fact that this conference finally allows for face-to-face encounters with fellow researchers makes networking, exploring opportunities for interdisciplinary scholarship, establishing links, and potential collaborations so much easier. Please make sure you capitalise on these opportunities not just in the conference rooms, but also outside the conference venue.

Let me finish with a thought about inspirations: We all acknowledge the importance of the environment as a contributing factor to success in education. Look around you and you will realise that there are very good reasons to be inspired by where this conference is taking place. We are at Durham University's Robert Stephenson College and Josephine Butler College. Both eponyms are great examples for having impact in terms of *power* and *enlightenment*. Robert Stephenson, for instance, is associated with the introduction of the steam powered engine. He also is considered the inventor of the miner's safety lamp. Josephine Butler's contributions to power and enlightenment are even more closely linked to education. She is known for campaigning for women's rights and for promoting the idea of Higher Education for women.

So, in the spirit of not just imagining a better education, but also aiming for contributing to its betterment, I wish you all two days of an educationally interesting, intellectually stimulating, but also socially exciting conference.

Jens F Beckmann

Professor of Educational Psychology

Director of Postgraduate Research, Durham University

Editor Information

Holly Bennion

Holly is a final year PhD candidate at Durham University researching children and young people's lived experiences at the intersections of migration, education, belonging, and identities (culture, ethnicity, language, religion). Holly has a keen interest in participatory research and creative methodologies. Holly graduated with an MPhil from Cambridge University and is a qualified primary school teacher, specialising in literacy and language teaching and learning. Holly recently taught on BA Education and PGCE modules at Durham University. Email: holly.a.bennion@durham.ac.uk; bennionholly@yahoo.com.

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Harriet is currently a final year PhD researcher at Durham University funded by the ESRC and a qualified early childhood education teacher. Her present study is an ethnographic exploration of compassion in early childhood education environments and what opportunities these afford for compassion's experience, exploration and extension. Interested in well-being and sustainability, this is in context of supporting young children to be and live well together with/in our interconnected world. Harriet teaches and lectures on a BA Education module and the University's Sutton Trust summer school, and alongside being director of The Children's Voice, peer reviews for the EECERJ.

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Keji is a PhD candidate at the School of Education, Durham University. She is supervised by Professor Beng Huat See and Professor Stephen Gorard. Her research centres on the critical thinking of Chinese students. The purpose of her doctoral research is to examine the impact of infusing critical thinking into the school curriculum on Chinese students' critical thinking skills and academic performance. She aims to develop a suite of teaching and learning resources that can be used in schools to support the development of critical thinking.

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Tong is a current PhD candidate at the School of Education, Durham University. Her research interests include digital intimate relationships, migration, China studies, and international student mobility. Tong is the Assistant Editor of Network for Research into Chinese Education Mobilities (NRCEM). Tong's doctoral study is about Chinese international students' perceptions and experiences of using mobile dating apps in the UK, and the relationships between the use of dating apps and the transformation of intimacy.

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Yuanya is a PhD student in the School of Education at Durham University. She started her PhD in 2021, and has been awarded an ESRC funded NINE DTP Studentship. Yuanya's doctoral research centres on Chinese teenagers' engagement with social media (short video-sharing mobile apps) in relation to their schooling experiences, with a specific interest in studying "school-disengaged" students in rural China. Her research interests include (digital) ethnography, online youth culture and identities, social media and rural education.

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Qiandong is a third-year PhD student at Durham University. She has a strong interest in the intersection of exploring the role of digital technology in education and its potential to improve teaching and learning outcomes. Qiandong completed her Master's degree with distinction in International Education from the University of Leicester. Her PhD focuses on exploring teachers' digital agency in rural China. Qiandong has received a local bursary to attend the ERC and European Conference on Educational Research (ECER) in Glasgow 2023, where she will present her research on teachers' digital agency. Qiandong is committed to advancing knowledge in the field of education and digital technology, particularly in rural areas and hopes to make a significant impact in the work of rural teachers to promote rural education.

Author Information

Sarah Blythe

Sarah Blythe is a teacher of English as a Foreign Language, with 12 years' experience in university and school settings. She completed the thesis on student-led creative practice for her MA Education in 2022, at the University of Northampton, gaining a distinction. She is passionate about young learner autonomy, alternative educational practices and childhood development, and in research practices centred on authenticity. She continues to teach English at the University of Lisbon, as well as teaching creative writing and Philosophy to younger learners and hopes to continue her research journey with a PhD in the not-too-distant future.

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Wenqing Chen is a postgraduate research student at the School of Education, supervised by Professor Stephen Gorard and Dr. Nadia Siddiqui. Her research explores how teachers can use research evidence to support at-risk students' academic achievement. With a diverse background, she earned her undergraduate degree in Mathematics and Applied Mathematics from Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics. She graduated with Distinction from Durham University with a master's degree in Education. She pursues a PhD study in education research, leveraging her expertise in data analysis and research methods. She is now conducting secondary data analysis and interventions to help teachers better understand and apply research evidence. She is also creating a suite of teacher training resources for primary schools in England and China to support the use of research evidence by teachers. Wenqing's research interests include: Evidence-based education; Quality of education research; Equity and effectiveness in education. Wenqing is part of Durham University Evidence Centre for Education. Email: wenqing.chen@durham.ac.uk

Sirui Gong

Sirui is a PhD student in her third year of study at the School of Education, University of Aberdeen. Previously, she earned a Master's degree in Education from Durham University in 2020, and a Bachelor's degree in English from Sichuan International Studies University in 2016 in Chongqing, China. Sirui's research interests focus on second language teaching and learning, language motivation

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Antonette Hall

Antonette was born in the Caribbean Island of Jamaica. She grew up in a large family with her mother and her two sisters. She moved to the UK when she was 21 in search of her new beginnings. She is committed to her Christian faith and is married with two children. In 2021, Antonette earned a (first-class) bachelor's degree in Applied Social Care and Education Studies from the University of Northampton. She recently earned a distinction in her Master's in Education Studies degree from the University of Northampton. In higher education, Antonette is concerned about race, equality, and diversity. She was awarded the 2022 Innovations in Research Award for Best Academic Research. She has presented her research at various conferences, including the Teaching and Learning conference at the University of Northampton and the Imagining Better Education conference at the University of Durham. She intends to pursue a PhD in education.

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Thuy Duong Tran

Thuy Duong (Jacque) Tran is an associate lecturer at Foreign Trade University and a counsellor at Vinschool Education System in Vietnam. Duong had an MSc in Counselling and she is undertaking an MA in Education at University of Northampton, where she gained in-depth knowledge of educational theory, counselling theory and research methods. Her research interests are around sex education and social media as well as how principals' leadership impacts the relationship between principal and teachers. Duong's research is to increase knowledge of the factors from Tiktok videos that contribute to a good sex education lesson and the considerations of its practice. She is particularly curious about the role of culture and emotional labour in principals' leadership.

James Underwood

Dr James Underwood is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Northampton. James taught for 19 years in the British state sector, in secondary schools. As well as teaching history he held a range of leadership roles in schools and in sixth form colleges. He completed his doctorate in education at the University of Cambridge before joining the University of Northampton – where he leads the MA Education degrees. The MA Education at Northampton has over 200 students – with international students and local teachers being part of this community. His research interests include: the nature of professional communities, teachers' knowledge sharing, non-positional leadership, using practitioner research to achieve school improvement and social impact, and using the arts to enable school improvement. Email: james.underwood@northampton.ac.uk

Quyen Van

Quyen Van completed her MA Education at the University of Northampton. She has worked in education in Vietnam for 4 years and now resides in the UK. Her interests include the empowerment of teachers through research and the ways autonomous teachers can address contemporary issues and enable students. She has previously published papers on climate change education, how social media affects classroom culture, and on differing interpretations of Janusz Korczak's legacy in schools. She has also presented in different educational conferences such as Kaleidoscope organized by Cambridge University, as well as Imagine Better Education (IBE) - Durham University. Her co-writer on this paper is Dr James Underwood who leads the MA Education degree at the University of Northampton.

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Nur Aiman bin Zainudin

Nur Aiman bin Zainudin is a PhD researcher in Educational Leadership at the University of Glasgow, working under the guidance of Prof James Charles Conroy and Prof Christopher Chapman. With a strong research interest in educational leadership and educational policy and practice, Nur Aiman has been an active member of the research community, publishing a book and four journals about school leadership in the Malaysian context since 2018. Prior to his academic pursuit, Nur Aiman has been serving as an education officer at the Ministry of Education Malaysia for nine years. This invaluable experience has greatly influenced his research direction and has enabled him to provide an in-depth analysis of the current educational landscape in Malaysia. With his dedication and passion for research, Nur Aiman aims to contribute to the advancement of educational leadership in Malaysia and beyond. His work is expected to have a significant impact on policy-making and practice, ultimately improving the quality of education for future generations.

Yuanya Zhang

Yuanya Zhang is a PhD student in the School of Education at Durham University. She started her PhD in 2021, and has been awarded an ESRC funded NINE DTP Studentship. Yuanya's doctoral research centres on Chinese teenagers' engagement with social media (short video-sharing mobile apps) in relation to their schooling experiences, with a specific interest in studying "school-disengaged" students in rural China. Her research interests include (digital) ethnography, online youth culture and identities, social media and rural education. Yuanya graduated with a BA (First Class Honours) in Media and Communication at City University of Hong Kong in 2016. She completed her MA program (with Distinction) in Education and Technology at University College London (UCL) in 2020.

Autonomy in the hands of young learners: Student-led creative practice in the context of the Portuguese EFL classroom

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Abstract

Long-term commitment in foreign language learning for young people demands the mitigation of restricting emotions whilst remaining open to risk taking and mistake making. Prevalent assessment-driven paradigms, however, disempower and demotivate students. Autonomous creative practice can address this through the influence it has upon autonomy and emotion. The study sought to answer four research questions on the impact student-led creative practice was perceived to have upon success in the L2 classroom; upon students' emotional wellbeing; the potential for creative practice to be incorporated into existing exam-focused syllabi and, finally; the willingness of teachers to undergo training in creative practice facilitation. Semi-structured interviews with six English as a foreign language teachers based in Portugal were conducted and analysed from a deconstructionist standpoint. Conclusions suggests that, whilst creative practice is favoured, obstacles to its implementation exist, with teachers themselves conceptually averse to autonomous student-led practice. Chaos and reduced productivity are primary concerns.

Keywords: *autonomy; creativity; emotion; motivation; second language learning*

Introduction

It has been common in the staffrooms of the language schools in which I have taught to observe teachers preparing creative tasks for their younger students. These might typically include posters or drawing exercises, or they may be more directly language based and in the form of poetry or scriptwriting, activities to consolidate and focus the learners on tasks outside of the workbooks. Creative activities are essential components of language lessons (Jones, 2020), for reasons ranging from the mitigation of negative emotion (Macintyre and Gregersen, 2012) to the nurturing of internal motivational drives which are so crucial to sustained language learning (Dornyei, 2019; Carrio-Pastor and Mestre, 2014). However, the method of delivery in many language schools fails to harness their full potential, with the focus being shifted from the task itself to the outcome, thus undermining the potential that creative tasks have of promoting learner autonomy and subsequently mitigating negative emotion (Ralph, 1997; Fredrickson, 2001; Anderson and Chung, 2011; Celik, 2019).

The current educational systems existent in many language schools in Portugal are based on evaluative, formative assessments and controlling strategies - methods which encourage oppression and directly attack autonomy (Holt, 1967; Freire, 1979; Costley, 2011; Stefanou at al., 2004; Tabrizi and Rideout, 2016). In this way, they are not unlike the majority of classrooms across the globe and an investigation into the potential effects which broadening, student-led creative practice could have in English language classrooms could reveal implications for other systems. This paper will present the arguments and discussion surrounding three elements of learning a second language as a young learner – motivation, autonomy, and emotion – and the role which creative practice can play in elevating the three to a healthy system of synergy (Krashen, 1981; Krashen, 1985; Gardner, 2006). It will then turn to the presentation of the findings from a set of interviews carried out into the opinions of six teacher of English as a foreign language, all of whom were based in Portugal, and examine how they addressed the following research questions:

1) To what extent can student-led creative practice enhance success in the English as a foreign language young learner classroom?
2) How important is the role of autonomy in reducing the negative emotions of young learners in the English as a foreign language classroom?
3) Can student-led creativity and traditional, exam focused syllabi be reconciled?
4) Would teachers be willing to undertake specialist training in order to facilitate creative programs effectively?

For the purposes of this study, 'young learner' is understood to be any learner under the age of 12. The study looked explicitly at teachers of students within the private language school system in Portugal, attending classes in their extra-curricular time. It is important to note that this study considers 'creative practice' to necessitate a high level of autonomy, such that it has the scope to allow the students to explore creativity. Autonomy entails the near total removal of objectives on the part of the teacher and rather the impetus is on the process upon which the young learners embark. Participants reflected upon the impact which student-led creative practice had, or would have, upon their young learners' experiences in the classroom, and explored their own conceptions of facilitating such sessions, with particular attention paid to perceived obstacles.

Review of the main literature to date

The importance of motivation in the EFL classroom

Motivation in any classroom is of the utmost importance but, when considering the learning of a second language, there is arguably a greater need for the type of long-term motivation which will allow for the commitment which learning a language demands (Dornyei and Chan, 2013; Dornyei, 2019). The *Possible Selves Theory* forwarded in 1980s psychological discourse describes the way in which people are motivated to achieve through self-formed projections of the behaviours, traits and values which their future selves might have (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Dornyei built upon this theory for the world of language learning with his *L2 Motivational Self System*, a process of harnessing short- and long-term motivational drives through the imagining of a future self capable of mastering the language (Dornyei and Chan, 2013; Dornyei, 2019). Through the provision of a future objective, the theory consociates cognition and motivation (Dornyei, 2019), a process which in the young learner classroom will result from individual, intrinsically formed motivational drives (Carrio-Pastor and Mestre, 2014).

Motivational drives among young learners of English as a foreign language

Young learners are naturally self-motivated to explore and learn and are ideally educated in an environment which does not threaten the health of their natural curiosity (Holt, 1967; Robinson, 2006; Costley, 2011). However, in the English as a foreign language classroom, as in many others, the intrinsically rooted motivational drives of learners are all too often overshadowed by the imposition of external drives such as reward systems, praise and criticism, and evaluations. Since the 1970s, the main school of thought in psychology argues that extrinsic motivational drives undermine learners' levels of enjoyment and achievement, particularly when effects are considered in the long-term (Lepper et al., 1973; Smith and Pittman, 1978; Hennessey, 2016). Unfortunately, this attack on

children's natural curiosities is prevalent, explicitly so in the English as a foreign language classroom in Portugal, where tests are commonplace and high expectations are placed on learners from a range of actors. Relocating the core of motivation from intrinsic to extrinsic at this early stage in life is likely to result in a permanent shift (Smith and Pittman, 1978), thus compromising the effective establishment of the *L2 Motivational Self System* (Dornyei, 2019). It can therefore be argued that a vital constituent in the preservation of long-term motivation is the provision of sufficient quantities of learner autonomy, allowing for drives which are well-founded and fully engaged with.

The role autonomy plays in the mitigation of negative emotion in the EFL classroom

The limiting effects of negative emotions, particularly anxiety, on language acquisition are extremely well-documented (Krashen, 1981; Krashen, 1985; Fredrickson and Losada, 2005; Macintyre and Gregersen, 2012) with Swain (2013) and Dornyei (2019) placing special significance on the fundamental accord between cognition and emotions. Anxiety is considered to negatively impact imagination in the classroom (Macintyre and Gregersen, 2012), an outcome twice as detrimental in a foreign language classroom as it further impedes the production of the motivational *future self* and obviates creative problem solving (Macintyre and Gregersen, 2012; Dornyei, 2019). The creation of a prescribed idea of what language should be (as the findings from the primary research to be discussed mirrored) oversimplifies and idealises the process of language production, precluding the 'messiness' which effective language learning necessitates (Maybin and Swann, 2007; Jones, 2008). The imposition of external norms, extrinsic motivational drives and idealised production in the language classroom injures learners' agency and triggers feelings of anxiety leading some students to embark on a process of *introjection regulation*, a form of self-founded extrinsic motivation which threatens true agency (Deci and Ryan, 2000). It is therefore of little surprise that the language classroom, where learner performance is endlessly assessed and evaluated by teachers, peers and even oneself (Ohata, 2005), is viewed as an anxiety-inducing environment.

This relationship can be adjusted, through the cognitive freedom and space for imaginative flexing which creative practice offers (Neelands, 2001; Shao et al., 2019). Creative practice consists of the manipulation, abstract or concrete, of materials in a process which melds self with substance; in the language leaning classroom, this is language itself, with the validating and realising of language on the learners' terms leading to more robust intrinsically motivated linguistic aptitude (Sullivan, 2015).

The role creative practice plays in the promotion of autonomy and the mitigation of negative emotion in the EFL classroom

The reductive effects which negative emotion has on imagination and cognition, termed 'negative-narrowing' by Macintyre and Gregersen (2012), are all the more restrictive as they necessarily impede the presence and efficacy of positive emotions such as enjoyment (Anderson and Chung, 2011). Enjoyment and, thus, lower anxiety are proven positive indicators of short- and long-term levels of achievement in learning (Shao et al., 2019) and co-exist in a dynamic process where enjoyment lowers anxiety, decreased anxiety allows for greater enjoyment, and so forth.

The development of positive emotion in the classroom is underpinned by autonomy, defined by Deci and Ryan (1988) as an action which has been chosen by the actor and for which they take responsibility, and autonomy is the key component in Petrovil and Rolstad's *flourishing lives* (Petrovil and Rolstad, 2016). These lives are lives cultivated from within, lives worth living (Fredrickson and Losada, 2005), blossoming into the space furnished by autonomy. True self-expression and natural enquiry are nurtured from within, grown from the child's inherent curiosity (Scanlon, 1972; Bolitho et al., 2003) and, importantly, are enjoyed by the actors themselves. The higher the internal valuation of an act, the greater the sense of autonomy felt (Stefanou et al., 2004).

Hearing teachers: A study into teacher conceptions of student-led creative practice in a language learning setting.

The context: Teaching English as a foreign language for young learners in Portugal.

Portugal is a lower income country, with GDP at 70% of the EU average (OECD, 2022) yet standard fees for attending a language school commonly exceed €250 per month. This has created a situation where the teaching English as a foreign language industry is able to monopolise language learning, a type of capitalisation which helps create a system of demand and inequality (Pennycook, 1994; Malik and Mohamed, 2014). Attending a private language school is a badge of honour, which to no small degree removes the focus from robust pedagogy to the attainment of status symbols, favouring high grades and formal qualifications over progression. The combination of high fee-paying students and parental expectation can take a heavy toll on teachers, both in terms of their day-to-day pressures, but also in terms of the expansiveness of their outlook.

Epistemological foundations for the interviews

Patti Lather describes in her paper *Getting Lost* the idea of the '…curious and unknowing…' researcher (Lather, 2007 p.9) – not only a researcher invested in the pursuit of knowledge, but also one in full awareness and ownership of their ignorance. It is in this way that the authenticity of the voice to be heard, in interviews and other narratives, can be preserved and deeper truths revealed. Her deconstructionist stance is usually attributed to literary research, yet the foundational themes of the theory are useful guiding principles for the analysis of interviews. Deconstructionism looks for the truths which exist between the accepted, constructivist methodology (Pinar and Reynolds, 1992), the spaces between the structural norms (Salusinsky, 1987).

Data collection

As a result, data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews, open discussions which were guided, as infrequently as possible, by a set of broadly pitched prompts. The objective was that the boundaries between interviewer and interviewee were blurred into indistinction, harnessing the idea of the diminishing author outlined by Fontana (2011). The interviews were held online, despite valid concerns that the synthetic distancing created by online interactions compromises participant authenticity (James and Busher, 2006). As the participants were known in a professional manner, some mitigation of the negative effects of being online naturally occurred. Beyond that, steps were taken to familiarise the setting, with informal chats held before each session and awareness paid to feelings of nervousness or self-doubt. Where reassurance was sought, support was given.

The interview prompts were designed to answer the research questions and were purposefully kept broad and encouraging, rather than leading. As an example, in answering the first research question about success in the classroom, the prompts developed were: *What about the role the teacher plays in these creative activities?*
How do you think creative practice impacts on the student? Have you any experience of this? If not, how do you imagine it would play out?

Data analysis

It was decided to code and categorise the transcripts of the interviews, as a means of effectively analysing a large amount of detailed data for use in a small study. The use of coding has traditionally been met with considerable controversy within postmodernist theories (Fontana, 2011), due to its

reductive nature (Lather, 1991) and its distancing from the sort of detailed, nuanced postmodernist picture presented by the 'thick analyses' of Fosket (2002). However, Clarke (2003) posits that coding has always possessed certain fundamental, if latent, aspects which are compatible with postmodernist thought, particularly with grounded theory. Thus, the data were coded and categorised manually, avoiding the passivity of coding software so that the relationship between the researcher and the participant remained unanimous.

Codes

Coding was carried out in sensitivity to the potential dehumanising effects such a process can cause. In avoidance of transforming the participants into statistics (St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014) a large number of codes were located in the transcripts, with figures in the tens. The codes were then logically ordered into ten distinct categories, a process which required several revisions in order that the essence be maintained. A table of the categories and a sample of the codes therein, plus example quotes, is demonstrated below:

Table 1. Codes and categories with relative quote samples (Blythe, 2022).

Category	Sample of the codes identified	Example of quotes
1. Activities and processes	a. Passive learning b. Play opportunities	i. *I feel like...maybe they wouldn't...be used to it right? Because they're used to quite like a strict, structured way...* ii. *Because they're not given the opportunities, because they're not encouraged to play because they're just sitting there.*
2. Perceived negative outcomes	a. Difficulty of learning a foreign language b. Use of L1	i. *It's hard work learning a foreign language, right? Obviously, our aim is always to try to reduce that [negative emotion] in whatever way we can.* ii. *And the more creative when they're working together on things, the less controlled it is, the more Portuguese...they're going to be speaking.*
3. Perceived positive outcomes	a. Parental expectations	i. *... it's the parents' expectations...where there's, there's marks on the league tables in front of classes where these kids are and like everyone's obsessed with how good they're doing things.*

		ii. *And they love sort of creating like these fictitious lives…you can then get the grammar out and through that.*
	b. Use of English	
4. Creative practice	a. Classroom creative practice	i. *And I think more creative activities probably take longer right to build something because …It would take quite a lot of time to create, and then practice and perform.*
	b. Incorporating creative practice into syllabi	ii. *Creating something…often I have to be like "Come on, we have to do something else," because you know, we've got material to cover.*
5. Classroom culture	a. Relinquishing control (teacher)	i. *So you're either going to have…to embrace that…or just sail with it and go like "Oh pandemonium".*
	b. Student collaboration	ii. *And generally they were very enthusiastic and quite competitive. about putting their bit of the show together.*
6. School culture and syllabi	a. Top-down support	i. *…it depends on where you work and I think…to motivate yourself to do things like that, when…you're not getting any recognition for that.*
	b. Limitations of syllabi	ii. *It [creative practice] is not hard to imagine with the class. My thing with those guys is that they still have to have sort of target language and things like that.*
7. Young learners' negative emotions	a. Student self-doubt	i. *… there's a shyness, obviously, because of the age, but it also couples with "I just don't think I can do it so well".*
	b. Disengagement	ii. *I think there, there are some classes where…they are more distracted and they can't concentrate on a specific task. And sometimes I can see that's because the material is not like engaging or it's not interesting to them.*
8. Young learners' positive emotions	a. Sense of comfort	i. *And then hopefully, they're gonna be more encouraging and supporting each other and therefore feel more comfortable.*

	b. Imagination	ii. *…they can they have really interesting things that they can come up with…but maybe they just need a little bit of like, coaxing, guidance.*
9. Teacher role	a. Teacher training b. Teacher-student interaction	i. *I would be keen to be trained. Yeah. I'm dying to be trained in anything.* ii. *… the experience for the learner varies massively depending on what teacher they get for that year.*
10. Autonomy	a. Student autonomy	i. *I'm quite fortunate…that…[there's] lots of time dedicated to production…gearing them up towards being more autonomous.*

From this foundational analysis, a set of distinct findings were established. There was frequent, but not consistent, agreement between the opinions of the teachers interviewed and the findings from the prevalent literature, and the correlations and divergences between the two are discussed below.

Findings

Creativity and autonomy, and how they affect students' emotional wellbeing

Here, the teachers interviewed and the principal ideas in the literature largely correlated. Teachers felt overwhelmingly that creative practice had a positive effect on the mood and emotion of their young learners and noted that students feel less bored and more invested in the session when it had a creative focus. The *young learners' positive emotions* category encapsulated a range of motivational terms, such as 'student motivation' and 'willingness to participate', whereas the opposing *young learners' negative emotions* category described the feelings of 'disengagement' and 'demotivation', amongst others (Blythe, 2022) – directly correlative with the negative-narrowing emotions of boredom outlined by Macintyre and Gregersen (2012). These findings addressed research questions one "To what extent can student-led creative practice enhance success in the English as a foreign language young learner classroom?", and two "How important is the role of autonomy in reducing the negative emotions of young learners in the English as a foreign language classroom?".

Creative practice and ideas of success

In further reference to research question one, it should be noted that success in the language classroom may be defined to include a variety of elements, ranging from apparent motivational levels to evaluative achievement, to accurate and consistent language production. For the participants in this

study, a recurrent theme was that of productivity. Teachers felt that the more creative the lesson, the *less* productive the students were – and the less productive they were, the less inherent value they could find in the activity. It was difficult for teachers to envisage the long-term effects of student-led creative practice, good or bad, and teachers expressed fear at the prospect of the loss of control which they perceived would ensure from giving young learners greater freedoms. When discussing this aspect, several teachers used expressive, exaggerated linguistic terms to express themselves, a sample of which can be seen in the table below.

Table 2. In Vivo codes; teachers' hypotheses of classroom management during student-led creative practice (Blythe, 2022).

Teacher J	Teacher K	Teacher S	Teacher B
…just sail with it …and it's pandemonium.	…anarchy.	It's a balancing act. …it gets chaotic.	…it's this tightrope…

Of note is the totality with which teachers viewed any loss of control. Not only did the teachers feel extreme uneasiness at the prospect of classroom control being compromised but should control be lost, the effects would be absolute. Teachers qualified this fear by stating that loss of control would result in less ability to satisfy the demands of the syllabus, and would subsequently lead to admonition from several agents, specifically the parents of the young learners and the school administration.

Further obstacles to the implementation of student-let creative sessions

The analysis of this sections of the findings contributed to the resolution of research questions three "Can student-led creative practice and traditional, exam focused syllabi be reconciled?" and research question four "Would teachers be willing to undertake specialist training?"

The constraints of time

Teachers raised dual concerns surrounding the theme of time – firstly, that the young learners would need repeated sessions in student-led creative practice in order to learn to manage the freedom effectively; and, secondly, that as lessons were around one hour in length, there would not be enough time for creative sessions to unfold. The teachers showed profound consideration for their students' wellbeing as they ruminated that they would need more time to get to know their students so that they

could know how best to facilitate sessions, and that the students needed to be allowed to acclimatise to any big changes, too.

The need for a universal change in mindset

Whilst teachers were supportive of creative practice, and ostensibly genuinely cared for their students' wellbeing, they experienced real difficulty in fully imagining the implementation of student-led creative sessions. The participants clearly experienced obstacles when hypothesising about the practicalities of such sessions; the category *School culture and syllabi* is rich in references to the extent of change necessary, such as 'top-down support for change', 'incumbent education system' and 'system change', the desire for change driven by the need for greater support from management. Teachers located further need for change in the pre-conceptions of students and the expectations of parents as well as in their own mindsets and those of their colleagues – in short, the ideological shift would need to be paradigmatic in order for the teachers to feel comfortable.

Three emergent key themes

It is with caution that the three emergent themes are here presented; reducing the richness of the narratives to a simplified set of themes is not the objective. Rather, it is hoped that the key themes adequately represent the core issues to have been revealed and continue to safeguard the situatedness and specific positionality of the original accounts, through avoiding over-definitions and being limited to three (Clarke, 2003). The three main themes are termed *the expanding desire for change, the limiting fear of disorder* and *the call for a paradigm shift* (Blythe, 2022).

Whilst teachers were very keen to express their doubts surrounding the feasibility of implementing student-led creative sessions within the current system, there was also frequent reference made to the desire to do so, the prevalence of such comments being ubiquitous amongst the participants. The 'expanding desire' allowed the teachers to imagine the potential value such sessions could have for young learners, despite being overtly conscious of the obstacles to their implementation. Teachers also remarked that students were reluctant to leave lessons which had been creative and expressed excitement where the prospect of continuing the task was offered. It can be deduced, then, that the students, the key actors, are also supportive of change.

This is limited in the teachers' thinking by the sometimes-extreme fear of disorder, which is founded in a universally reported aversion to loss of control and culminates in the apprehension associated with low language production. In spite of feeling positively about creativity, the category *classroom*

management illustrated that teachers thought repeatedly about the topic of losing or gaining control of a classroom. According to the literature, such fear is unfounded and, indeed control and controlling methods directly threaten creative practice (Stefanou et al., 2004). It is for this reason that the theme is entitled 'the *fear* of disorder' and not 'the *reality* of disorder', as in the event of implementation the teachers may discover their as-yet-hypothetical worries to be unproven.

Some of the concerns raised by the teachers themselves remedied through the imagining of system change. One of the justifications presented for this desire was the idea that, in order for the sessions to be 'done' properly by the young learners, they would have to be shown how. This mirrors the thoughts of Claxton (2002) in his *Building Learning Power*, where he proposes that young people need to be taught how to learn. Whilst this theory might appear plausible when taking a student whose learning has already been extensively manipulated by extrinsic motivational devices and evaluations, the results would likely be short-lived. Without (re)building self-worth through allowing students to embark on autonomous journeys of self-discovery (Dweck, 1998), children will be far less likely to develop the intrinsic, long-term motivational frameworks imperative to language learning (Dornyei, 2019). All of the teachers interviewed expressed a willingness, and some a strong desire, for further training and stated that such training would comprise part of the universal support they would seek to implement student-led creative sessions.

Conclusions

The interviews revealed a sentiment amongst teachers that whilst creative sessions had observable positive impacts on young learners in the English as a foreign language classroom, teachers were reluctant to commit to supporting their implementation. Whilst this was in part due to legitimate fears surrounding the support needed from management and other stakeholders, a greater obstacle existed in the aversion to autonomy and the perception that it is almost synonymous with anarchy. Despite this, the literature shows that disorder supports language learning (Jones, 2020) and greater autonomy leads to healthier, intrinsically founded motivational drives which can carry the learner through the lifelong commitment of learning a foreign language (Macintyre and Gregersen, 2012; Dornyei, 2019).

The type of thought process which comprised the interviews was itself illuminating to the teachers, some of whom appeared surprised at the realisation that they were in fact in support of creativity in the classroom. Such hypothetical exercises could prove highly beneficial to teachers in educational sectors where change is due but the incumbent system precludes creative thinking, a process of

reflection to provide invaluable insights from those most qualified. Implications for further study could, amongst other possibilities, include primary research into the experience of young learners who have participated in student-led creative sessions, including a comparative study into the experiences of those who have followed both traditional and creatively focused syllabi and a set of empirical studies into the effects of autonomous creative practice on young language learners' emotional wellbeing and on perceptions of success. Finally, of particular interest, would be studies into how the themes of disorder and anarchy feature when learning a first, second or subsequent foreign language.

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Can Teaching Enthusiasm Partially Predict the Reading Attainment of Low-income Students in Secondary Schools in England?

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Abstract

The poverty achievement gap in early reading is a persistent issue in England and around the world, potentially disadvantaging poor students and their further study. This new study employs student-perceived teaching enthusiasm and reading attitudes to help explain the poverty attainment gap. The sample was 5,242 15-year-old participants in PISA 2018 from 175 secondary schools in England. Path analysis is used to investigate the potential effect of teaching enthusiasm on the reading attainment of low-income students. The findings indicate that family socioeconomic status remains an important predictor of students' reading achievement. Students from economically privileged families tend to rate teaching enthusiasm more highly and express a positive reading attitude, which can partially explain the poverty attainment gap in reading. Therefore, teachers might be able to enhance low-income students' reading outcomes and close the poverty attainment gap a little through enhanced teaching enthusiasm to cultivate students' positive reading attitudes.

Introduction

Reading, a basic skill

Reading is a crucial activity for humans that involves brain function, interpretation, and emotion. Students often learn to read in language classes to expand vocabulary, comprehension, and cultural understanding (Friesen & Haigh, 2018; Nambiar et al., 2020; Soltani, 2011). In secondary school, students are expected to read independently, in order to learn about wider curriculum. Reading proficiency is a crucial factor for evaluating education quality across schools and regions and the attainment gap between low-income and wealthy students can be observed through evaluations of their reading literacy. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) framework, the 2018 results of which were used in this present study, reading literacy involves "understanding, using, evaluating, reflecting on, and engaging with texts in order to achieve goals, develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society" (OECD, 2019, p.28).

The Poverty Attainment Gap

On average, students from low-income families are more likely to have lower academic achievement compared with their counterparts from economically more privileged families (Harwell et al., 2017; Sirin, 2005). Middle-class students are supposed to get more learning resources and devote more time to learning, particularly in reading (Greaney & Hegarty, 1987; Johnsson-Smaragdi & Jönsson, 2006). According to PISA's 2018 results, around the world students from the 10% wealthiest socioeconomic groups scored 141 points more in reading than those from the 10% poorest socioeconomic groups (Schleicher, 2019). This kind of disparity occurs in England as well, with the average reading score of free school meal (FSM) eligible students being 39 points lower in PISA 2018 than the figure for Non-FSM students (Sizmur et al., 2019).

School Segregation

School education is expected to make a change in students' learning habits, promote academic outcomes, and enhance education equality. However, teacher quality can differ between schools. Schools in disadvantaged areas are often less attractive for high-quality or more experienced teachers, which leads to school segregation of teacher experience.

In England, a considerable proportion of low-income students enter schools which possess limited learning resources and perhaps more low-effectiveness teachers. Students at these low-SES schools have a higher possibility of being taught by less-qualified, inexperienced, or out-of-subject teachers (Allen & Sims, 2018). This strengthens their lower academic achievement. Wealthy areas tend to have more prestigious schools, creating a positive correlation between family wealth and learning attainment, which increases the cost of housing and further exacerbates school segregation (Gorard et al., 2022).

Moreover, teaching styles, practices, and expectations might differ between working-class students and middle-class students. Kneppers (2022) found from two Norwegian schools that working-class students are more likely to obtain visible pedagogic practices than middle-class students. Some economically disadvantaged students have even suffered unfairness from prejudiced teachers who had lower expectations and provided less assistance for them (Gorard & Smith, 2010).

Teachers' Enthusiasm Matters

Teachers' enthusiasm represents an aspect of teacher-student interaction quality which attracts attention from researchers, teachers, and school leaders as a malleable factor of teaching. Students can perceive teachers' enthusiasm in classroom interaction, which potentially contributes to their learning attitude and outcomes (e.g. Rogiers et al., 2020; Roorda et al., 2017). When teachers demonstrate excitement and passion for reading, students are more likely to feel inspired and curious about the topic. The combined emotional and motivational atmosphere created by the teacher's enthusiasm and the students' engagement is referred to as a shared affective-motivational climate (Gaspard & Lauermann, 2021). It has been observed in a recent systematic review that a positive learning attitude in students is often associated with higher levels of achievement (Camacho-Morles et al., 2021). A meta-analysis stated a moderate positive association between reading attitude and attainment (Petscher, 2010). If students feel motivated and interested in the material, they are more likely to invest time and effort into reading and comprehension. This, in turn, can have a positive impact on their reading achievement. Moreover, students' prior reading achievement could predict their enjoyment of reading in further study and their later life (Toste et al., 2020).

However, while previous studies have investigated the correlation between socioeconomic status, reading attainment, teachers' enthusiasm, and students' reading achievement, they usually treated the correlation as a 'black box', which ignores the interaction between these variables. A few studies have focused on the specific path in which low-income students' academic outcomes are predicted by their

perceptions of teacher enthusiasm. Additionally, whether high-rated teaching enthusiasm makes a difference to low-income students' reading attitude and performance is still unclear. Some studies suggest that teacher characteristics and classroom interaction may not be predictors of low-income students' attainment (Jepsen, 2005; Xuan et al., 2019).

If student-perceived teaching enthusiasm could partially explain the poverty attainment gap, teachers and school leaders could try to address the gap in daily classroom interaction. Teachers could adjust their teaching approach to improve students' perception of teachers' enthusiasm. This adjustment would not require much time or energy of teachers and would not be harmful to students.

This new study employs data from PISA 2018 in England to describe the reading attainment gap between extremely poor students and their counterparts with better economic backgrounds. Then the research examines to what extent teachers' expression of enthusiasm could make a difference in the reading outcomes of economically disadvantaged students. In addition, the study also investigates the importance of reading attitude for reading proficiency.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

(1) What is the difference in leisure reading time between extremely poor students and higher-income students in England?

(2) How large is the early reading attainment gap between extremely poor students and higher-income students in England?

(3) To what extent, could student-perceived teaching enthusiasm make a difference to reading attainment of low-income students in England?

Design and Method

The research uses an overall cross-sectional design to illustrate a 'snapshot' of students who were 15 years old in 2018 in England. The research compares the leisure reading time and average reading scores between low- and high-SES students. Cohen's d "effect" sizes are calculated to indicate the potential impact of family socioeconomic status on reading proficiency of secondary school students in England. Then, teaching enthusiasm is measured by four items in the PISA student questionnaire.

Path analysis is employed to investigate the mechanism of how teaching enthusiasm works with low-income students' reading attitudes and proficiency.

Sample

The samples in this research are downloaded from the PISA 2018 dataset on the website of OECD. The original dataset includes some 600,000 students from 79 countries and economies. This research only focuses on students in England, therefore, involving 5,242 students (2,554 males, 2,688 females) from 175 schools with the region code '82611'. The majority of students who completed the assessment are in grade 11 at age 15.

Variables

Variables in this study include students' socioeconomic status (SES), teaching enthusiasm, reading attitude, leisure reading time, and standard reading scores. SES, student-perceived teaching enthusiasm, and reading attitude are selected as three predictors of reading proficiency.

SES

PISA employs the index of economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS) as a measure of students' socioeconomic status. The larger the index is, the more economic, social, and cultural resources the individual owns. This index is calculated as the arithmetic mean of three components including the highest parental employment status, the highest parental educational qualification, and household possessions (OECD, 2020). In England, the average SES is +0.28 in 2018 (Sizmur et al., 2019).

Teaching Enthusiasm

Teaching enthusiasm is a latent variable which cannot be measured directly. In this study, teaching enthusiasm refers to student perception of teaching enthusiasm which indicates teachers' enjoyment of teaching and inspiration to students according to students' perception. PISA 2018 employed a four-point Likert Scale ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree' to measure teaching enthusiasm based on four items. All data are collected in the students' self-report questionnaire. The items are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Items in Teaching Enthusiasm

Dimension	Items
Teaching Enthusiasm	It was clear to me that the teacher liked teaching us.
	The enthusiasm of the teacher inspired me.
	It was clear that the teacher likes to deal with the topic of the lesson.
	The teacher showed enjoyment in teaching.

Reading Attitude

PISA measures students' reading attitude based on their joy of reading. Five four-point items from strongly disagree to strongly agree are used in the student reading attitude scale to estimate the joy of reading. Items based on how much a student agrees the statements such as 'I read only if I have to', 'Reading is one of my favourite hobbies', 'I like talking about books with other people', 'For me, reading is a waste of time', and 'I read only to get information that I need'. All statements could reflect students' engagement and enjoyment of reading.

Leisure Reading Time

Leisure reading time usually refers to extra-curriculum time that students spend in reading automatically. Students answer the question 'About how much time do you usually spend reading for enjoyment?' to tell their leisure reading time. The question does not require a specific time of reading but has categories of five degrees including 'I do not read for enjoyment', '30 minutes or less a day', 'More than 30 minutes to less than 60 minutes a day', '1 to 2 hours a day', and 'More than 2 hours a day'. This study compares the percentage of students who have leisure reading habits and re-categorises students to 'spend no time on leisure reading' and 'spend some time on leisure reading'.

Reading Attainment

This study uses standardised test score of reading in PISA 2018 to evaluate students' reading outcomes. Students' reading attainment is measured by a standard reading test in PISA 2018. The PISA 2018 innovatively used the multi-stage adaptive approach to evaluate students' reading proficiency (OECD,

2019). The system evaluates individuals' reading scores automatically and matches test items to students according to students' performance in prior items. The difficulty level of test items could be adjusted based on students' capacity, which calculates students' reading proficiency adequately.

Data analysis

The study first handled missing data in the dataset. The overall response rate of PISA 2018 in England is 83.2% (Sizmur et al., 2019). Students who refuse to participate in the assessment are excluded from the published dataset, therefore, this research only deals with missing values within each existing case. The research only picks up students who complete most of the survey and participate in the reading test. Missing values in student survey items are replaced by the mean score of the item. 4868 cases (Female=2530, Male=2338) are valid in this research. Gender, average age, average SES, and the mean reading score of cases in the research are reported in Table 2.

Table 2 Characteristic of dataset

Variables	Mean
Age	15.8
SES	0.26
Reading Score	509.4

With this cleaned dataset, students are categorised into the 90%-highest SES group and the 10%-lowest SES group to compare the leisure reading time and the mean reading score. A cross-tabulation indicates the link between SES level and time of reading for enjoyment. Mean reading scores and standard deviations of two separate groups are reported. Cohen's d is calculated to measure how large the potential effect of SES is.

While the prior step describes the reading habit and attainment of extremely poor students, the next step explains this attainment gap from teaching enthusiasm with path analysis. The mediation role of teaching enthusiasm is hypothesised in the following Figure 1. The hypothesis states that the reading score is predicted by SES and teaching enthusiasm, while teaching enthusiasm is predicted by SES at the same time. Low-income students might experience low-quality teaching enthusiasm in test language lessons, therefore, achieve a lower score on the standard test.
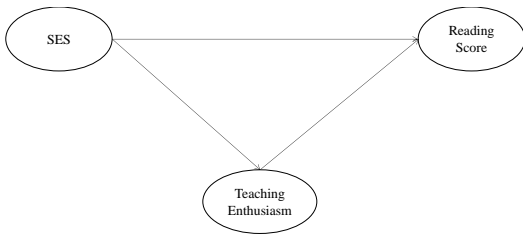
Figure 1 Hypothesised Mediation Model

Taking a further step, students reading attitude is assumed to be a potential predictor of reading scores and might be associated with teaching enthusiasm. Figure 2 proposes the hypothesised model with consideration of reading attitude.
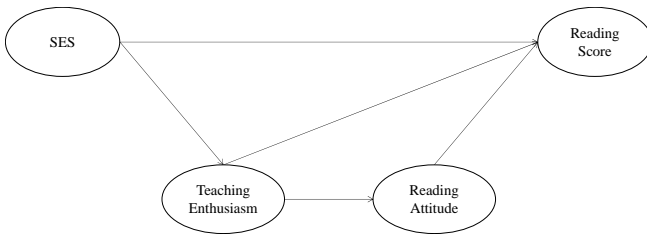
Figure 2 Hypothesised Serial Mediation Model

There are inevitable missing cases in the sampling, as well as missing values from existing cases. PISA data is not a randomised sample, the p-values and similar approaches are not possible here. This study judges the reliability and interpretability of models with standardised path coefficients and ΔR^2. The standardised path coefficients represent the importance of the predictive variables. The larger the coefficient is, the larger variance of the reading score could be made by the predictive variable. The coefficient of determination R^2 presents the fitness of variables in terms of explaining students' reading scores. This study records and compares R^2 in each step. If $\Delta R^2 > 0$, the added variable could increase the model's explanatory power to predict students' reading attainment, which is evidence of model existence.

Findings and Discussion

The results of this research illustrate the reading attainment gap between extremely poor students and their counterparts in secondary school education in England. The study also suggests a likely role for

teaching enthusiasm and reading attitude in reading proficiency.

Poverty Attainment Gap in Reading

The findings from descriptive analysis suggest the difference of leisure reading time and reading attainment between low- and high-income students in England. Leisure reading time is an indicator of students reading habits during extra-curriculum time. A student who spends more time reading for enjoyment is more likely to possess an autonomous reading habit and devote more time to reading practice. 4,835 students answered the question 'About how much time do you usually spend reading for enjoyment'. The percentage of students who spend some time on leisure reading from each SES group is reported in the following Table 3.

Table 3 Family Circumstance and Leisure Reading Time in England

		Students who have leisure reading habit %
SES	Lowest-10%	42
	Highest-90%	53
	Overall	52

Only 52% of the students spend some time on extra-curriculum reading, which suggests that almost half of the students do not read for enjoyment at all. Leisure reading time is more limited for those extremely poor students than their counterparts from higher-income families, which is supported by prior studies (e.g.Greaney, 1980; Johnsson-Smaragdi and Jönsson, 2006). A higher proportion (53%) of high-SES students have extra-curriculum reading habits, compared with the low-SES group (42%).

The PISA 2018 reading test scores of 4868 students in England vary from 207 to 809 with a mean score of 509. To measure the reading attainment for extremely poor students, Table 4 illustrates the average reading scores of two groups and Cohen's d 'effect size'.

Table 4 Reading Attainment and Family Circumstance in England

		Reading Score			Effect Size
		Mean	S.D.	N	Cohen's d
SES	Lowest-10%	456	95	489	0.62
	Highest-90%	516	97	4,379	
	Overall	509	98	4,868	

According to Table 4, the lowest-10% students achieve sixty points lower than the highest-90% students on average with a medium effect size (0.62). Extremely low-income pupils may struggle to get the same reading proficiency as other students from more affluent backgrounds. The reading attainment gap in this study is consistent with earlier studies in terms of the SES attainment gap in developed countries (Buckingham, Wheldall, and Beaman-Wheldall, 2013; Hemmerechts, Agirdag, and Kavadias, 2017).

How to close the gap is perhaps the more essential issue. The study focused on teaching enthusiasm and reading attitude to construct a mediation model to explain the poverty attainment gap and bridge it.

Teaching Enthusiasm Matters

The research employs a path analysis approach to investigate the inter-relationship among socioeconomic status, teaching enthusiasm, and reading scores and explain the poverty attainment gap with teaching enthusiasm. As shown in Figure 3, the study first constructs the direct path between SES and reading attainment. The standardised coefficient on the arrow (0.293) illustrates that students from high-SES families are more likely to achieve a higher reading score on average with a foundational R^2 of 0.092. Socioeconomic status still contributes to the explanation of 9.2% of the variation in reading ability.
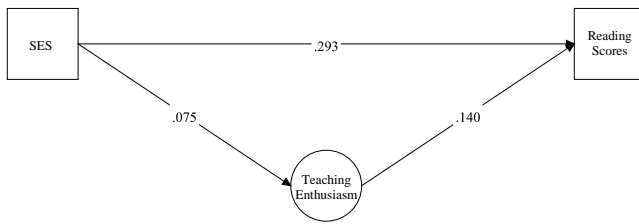
Figure 3 Mediation of Teaching Enthusiasm

When adding the variable of teaching enthusiasm, the R^2 reaches 0.112, which confirms that teaching enthusiasm increases the model explanatory power for reading proficiency. The positive path coefficient of 0.140 suggests that students who rate a higher teaching enthusiasm achieve higher reading proficiency. This variable has a small positive correlation with SES with a coefficient of 0.075, which suggests that socioeconomically privileged students report a higher quality of perceived teaching enthusiasm. Students from low-income families are more likely to experience low-rated enthusiasm teachers. This correlation could be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, students may notice the difference in teachers' enthusiasm for economically disadvantaged students and privileged students (Diamond et al., 2004; Gast, 2018; Smith and Gorard, 2005). On the other hand, there may be a mismatch between teachers' expression of enthusiasm and students' requirements depending on the nature of the classroom. The high-quality and high-efficacy classroom interaction has the pre-request of teachers' empathy (Aldrup et al., 2022). Even if some teachers have the awareness to express their teaching enthusiasm, the way they express it has potential impacts on students' perceptions of teaching enthusiasm.

Focus on Reading Attitude

Although Figure 3 explains the SES reading attainment gap with teaching enthusiasm, the mechanism of teaching enthusiasm is still in a black box. Several previous studies discovered a substantial relationship between reading attitude and performance (e.g. Lerang et al., 2019; Rogiers et al., 2020). Meanwhile, past research has revealed that teacher-student interaction can foster students' reading attitudes (Guay, Stupnisky, Boivin, Japel, and Dionne, 2019; Roorda, Jak, Zee, Oort, and Koomen, 2017). This study takes a further step to analyse how teaching enthusiasm makes a difference to reading scores with students' reading attitudes. The second hypothesis of the study is explored whether teaching enthusiasm and reading attitudes have a serial mediation on reading proficiency as shown in Figure 4.
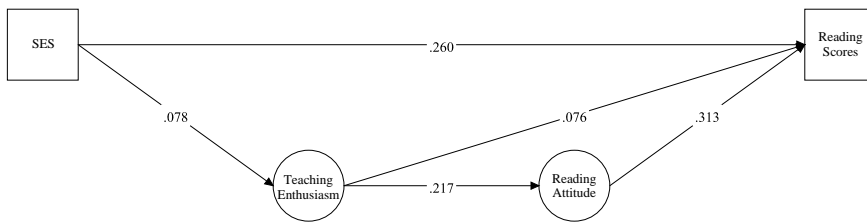
Figure 4 Serial Mediation Model of Teaching Enthusiasm and Reading Attitude

R^2 in this model is 0.187, which means that the model explains about 19% of the variation in reading scores. Students' self-reported reading attitude is the strongest predictor of their reading scores with the largest coefficient of 0.313, compared with SES (0.260) and teaching enthusiasm (0.076). Students who perceive high-quality teaching enthusiasm tend to express a positive reading attitude, which improves their reading test outcomes. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds who have highly rated teacher enthusiasm have a more favourable attitude about reading and perform better on standardised reading examinations. In other words, the present research could form the basis of a strategy for raising low-income students' reading levels by improving their attitude toward reading by delivering high-quality teaching enthusiasm.

Limitations

The study's findings only on a (large) subset of 15-year-old students in England. Some students who refused to participate in the PISA might suffer a super-deprived situation. At this point, the reading achievement gap between rich and poor students may be even greater. In addition, this study used a cross-sectional design to establish a link between teaching enthusiasm and reading proficiency. However, teaching enthusiasm and reading attitude may not be necessary or sufficient to improve students' reading proficiency. Further research should be conducted with randomised controlled trials to demonstrate a firmer causal conclusion (Gorard, 2013). The findings should therefore be interpreted with the necessary caution since this study is not reported as being definitive. However, it makes a substantial contribution to the field, and the implication that can be gained are discussed in the next section.

Implications

According to the current study, the socioeconomic achievement disparity might be partially explained by teachers' excitement. For educational practice, three recommendations are proposed.

First, teachers and schools should provide students with adequate reading materials so that low-income students have the opportunity to get extra-curriculum reading experience. Secondly, all teachers should cultivate their empathy to focus on low-income students' requirements with consideration of their growing environment. Thirdly, students' reading attitudes showed a strong predictive power to reading attainment in secondary schools.

Therefore, teachers need to foster students' positive reading attitudes. However, all of these implications are based on certain teaching approaches which should be decided by teachers themselves with consideration of students' status. In educational research, a great number of studies in terms of classroom interaction in reading are accumulating, which could guide teachers' classroom practice. The next step should focus on how to transform these bodies of research evidence into practice.

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Using a Situative Approach to investigate Motivation to Learn English: A Justification for the Methodological Choice

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Abstract

This paper aims to present the rationale for adopting a situative perspective as the primary investigative approach, presents a snapshot of the author's theoretical framing before data collection, and serves as a source for self-reflection. Since the theoretical framing process is ongoing, the arguments presented in this paper are tentative and subject to revision. Because this paper is a theoretical discussion, it does not provide detailed operational information or conclusive findings, since data analysis had only just begun at the time of writing. This paper is a written account of the oral presentation given at the 4th Annual Imagine Better Education Conference, hosted by the School of Education of Durham University 20th & 21st October 2022.

Keywords*: Situative approach, L2 motivation, constructivism, mainland China, grade seven students*

Introduction

Structure of the paper

The first section is the introduction, which includes the structure of the paper and a discussion of the methodological problems that occur in the investigation of motivation. The second section provides an overview of the evolution of motivation definitions, giving readers a comprehensive introduction to the subject. The third section narrows the focus by exploring the development of the conceptualisation of second language (L2) motivation, which forms the theoretical basis that informs the formulation of the research question and the adoption of a situative approach. The research question is presented in the fourth section, with its complex dynamic nature deconstructed into four key phrases. After building upon the arguments presented in the preceding sections, the fifth section of the paper focuses on elucidating the principles of the situative approach. It defines the approach, outlines its purpose, and emphasises its distinctive capacity to reveal novel perspectives on motivation. The section also explores why the situative approach is particularly well-suited to address the research question. In the sixth section, the paper provides contextual information on the study's implementation. Finally, the paper concludes that, after thorough evaluation, the situative approach was carefully selected as the theoretical framework for the present study.

Methodological problem

Using quantitative psychometric measurement as the main method, prior research on second language (L2) motivation has focused on understanding the relationships between motivation and other variables related to L2 learning. Since the 1980s, following a traditional psychological approach, a number of L2 motivation frameworks have been established using this focus. Capitalising on these frameworks, in the next ten years, an increased number of empirical studies were conducted and initial insights about L2 motivation were documented. However, after a decade of rapid development, the traditional approach seems to have reached its limit. This is mainly due to the epistemological position the traditional approach adopts, which construes learning as a purely cognitive process, a mental activity that entails internal information processing, such as coding and structuring (Ertmer & Newby, 2013, p. 51). This conceptualisation

of L2 learning has led to an overemphasis on the cognitive aspect of motivation, which fails to account for the learner's agency and affect and isolates motivation from its owner, leading to a fragmented view of cognition and context. By contrast, a situative approach offers a more holistic view that can be helpful in addressing these problems. More importantly, via a situative lens, the power of L2 motivation research can be further unleashed by providing teachers and practitioners with down-to-earth, context-based implications that help to create supportive learning environments.

Changes in defining motivation

Motivation has long been considered a complex, multifaceted psychological phenomenon involving many contributing factors, sub-systems, and sub-components that interact over time (Chambers, 1999, p. 13; Graham, 2014, p. 174). Despite continuous efforts, its elusive nature remains a source of confusion. Ongoing attempts to capture it tangibly seem to further complicate the picture as new features of motivation continue to be discovered. The following provides a general understanding of the nature of motivation. Gardner (1985) took a social-psychological view and referred to motivation as "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language" (p. 10).

Moving from Gardner's relatively simplistic description that views motivation a mere combination of individual traits, Williams and Burden (1997) developed a socio-cognitive view based on their social constructivist framework, emphasising the central role of cognitive process in L2 learning. They contended that "motivation may be construed as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual or physical effort to attain a previously set goal" (p. 120). As the field of L2 motivation had been further developed and more empirical evidence had been gathered, researchers came to realise previous frameworks did not sufficiently reflect the changing nature of motivation. Consequently, researchers shifted their focus to the temporal aspect of motivation and started to adopt a developmental perspective to examine how motivation fluctuates in a process-oriented manner over shorter time periods, such as intervals by minute or day (Dörnyei et al., 2014). More recently, the complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) had been applied to various domains of applied

linguistics (Larsen-Freeman, 2017). Drawing on this grand theory, motivation was conceptualised as a "relational and soft-assembled system rather than as an often-essentialised artefact" (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). This conceptualisation was based on the idea that the unit of analysis should be just as dynamic as the world studied (Hiver & Papi, 2019, p. 119).

To summarise, previous research has defined motivation as a complex and ever-changing concept that encompasses social, cognitive and temporal aspects. These broad definitions help to establish a fundamental understanding of motivation that individuals can relate to based on their own experiences. However, the real challenge lies in developing a specific method to investigate motivation. A critical review of past conceptualisations of L2 motivation can serve as a valuable resource for reflection and prepare grounds for determining the methodological choice for this study.

Prior conceptualisations of L2 motivation

Engaging social aspects

Canadian Psychologist Robert Gardner and his associates developed the seminal Socio-Educational Model (SEM) of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (1979, 1983, 1985, 2000), which has been the most influential framework in L2 motivation research for over four decades (Gu, 2009). The model has gone through multiple versions, with certain variables being removed or replaced. Gardner drew on social psychology and argued that language learners' attitude towards the target language community has a direct impact on L2 learning behaviours (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). He noted that this social aspect distinguished language learning motivation from motivation to learn other school subjects (Gardner, 1985, p. 6). This concept later became a central assumption in the field of language motivation (Al-Hoorie & Hiver, 2020, p. 1). Gardner and colleagues also contributed to the development of the Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), a standardised measure associated with the model (Lamb et al., 2019, pp. 23-25). The AMTB was a ground-breaking measure as it allowed L2 motivation to be measured in a structured and replicable way (Gardner, 2006).

The SEM of SLA brings L2 motivation research to maturity, marking it as an independent, interdisciplinary field under psychology and SLA (Taie & Afshari, 2015, p. 609). In addition to emphasising learner aptitude, Gardner and his colleagues were the first in the L2 motivation field to highlight the important role of individual differences in language acquisition and the influence of cultural and social contexts on the development of those differences (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Gardner, 1985).

However, despite its acknowledged contributions, the model has been critiqued over the past decades for its lack of substantial development (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991, p. 501), its dominance (Dörnyei, 2005), and its broad lens that makes it difficult to capture nuanced insights (Dörnyei, 2019; Ushioda, 2016, p. 564). Other criticisms of the model include that it creates confusion by including attitudes as a part of the definition of motivation when they should be separate (Oller, 1981, p. 234); that the model cannot describe the development of motivation as it progresses over real time (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011); and that the five hypotheses of the model are problematic (Au, 1988).

Nevertheless, these shortcomings cannot undermine the pioneering role of SEM as a cornerstone in the field of L2 motivation. In fact, the development of L2 motivation research in the next decades has largely focused on addressing the problems existing in SEM. In this sense, SEM has directly or indirectly inspired new L2 motivation studies in an ongoing manner, which continues today.

Influenced by cognitivism in learning theories, researchers began investigating L2 motivation by placing it within the context of L2 learners' complex cognitive processes. The next subsection will shed light on how cognitive theories influenced the theorisation of motivation.

Influence of cognitive theories

In the late 1950s, learning theories shifted their focus from behaviourism to cognitivism, signifying a transition from a focus on overt, observable behaviours to more complex cognitive processes (Ertmer & Newby, 2013, p. 50). Epistemologically, cognitivism holds that knowledge acquisition

is a mental activity, which involves internal structuring and coding by learners (Bates, 2009, p. 16; Ertmer & Newby, 2013, p. 51). Drawing on cognitivism to understand L2 motivation is a significant step forward because a cognitivist lens complements Gardner's broad social lens, enabling a more comprehensive analysis at both micro, individual and macro, sociocultural levels. This echoes Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) observation that investigating L2 motivation via a cognitive lens is beneficial because cognitive theories emphasise the role of individuals' cognitive processes in L2 learning and sharpen the research focus from a broader perspective of ethnolinguistic communities and general affective dispositions to more specific learning contexts (p. 46).

One of the prominent examples is Trembley and Gardner's (1995) L2 motivation model. In response to the call for the "adoption of a wider version of motivation" (p. 505), they introduced three mediating variables between language attitudes and motivational behaviours: goal salience, valence and self-efficacy. These variables were rooted in cognitive theories of mainstream psychology. Goal salience came from goal theories (e.g., goal-setting theory in Locke & Latham, 1992; goal-orientation theory in Ames, 1992); valence is based on expectancy-value theories (e.g., attribution theory in Weiner, 1992; self-worth theory in Covington, 1992); and self-efficacy comes from the Bandura's influential theory (e.g., Bandura, 1977; 1997).

The cognitive perspective takes a reductionist approach, which simplifies complex phenomena into discrete variables that can be conveniently measured and quantified. This leads to the cognitive perspective alone being limited in capturing the intricacy and complexity of motivation.

Examining the dynamics of motivation over time

Temporal change

Due to the fact that mastering an L2 is a long-term learning process that requires years to achieve, describing the temporal organisation of motivation has been a significant challenge (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 60). However, by adding a temporal dimension, we can get closer to our intuitive understanding of motivation. That is, motivation is not static. It changes over time. Researchers

began conceptualising motivation development in the 1990s. Since then, the temporal aspect has become an integral aspect of L2 motivation research.

To synthesise current L2 motivation research, Dörnyei and Ottó (1998, p. 48) developed a comprehensive, non-reductionist process model of L2 motivation. This model comprises three interrelated linear subprocesses: action sequence, motivational influences, and behavioural processes (i.e., pre-actional, actional and post-actional phases) (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 65). While this model provides insights into the temporal development of motivational processes, it has a limitation of adopting an oversimplified linear approach to describing the relationships among and across components. This contrasts with the multifaceted and complex nature of L2 motivation, indicating that this model serves as a transitional model to pave the way for the subsequent complex dynamic system theory (Dörnyei, 2019, p. 49).

Complex dynamic system theory

There has been growing interest in applying CDST in SLA since the turn of the new millennium (Larsen-Freeman, 2017). As a grand theory, CDST comprises Complexity Theory (CT) and Dynamic Systems Theory (DST). The former draws on Chaos Theory in physics and emphasises system properties of a complex phenomenon, while the latter draws on Dynamic Systems Theory in mathematics and focuses on the process (Han et al., 2022, p. 16). Researchers have recognised the potential of CDST to understand motivation and it has inspired numerous empirical studies in recent years (e.g., Dörnyei et al., 2014a; Mercer, 2016; for the latest review of CDST-inspired studies, see Han et al., 2022, pp. 11-16). CDST is an "appealing theoretical anchor" for understanding L2 development (Han et al., 2022, p. 2), because it can describe the complexity of non-linear changes over multidimensional time and space; it is a framework sensitive to initial condition, immediate feedback and ongoing adaptation; and it is open to, but also dependent on, changing contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2014; Hiver & Papi, 2019).

Hiver and Al-Hoorie (2016) explained that a complex dynamic system is built upon the interrelationships of a number of contextual components, among which one component acts as an agent (i.e., L2 motivation in the present study), interacting with other components interdependently over time. The synergetic outcomes of inter-component interactions reshape the nature of the agent

component and other components within the system, resulting in new patterns of individuals' behavioural and mental processes that can emerge at a system-wide level. Following this conceptualisation, Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) proposed a five-step guide to capturing a complex dynamic system as the unit of analysis: (1) identify system components, including processes, agents and subsystems; (2) identify timescales and levels on which the system is operating; (3) describe relations between and within components; (4) understand how the system and the context mutually adapt to each other; and (5) describe the dynamics of the holistic system over time.

Although the five-step guide seems feasible and promising, the statements made are "highly elusive when it came to operationalising it to concrete terms" (Dörnyei et al., 2014b, p. 4). The thorny issues for applying CDST in empirical inquiries centre on which components constitute a sensitive, context-based system as the unit of analysis, and how to identify these components and the associative processes, subsystems, and interacting relations between and within components (Han et al., 2022, p. 17). The potential and impracticality of CDST seem to place L2 motivation researchers in a difficult position. On the one hand, from an epistemological perspective, CDST claims to capture the complexity and dynamics of motivation; on the other hand, the lack of traditions, templates, and workable research metaphors has made it challenging for researchers to develop appropriate designs (Dörnyei et al., 2014b, p. 4). This confusion in application results from the ultimate purpose of CT. In Larsen-Freeman (2017)'s words, CT intends to remain metaphorical (p. 23) and aims only to become a metatheory that stipulates "a coherent set of interlocking principles that both describes and prescribes what is meaningful and what is meaningless, acceptable, central and peripheral as theory and as method" in applied linguistics (p. 21).

CDST contributes to SLA research as a "metatheory" (Han et al., 2022, p. 16) and functions as either a guiding framework for research design or a source of interpretation for findings (p. 12). Although CDST can offer a novel perspective, its elusiveness and lack of operational details may lead to confusion in practice. Particularly, CDST does not specify what components constitute its unit of analysis and how to identify these components and the relations among them. In light of this concern, it is crucial to develop an investigative approach that extends CDST's legacy in

describing changing process, while also providing a flexible yet structured unit of analysis to accommodate bottom-up analysis.

Research question

Drawing on the features of prior conceptualisations, the research question (RQ) is formulated as follows:

> *How do Chinese seventh graders' perceptions of their lived experiences of learning English and contexts work interdependently to shape their motivation to learn English over one semester?*

Four key phrases in the RQ reflect conceptualisations mentioned earlier. The first phrase, *"perceptions of lived experiences"*, is concerned with how learners think and feel about their lived experiences in English learning. This is represented by 21 categories relevant to shaping motivation. The second key phrase of the RQ is *"contexts"*, which encompasses both formal and informal settings for English learning, as well as the wider socio-cultural environment that can impact language acquisition. Formal settings refer to classroom-based learning, while informal settings are outside the classroom. Preliminary findings show that during the research period, private tutoring and self-study at home were the primary forms of informal English learning due to Covid-19 restrictions, while other formats, such as language camps in English-speaking countries, were difficult to pursue. Informed by features of CDST, the third key phrase is *"work interdependently"*. It sees learning English as a complex, dynamic process where learners' lived experiences of learning English and surrounding contexts work interdependently to shape motivation over time. The fourth key phrase, *"over one semester"*, emphasises the importance of examining motivation over a period of time instead of just at a single point, and suggests changes over time should be considered a fundamental aspect of motivation.

The formulation of the RQ represents a critical synthesis of prior conceptualisations on L2 motivation. It aims to extract qualitative insights about motivation that quantitative approaches cannot provide. The next section explains why the situative approach is the most appropriate choice for answering the proposed RQ.

Justify the use of situative approach to understand L2 motivation

Drawing on social practice and identity theories in learning science, psychology and anthropology (Nolen, 2020, p. 2), a situative approach "seeks to understand individuals as part of multiple, partially overlapping and socially constructed systems of meaning in which people do what they do." (p. 1). It aims to comprehend human activities by embedding them within the meaning system that shapes the living context and ways of thinking of participating individuals. In the context of school-based education, a situative perspective seeks to uncover how educators and students negotiate changes of meanings in the classroom activity system over time, and how these changes can inform the design of engaging learning environments (Nolen et al., 2015, pp. 240-241). The situative approach not only incorporates but also expands on the dominant features of previous conceptualisations, enabling a more extensive and in-depth examination into L2 motivation. The following expounds on the rationale for using a situative approach, from the perspectives of learning theory and the theorisation of L2 learning process.

Since the 1950s, cognitivism dominated learning science (Ertmer & Newby, 2013, p. 50). Early L2 motivation theories were inevitably influenced by its ontological and epistemological presumptions (Gardner, 1979; Gardner & Smythe, 1974, as cited by Lamb et al., 2019, p. 25). Their methodological choices, therefore, were also impacted by these cognitivist presumptions. Cognitivism views learning from a rationalist perspective (Bower & Hilgard, 1981), which holds that knowledge comes from the reason that already exists in the mind (Schunk, 2012, p. 497). In this sense, knowledge is not learned from the outside, but is rather a process of recalling or "discovering" from the inside (Ertmer & Newby, 2013, p. 47). Although cognitivism concerns both environmental conditions and the learner, it gives more importance to the "active" nature of the learner (Ertmer & Newby, 2013, p. 51), which is "held to be more important, more knowable, and more certain than any underlying material interests, social practices, or objective properties of the stimulus situation" (Sampson, 1981, p. 731).

Following the principles of cognitive science, early theorisations of L2 learning tended to use static, linear and variable-based models to describe the learning process, referred to as "prevalent psychological approaches" by Nolen et al. (2015, p. 234) and "socio-cognitive approaches" by Nolen (2020, p. 1). Two prominent examples are Gardner's (1985) Socio-Educational Model of

SLA and Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) process model of L2 motivation, which differ in that the latter adds temporal change as an additional concern.

As for CDST, this paper argues that either as a metatheory (i.e., CT) or as an object theory (i.e., DST) (Han et al., 2022, p. 16), it only focuses on describing the L2 learning process without clarifying its epistemological position. CT and DST describe L2 learning at different levels. As a metatheory, CT defines L2 learning as developmental, complex, dynamic and non-linear (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 141). In contrast to this abstraction, DST as an object theory focuses more on the specific details of systems that vary among individual learners. It seeks to answer concrete questions such as the shape of a language learning developmental process and what elements are viewed as connected or competing (Han et al., 2022, p. 16). Although CDST functions more as a process framework without a clear epistemological position, it contributes to describing the L2 learning process comprehensively and dynamically, which provides an alternative development to the prevailing cognitivist, variable-based approach.

Unlike previous approaches mainly rooted in cognitivism, a situative approach draws on principles from constructivism. Although constructivism is seen as a branch of cognitivism as both believe that learning is a mental activity in nature, they are fundamentally different in how knowledge is produced (Ertmer & Newby, 2013, p. 55). It is this epistemological difference that leads to different methodological choices. With a particular emphasis on the mental activities of the learner (2013, p. 51), cognitivism claims that knowledge pre-exists in the mind, so learning equates to a process of awakening the "sleeping" knowledge (Schunk, 2012, p. 497).

Contrary to cognitivism, constructivism asserts that knowledge is created through interactions between the learner and the environment, and that it "is a function of how the individual creates meaning from his or her own experiences" (Jonassen, 1991, p. 10; Ertmer & Newby, 2013, p. 55). As a result, the situative approach, which incorporates features of constructivism, expands its focus from the mental processes of the learner to their interactions with the environment (Nolen et al., 2015, p. 237). This epistemological shift leads to an extension of the unit of analysis from individuals to individuals-in-context, where individuals and context are not independent of each other, but mutually constitutive and mediated by an individual's identity through social participation (ibid., p. 244).

Shifted from cognitivism to constructivism, a situative approach to L2 motivation departs from traditional cognitivist ideas and incorporates features from CDST to describe the L2 learning process. By using learners-in-context as a new unit of analysis, a situative view broadens L2 motivation research beyond the analysis of motivational fluctuations and variable correlations, enabling social status and power dynamics to be unfolded through positional identity (Nolen et al., 2015, p. 239). Additionally, the situative lens enables a more comprehensive understanding of the classroom, school, and culture-specific meaning systems, shedding light on the inner workings of L2 motivation and on other phenomena and behaviours in the same environment (Nolen, 2020, p. 5).

The situative approach has its own set of limitations. One of the most common criticisms is that findings may not be generalisable. Nonetheless, as pointed out by Nolen et al. (2015, p. 245), the complexity inherent in the situative approach can offset this criticism, as it is pioneering in challenging the established norms and contributes to the field in a novel way.

The study

This PhD study was conducted at a junior secondary school in southern China and involved ten grade seven students and two English teachers as participants. A case study research design was employed to obtain in-depth knowledge, with surveys, semi-structured interviews, and lesson observations as the primary data collection methods. This study aims to understand how Chinese grade seven students' perceptions of their English learning experiences and their learning contexts interact to shape their motivation to learn English. Nolen et al.'s (2015) situative perspective is used as the theoretical framework and features of Bronfenbrenner's (1976, 1986, 1993) process-person-context-time model will be picked up in the analysis.

Conclusion

This paper has justified the methodological choice for the current study and concludes that utilising a situative approach is particularly suitable for exploring insights of L2 motivation. A situative approach moves beyond a traditional cognitive approach and instead views learning as a social

practice that is influenced by constant interactions between learners and their surrounding contexts (Greeno, 1998). By adopting a holistic perspective, a situative approach allows for a thorough analysis that goes beyond surface observations of motivation and instead examines the underlying and often unnoticed factors related to motivation in students' daily practices. These factors include, but are not limited to, how students construct their own identities as English learners and exercise agency in their decision-making during the learning process, how they respond to and navigate themselves through environmental constraints, and how both learners and their environments are constantly shaped through ongoing interactions.

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An investigation into Black Women's Identity: Progression, Race and Equality within Higher Education in Britain.

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Abstract

In Britain, Black women still experience social inequalities, discrimination, institutionalised racism, microaggression and sexism within Higher Education (HE). Is there a relationship between their gender and race in HE? Because Black women's career advancement is sluggish, unfair and unjust, it is necessary to promote intersectionality to achieve equality and equity within HE. This paper is based on ongoing research into the racial and social issues Black women in modern Britain face. Such significant marginalisation limits them in their chosen careers. This paper's primary objectives therefore, are to critically examine Black women's experiences of discrimination in the British HE system and identify the structures and systems of success and hindrance. I argue that because of the intersection of race and gender in HE and Black women's career advancement, British Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should consider using a framework that can expose and eradicate racism and sexism that hinders these women's advancement.

Keywords: *Minority Ethnic; women career progression; intersectionality; racism; Higher Education*

Introduction

In Britain today, Black women still experience social inequalities, discrimination, institutionalised racism, microaggression and sexism within Higher Education (HE). While there is well-documented research on under-representation, the attainment gap, social inequalities and widening participation within Higher Education (HE) amongst Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups (Bhopal, 2020), there is limited research as to why or what has hindered Black womens' progression in their careers. Therefore this piece of research aimed to investigate Black women's (students and staff) experiences and explore how identity, race and equality have influenced their career progression and asked: Do race and gender impact Black Women's career progression within HE? Do Black female staff and students feel supported in their universities as they progress in their careers? This entailed a critical examination and analysis of the perspectives and lived experiences of Black women, specifically students and staff from various universities and courses, regarding their career progression, identity, race, equality and university systems and structures (such as targeted programmes, mentorships, allies and workshops).

Although universities are often considered institutions that welcome multiculturalism, inclusivity and diversity, it is claimed that within these institutions there are persistent levels of racial inequality that perpetually and disproportionately impact Black women career progression leaving them at a disadvantage when compared to their white women counterparts. (Alexander and Arday, 2015; cited in Runnymede Trust, 2022). Importantly, the impact of these racial conflicts has led to many movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) seeking racial justice and ethnic differences within British society. It is therefore critical to understand how these inequalities continue to persist for not only Black female students but also staff in Britain's Higher Education Institutions (HEI), especially in academic success and senior leadership roles (ECU, 2015; Williams, 2013). Arguably, Black females within such institutions are significantly under-represented at senior levels (Bhopal and Brown 2016).

Literature Review

Barriers for Black Female Students and Staff in HE

Britain's HEI are seen as the driving force for social mobility, thus they are democratised and meritocratic institutions that are available to everyone who has the qualifications to access them, regardless of their racial and socio-economic backgrounds (Kettley, 2007). However, there is

evidence to suggest that Black women in academia are less supported and are taken for granted when compared to their male and female white counterparts. For instance, they suffer invisibility and marginality as well as experience many challenges that are correlated to sexism and racism also referred to as misogynoir. A combination of these factors creates barriers to Black womens' career progression and impacts their overall experience in HE (Smith et al., 2019). According to Doharty (2021), the British HE system is embedded with structural and institutional whiteness which has impacted not only the curricula, pedagogy, university policies, and campus climate, but also the experiences of students and staff of colour. As a result, Black minority ethnic groups especially Black women are considered less important by the white British and male dominant society. Therefore, movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) have campaigned for social change to prevent pervasive racism experienced by the Black communities, thus building an anti-racist society (Pilkington, 2021). According to Haynes et al (2020), Black women (students and staff) have experience discrimination such as racism, classism, sexism and feeling of isolation, resulting in claims that these are contributing factors which have influenced their racial and gender identity, progression and equal opportunities within HE. As a result of these claims, the topic of Black female experiences in HE and academia has gained the attention of many scholars from an interdisciplinary perspective (Bonner, 2001; Croom & Patton, 2011; Davis & Reynolds, 2011; Edwards, 2015; Guy-Sheftall, 2006; Hinton, 2009; Patton & Catching, 2009; Sule, 2014; Turner Kelly & McCann, 2013, 2014).

Furthermore, significant barriers to Black womens' progression in HE are correlated to injustices and systematic racism which significantly impact their progress (Arday, 2022). Despite these barriers, Black females are advocates in their efforts to manoeuvre through these challenges within HEIs. For example, they have developed and continue to utilise practical strategies of analysis, self-care, determination and resilience to progress in their careers and continue in academia (Rollock, 2021). To further expand on the latter, many Black women have indicated that they have strategically overlooked, ignored and even played along with their white counterpart's negative behaviours to embrace self-care. Moreover, they remain silent, by not defending themselves against abuse or microaggression which secure their safety and advances their career progression within such a context (Leonardo and Porter, 2010). However, despite these efforts made by Black women to improve and develop their career progression in HE, it is claimed that they are the most marginalised and disadvantaged social group within such institutions. According to many scholars, these adverse factors are the downfalls and implications of UK universities not addressing the issues of class, race and

gender diversity within their institutions (Bathmaker et al, 2016; Burke et al, 2017; Coulson et al, 2018).

As a result of the above, Black women have been struggling with the concept of the "glass ceiling" for many decades in HEIs across Britain as they seek to advance in their career progression (Glass and Cook, 2016). Where Black women have reached senior positions, they are said to be 'privileged', yet are thought to still encounter direct and indirect discrimination which impacts further career progression (Shilliam, 2015). It is therefore possible that Black women in HEIs who occupy these positions are faced with the intersectionality of race and gender which present further challenges in their career progression. Importantly, the framing of intersectionality deals with the fact that many social justices for Black women, problems like racism and sexism often overlap, creating multiple levels of social injustice.

A recent report published by the Goldsmiths University of London has highlighted that, Black women in academia have experienced racism, bullying, ostracism, racial stereotyping and racial microaggression. Furthermore, these individuals have indicated that in comparison to their white counterparts when seeking to progress in their careers they need to work twice as hard to demonstrate their competence, knowledge and experience, especially as they work towards a professorship (Rollock, 2019).

Bhopal (2020a) demonstrated that the overlapping of intersectional identities plays an important part in the direction of Black women in HE. She further concluded that because of these connections Black women in HE continues to experience significant disadvantages and disparities which hinder their career progression. For example, they are discriminated against, obtained lower grades and failed to access leadership roles. More recently, statistical evidence on gender and race indicates that White males and White females continue to occupy advantageous positions in HE when compared to BME females and BME males. Furthermore, the salary for a White female is higher than the mean salary for Black males and BME females (Advance HE, 2018). Therefore, the emergence of intersectionality is challenging the notion that gender is the primary factor in determining a female's fate (Bell hooks, 1984). Nonetheless, despite these barriers, which adversely affect Black women in Britain's HEIs, some have managed to progress and reach professorship (Rollock, 2019 and achieved good degree outcomes (Bhopal, 2020) respectively. For instance, there are patterns which indicated that in comparison to their white counterparts, BAME groups are least likely to be awarded a 'good degree': that is, a first or upper-second-class degree classification, whilst BAME staff are often overlooked for promotions (HEFCE, 2014). Perhaps not surprisingly, many Black women

from various ethnic minority groups have considered leaving Britain's HEIs and seeking employment overseas (Bhopal et al, 2015). The latter discussion would suggest that there is a problem within Britain's HEIs that is more deep-seated than BAME students' attainment gap and degree outcomes (Rollock, 2021). For instance, at least 70% of Black women have been exposed to harassment and bullying within HEIs (UCU, 2016) and they remain under-represented and racially invisible (Rollock, 2021). Likewise, many have documented their own experiences of racial barriers that they fight to overcome as Black women to advance in their career progression (Rollock 2013) and Maylor (2009). According to Gabriel and Tate (2017), racism is prevalent within Britain's HEIs, thus Black women seeking to progress must navigate through various stages to climb the ladder of success. Yet despite these claims, Black womens' aspiration continues to grow within HE (Mirza, 2009), as they are said to be ambitious and want to advance in studies and career progression (Bhopal, 2020b).

Although Black women are ambitious, they have experienced negative self-image relating to the colour of their skin which impacts their self-worth and sense of belonging. Therefore, they are unsure of their full potential as they lack the support needed to reassure them which in turn impacts their identity and career progression (Bryan et al., 2018 p.2). Britain's HEIs are still famously recognised as "Hideously white" (Back (2004), thus it is not an establishment that many would expect Black women to succeed, as they are deemed out of place within such white institutions (Ahmed 2012, p153). Nonetheless, this is not to say that white women do not experience prejudices within HE (Marion, 2021).

More recently, statistical evidence has highlighted that in 2016 in the UK there were 22,810 professors of which 28% were females, 18% were BME and 110 were Black and only 35 are Black women (Advance HE, 2022). Moreover, the Fawcett of society (2022) reported women of colour in Britain are not disillusioned that they experience institutional racism within HE, which is now the norm. For example, 52% of Black women were asked to provide UK qualifications or English as a first language, 39% indicated that lack of progression has significantly impacted their well-being in comparison to 28% of their white female counterparts and a further 28% were blocked from promotion which impacts their career progression despite positive feedback. This was supported by The Runnymede Trust report which further highlighted that, Black women face double jeopardy as they advance in their career progressions (Runnymede Trust, 2022).

Research Design and Methods

This research paper is based on a mixed-method approach and an interpretive paradigm were considered and adopted as the most effective qualitative methodology for collecting the data. Moreover, the qualitative findings will help to provide a rigorous answer that aligns with the research questions (Cohen, et al., 2011, p. 179). The purpose of this research study is to gain adequate, insightful and relevant information on the unique lived experiences of Black women and spark discussion on assimilation tactics that create identity conflicts and limit career development across university levels in Britain (Athens, 2010). Ethical approval was sought in line with the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and approval was obtained by the University of Northampton Code of Ethics (UON, 2018). The guidelines were adhered to throughout the research study. Before conducting the research, consent forms and information sheets were shared with all participants via email invitation and signed copies were collected before the interviews commenced. The research was conducted in various universities in Britain.

A snowballing or chain referral sampling was employed to collect data across various universities in Britain and the participants were contacted via email. For all the participants in the study pseudonym were used to ensure that identity confidentially and anonymity were protected. I adapted this sampling technique as a rolling snowball effect where I gained access to the participants who are normally difficult to reach which allowed me to gather richer and more effective data which is often useful to the topic in question. (Parker et al., 2019). Snowball sampling to recruit the participants, as I was introduced to some initial contacts (seeds), who fit the research criteria (Black women), academic staff and students across various universities, levels of studies and roles who were invited to take part in the research. Therefore, the participants in this study were recruited by blending convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling techniques (Palinkas, et al., 2015). According to Parker et al (2019) by networking with peers and colleagues in various universities the agreeable participants were then asked to use their social networks to establish initial links which developed an increasing chain of participants. The participants who fitted the research criteria (Black women) academic staff and students were approached and invited to participate in interviews via email. From the respondents, although six academic staff were invited to take part only three were interviewed, due to time restrictions and planned holidays. In addition, five Black female students, also from various faculties, levels of studies and universities were interviewed and gave their experiences

on issues relating to their career progression. Finally, the link to the online questionnaire was shared, via various social media sites, including LinkedIn, university social media sites, and WhatsApp and selected lecturers were asked to distribute the link amongst their student groups. The interviews were conducted utilising semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions were asked to obtain rich and authentic data online questionnaires were also employed. The interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. In total, 35 students and 3 staff have been involved in the research study that employed comparative analysis to understand racial inequalities and intersectionality hindering Black females' career progression within HE.

Data analysis

The transcripts collected from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis, which is a method that is used to identify and present patterns in themes. This analytical approach allows the emerging themes to be presented in detail, enabling clear interpretations (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Thematic analysis is considered the most appropriate method for any study seeking an interpretation of the data collected and allowing the researcher to link and analyse the frequency of the identity themes.

Research Issue

There was some delay in reaching academic staff from various universities selected in the snowballing process due to other commitments. As a result, it was difficult to arrange a convenient time for the interviews to take place and to recruit participants.

Research Findings

Role Models, Allies and Mentors

Here, the findings collected and presented from the semi-structured interviews of both students and academic staff are correlated to those in the review of the literature. Students and academic staff felt that they needed more mentorship support to advance in their career progression.

Figure 1. A Representation of *Black Female Students' Opinions on Allies and Mentorship Support.*

The research findings collected from Black female students in the study have indicated that multiple inequalities have hindered and influenced Black women's career progression within HE. However, the figure above shows that 21/30 of the online respondents have acknowledged that having a mentor/ally would positively influence their career progression. Similarly, all five of the student participants (Mel, Mary, Mia, May and Maya) from four different universities in the semi-structured interviews have also indicated that they would benefit from having mentors to support their academic/career progression. For example, student participant Mel from the semi-structured interview indicated that.

"My entire academic progress and outcome would be much better if I had a mentor, which could improve myself confidence and my work capabilities".

(Online student participant)

A student participant also indicated that,

"Having a mentor to learn from would raise my self-confidence, improve my grades which would empower and motive me to do better"

(Student participant – Mai)

"I know I have potential but sometimes I don't believe in myself, so having a mentor would support and inspire me to do better"

(Student participant – Mary)

"Having role models and mentors to look up to is very important, at times I don't believe in my ability, having a mentor would provide practical and emotional support.. which would empower me and improve my overall performance"

(Student participant – May)

Recognising the value of sponsorship, mentorship, and role models for Black students, Paterson and Chicola (2017) stated that such progress should be implemented in HE universities, to support Black student progression and improve academic performance. Darwin and Palmer (2009) however argue that there are many challenges and negative impacts with the implementation of such mentoring programmes within HEIs, suggesting that they can limit students to one person's perspective which can be detrimental to their success. Also, the academic staff participants involved in this study, acknowledged some issues surrounding implementation of mentoring programmes:

"There are no established systems or early career advisers for people of colour within the university. I think there is a notion that they have a development programme so that one size fits all... but as I said all these training workshops and development projects, I still don't believe one size fits all".

(Academic staff – Sam)

Despite these cited challenges, in 2019 universities such as Kingston University have implemented and delivered workshops to staff across the university, aiming to shed light on the lived experiences of Black students and staff. They worked collaboratively with BAME students and staff to develop case studies and workshops to support their white staff to explore the challenge and experiences of BAME and how their identity has affected their progression. The university also launched the ELEVATE programme specifically for Black UK-domiciled students which was designed to support and empower Black students in their career development (Binnie, 2020).

Black Female Students	Reason for Mentors /Allies	Black Female Students	Reason for Mentors /Allies
Respondent 1	Someone with experience in that career path would be able to help me to progress more effectively and efficiently.	Respondent 10	It is inspiring to see someone who looks like you and is your mentor/ally/someone you admire excel in their career. It can be very motivating. Even if they don't look like me having that support and someone pushing you can impact greatly.
Respondent 2	It would be nice to speak with someone who has been through what I have and can encourage me to believe in myself and highlight where and how I can progress.	Respondent 11	I used the person I look up to as a benchmark, my brother. I keep encouraging myself, thinking if he can do it, so can I.
Respondent 3	A mentor would help me and I would achieve so much more and get better grades	Respondent 12	Because they would inspire me to go down that career path more than I did before
Respondent 4	A mentor would be of great benefit to students. There would be more passes and fewer failures as the mentor would be there to offer support.	Respondent 13	There are always things you don't know and it's helpful to have guidance in every area. There's no such thing as too much advice or mentoring.
Respondent 5	At times you just need that added support/reassurance to ensure you are on the right path. More so in	Respondent 14	Support and they would have networks that could help me also. They have the experience and top tips on what to avoid.

	writing a dissertation/thesis.		
Respondent 6	Because I would be able to speak with someone who was knowledgeable in the field and who could steer me in the right direction when needed	Respondent 15	Some people are less self-driven. So having a mentor could enhance their desire to progress and could influence them to aspire to higher levels. Particularly if they have a mentor who is highly driven and successful, this could spark a similar drive within themselves.
Respondent 7	There isn't enough representation and affirmation at the senior levels. We need allies on this journey	Respondent 16	It's always helpful to know someone who is in the position you aspire to. They can help you get there
Respondent 8	I would have someone to guide me and believes in me and that would motivate me to be the best version of myself	Respondent 17	Support is important and helps to build your confidence
Respondent 9	Young black females have to work harder to achieve good career opportunities as a minority and international students. More guidance and support in understanding the systems are required	Respondent 18	A mentor would motivate me to do better in my studies.

Table 1. A Representation of Online Students' Reasons for Having the Support of a Mentor.

Table 1 captures the response collected from the online questionnaire, 18/30 of the Black female students' respondents' narrative accounts mirror those from the students and staff's semi-structured interviews suggesting that having a mentor would their career progression. For instance, one of the respondents highlighted that;

> "There isn't enough representation and affirmation at senior level, we
> need allies/mentors at this journey and every journey of our studies"

>> (Online student participant)

Micro-aggression, and discrimination

All participants agreed that at each stage of their career, there is discrimination bias for those of ethnic minority backgrounds, expressing that a combination of factors including micro-aggression and discrimination have impacted their career progression. According to recent reports, statistical figures confirm that of 19,868 studentships awarded by all UKRI research councils only 1.2% went to Black and Mixed-race students, and only 30 were from Black Caribbean backgrounds (Leading Routes, 2019). For example, student participant May indicated that:

> " When I consider applying my PhD funding is the biggest problem, I know
> my application will be rejected once they see my name, name brings
> discrimination, which is sad really"

>> (Student participant - May)

Another Student participant Maya indicated that

> "I think the colour of my skin speaks discrimination within my university, in
> lectures the class groups are based on ethnicity. White students only sit and
> interact amongst themselves and to make it worst I was the only black student
> so I sat by myself and that was very tricky to process. I felt like I don't
> belong I think race plays a part"

>> (Student participant – Maya)

Similar experiences for micro-aggression and discrimination were also experienced by all the academic staff that were interviewed. For example,

> "I have experienced discrimination and stereotype as a result of my race and
> gender, they think that us Black females are incapable, yes issues around

intersectionality and racial bias which they claimed is unconscious. I mean if your face doesn't fit, or you don't act in a particular way then you can't join the clicky group so that becomes a barrier to your progression without anything else. You shouldn't have to play games to have the same opportunities as everyone else.

(Academic staff - Sue)

She went on to explain that the British HE system needs to be broken down and start over which would eliminate systematic and structural racism which created issues concerning discrimination and micro-aggression.

Another academic Staff Sara explained her experience of micro-aggression and indicated that:

"Legislations do not protect you and have no powers to keep you safe. But it's down to people to make the change. Rather than overt discrimination and racism, it's covert, I have experience micro-aggression, so it still goes on, white people just like the idea of power and being nasty to others".

(Academic staff, Sara)

Poor Leadership and Career Progression

Here, the lack of supportive leadership was reinforced in some of the academic staff narrative accounts. For example, Sam stated.

"Leadership is very critical; leaders need to understand the issues that black females experience and should be willing to help them progress by introducing targeting and mentoring programmes. With policy framework in place universities must remove barriers to recruitment, looking at the language that they use in recruitment that might discourage ethnic minorities... sometimes the language that is presented can deter ethnic minority".

(Academic staff, Sam)

Sue shared similar views and expressed that:

"Leadership is important and if they are committed to changing issues around equality and equity then they will understand and take actions to ensure equal opportunities for all staff. So, if there are issues around

bullying, harassment, discrimination, victimisation and prejudices and these issues must be taken seriously by the leadership within universities".

<div align="right">(Academic staff, Sue)</div>

Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout the research findings and the review of the literature, it was evident that there is a combination of factors which prevent Black women's' career progression within HE. For example, many scholars have demonstrated that factors such as microaggression can be referred to as an action that can purposefully or unintentionally exclude Black women. As a result, this area is deemed troublesome, thus creating further academic barriers which, in turn, hinder these individuals' career progression (Ahmed, 2012; Arday and Mirza, 2018; Harris, 2017) within HE. Importantly, Gabriel and Tate (2017) argue that racism is prevalent within Britain's HE context. As such, many Black women seeking to progress must navigate through various stages and barriers to climb the ladder of success. Although they must fight their way to climb the ladder of success, they remain ambitious as their aspirations continue to grow without the necessary support network (Mirza, 2009). Moreover, Bhopal (2020) suggested these individuals continue to experience various stereotypes, micro-aggression and systematic barriers that operate to marginalise their career progression (Bhopal, 2020).

Based on the findings collected and presented, the first recommendation for universities to improve Black womens' career progression, universities must prepare to become more transparent in promoting equal opportunities and creating an inclusive environment as a lack of these is the most prevalent barrier. Therefore, universities can better support Black women students by seeking to dismantle issues surrounding racial microaggression and racism within their institutions. For instance, from the narrative discussions, all Black women in the study have emphasised that universities need to provide them with more in-depth targeted training, and workshops, and invest in mentoring programmes providing them with mentors. Thus, increasing their chances of academic success and further career progression. Therefore, leadership need to promote accountability towards colleagues who partake in racial slights within the universities. Further to this, from the narrative accounts and the review of the literature Black women (students and staff) face more than merely a racialised glass ceiling they encounter a 'concrete ceiling'. This led to the conclusion that they are the almost impenetrable barrier which requires exceptional skill and force to break through (Fook et al, 2019) if Black females are to advance in their career progression.

Secondly, as some of the participants in this study have alluded and perceived that their institutional culture is set by those who lead and steer it. Without exception, the senior leadership within universities must embrace equality and diversity within their team. For example, employing and promoting more and supporting Black women to reach senior leadership roles, to achieve this they must redesign their recruitment processes making jobs more accessible for these individuals and factoring intersectionality as a majority of those in leadership roles are white and commonly male. As a result, such lack of diversity at senior levels impacts the decisions taken and the direction, tone and culture of the organisation, all of which affect the lived experience of Black women. Thirdly, universities should engage in strategies to create safe space for active listening, sharing, mentorship, allyship and engage in educational sharing by implementing target programmes to better understand, acknowledge and support diverse employee identities, thus reducing biases and stereotypes participants feel that their race and ethnicity have impacted their career progression.

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Engendering intercultural competence? The experiences of Vietnamese students in the UK

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Abstract

This paper's focus is on how Vietnamese university sojourners in the UK are prepared for intercultural communication via their language learning. It is conceptually positioned within models of teaching intercultural competence. However, it explores the learning experiences of students rather than focusing on teaching practices from the teachers' perspective. In this way it gives students voice, which is innovative within research within a Vietnamese context. The study consists of a survey of seventy students, followed by in-depth interviews with five from this group. The majority of these students, once in the UK, engaged with the university community, and the wider local community through friendships and study spaces. However, they also faced challenges with intercultural communication. The paper concludes by asserting that one aspect of English language education in Vietnam needs to be helping teachers find strategies for enabling and empowering those Vietnamese who travel to study.

Key words: *Vietnamese students, inter-cultural communication, TESOL, language teaching, student experience.*

Introduction

This article focuses on how well Vietnamese university sojourners in the UK are prepared for intercultural communication and on how to raise their intercultural communicative competence. It accesses student voice to answer the following research questions.

- To what extent were Vietnamese university sojourners prepared for intercultural communication via their language learning?

- What are the factors causing intercultural communication difficulties for Vietnamese university sojourners?

This article is positioned within the broader genre of student voice papers internationally (Mitra, 2018). In Vietnam publications based on student-voice are a recent but growing part of academic discourse - they have been described by Fielding (2011) as the most empowering and significant form of research, and the form of research most likely to enable change. Positioning this paper as such identifies it within the emancipatory vision of student voice research discourse (Thi, 2022) – in that this paper has been written to bridge the academic practitioner divide and to be of use to students and their teachers.

A conceptual framework

The conceptual framework presented here was constructed for this article. It involves the integration of two existing models for understanding the teaching of intercultural communicative competence. One of these focuses on - what to teach? And the other on - how to teach?

What to teach?

Of available models or frameworks for understanding intercultural communicative competence, Byram's (2013) model is one of the most prominent in foreign language education (Hoff, 2014; Dimitrova-Gyuzeleva, 2019; Liu, 2019) - since it consists of a detailed description of different components of intercultural communicative competence. It contains five "savoirs", with each being a different component of intercultural communication, namely: *knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery*

and interaction, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness.

This model can be effectively employed to explore the question *what to teach?* However, it does not say when each of these competences should be taught and how they should be taught - for effective language teaching. In other words, Byram's (2013) model is useful for theorists; however, in classroom practice, its use is limited. As the aim of this short paper, and the larger project of which it is part, is to 'bridge the academic practitioner divide (Fielding, 2011) via accessing student voice – this model provides a useful but only partial conceptual foundation.

How to teach?

In contrast, Newton et al's (2010) framework of principles for effective teaching informs teachers how intercultural communicative elements should be integrated into language teaching. It outlines six essential principles and has also been employed in many research studies including those conducted by Vietnamese scholars (Ho, 2011; Chau and Truong, 2018; Nguyen, 2018).

These six principles are as follows, 'language teaching should: (a) integrate language and culture from the beginning, (b) engage learners in genuine social interaction, (c) encourage and develop an exploratory and reflective approach to culture and culture-in-language, (d) foster explicit comparisons and connections between languages and cultures, (e) acknowledge and respond appropriately to diverse learners and learning contexts, (f) emphasise intercultural communicative competence rather than native-speaker competence' (Newton et al., 2010).

Therefore, the conceptual framework, that underpins this study, consists of two main parts. both of which are securely established in academic discourse – but which uniquely in this paper are linked. Byram's (2013) model of intercultural communicative competence informs the first part of the conceptual framework - *what to teach?* For the second part about *how to teach?* Newton et al's (2010) six principles - provides a framework for when and how competences should be taught. This then provides a foundation for understanding students' perspective on their language learning experience in an empowering and emancipatory way (Villacañas de Castro, 2017). Positioning this paper as a student voice paper is especially relevant for Vietnam – which is only now emerging into a research culture in which research is done with participants and in which

Vietnamese academics give space for student voice (Thi, 2020).

The final aspect of English language learning that we explored in this study was into students' perceptions of whether their goal is native speaker fluency or intelligibility in an international context. These both involve functioning at a similar level of linguistic ability. However, the latter of these acknowledges that, uniquely among world languages, the majority of conversations in English do not involve a first language speaker (Marx, 2002). This therefore potentially shapes students' self-definition of intercultural competence.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the integration of Intercultural communicative competence into English Language Teaching in Vietnam

Research design

For this study in the initial quantitative phase, a questionnaire was used to help answer both research questions. After the quantitative data was collected and analysed, an interview sample was chosen from among the questionnaire participants who were prepared to be interviewed. Seventy Vietnamese students who, at the time the research was undertaken, were pursuing higher education in the UK took part in the research. This sample consisted of 47 postgraduate and 23 undergraduate students. These students came from different universities in the UK and had stayed in the country for a variety of periods of time, from less than one year to more than three years. The sample was selected through a combination of opportunity sampling, to gain access to an initial cohort, then snowball sampling in which participants involved fellow peers (Silverman, 2014). The only criteria they had to fulfil is that they had to be Vietnamese nationals currently studying at university in the UK.

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with BERA ethical guideline (BERA, 2018). To ensure that the research met ethical standards, before completing the questionnaire, participants were sent a consent form which contained information about the study. All participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time for any reason. Likewise, prior to the interview, the five interviewees were asked to give their written approval to the use of their interviews for this paper and any future publication. Interviewees were not only informed about the interview's content and purpose, but they were also given the opportunity to ask questions about it. Names and universities of all participants have been anonymised.

Demographic information	N	%
Gender (N = 70)		
Female	51	72.9%
Male	19	27.1%
Level of study (N = 70)		
Postgraduate	47	67.1%
Undergraduate	23	32.9%
Length of stay (N = 70)		
Less than one year	18	26.5%
One to two years	40	58.8%
Two to three years	6	8.8%
More than three years	4	5.9%
English proficiency (N = 70)		
Elementary	0	0%
Pre-Intermediate	2	2.8%
Intermediate	22	31.4%
Upper Intermediate	22	31.4%
Advanced	24	34.3%

Figure 2: Demographic description of the participants who responded to the questionnaire.

Participant pseudonym	Gender	Level of study	Length of stay	English proficiency level
Lan	Female	Postgraduate	Less than one year	Upper Intermediate
Hue	Female	Postgraduate	One to two years	Intermediate
Lien	Female	Postgraduate	One to two years	Advanced
Kim	Male	Undergraduate	One to two years	Intermediate
Duy	Male	Undergraduate	One to two years	Pre-Intermediate

Figure 3. Demographic description of the interviewees

Findings and discussion from the questionnaire

Participants were divided regarding how well they thought previous English classes had prepared them for intercultural communication. More than 40% of students held a positive attitude regarding these. However, a relatively similar figure (37.1%) of students felt that they were not well-prepared by previous English classes. Interestingly, language proficiency did not have a noticeable impact on how students perceived their level of preparedness. The group which felt the most prepared were intermediate-level students, with 44.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.
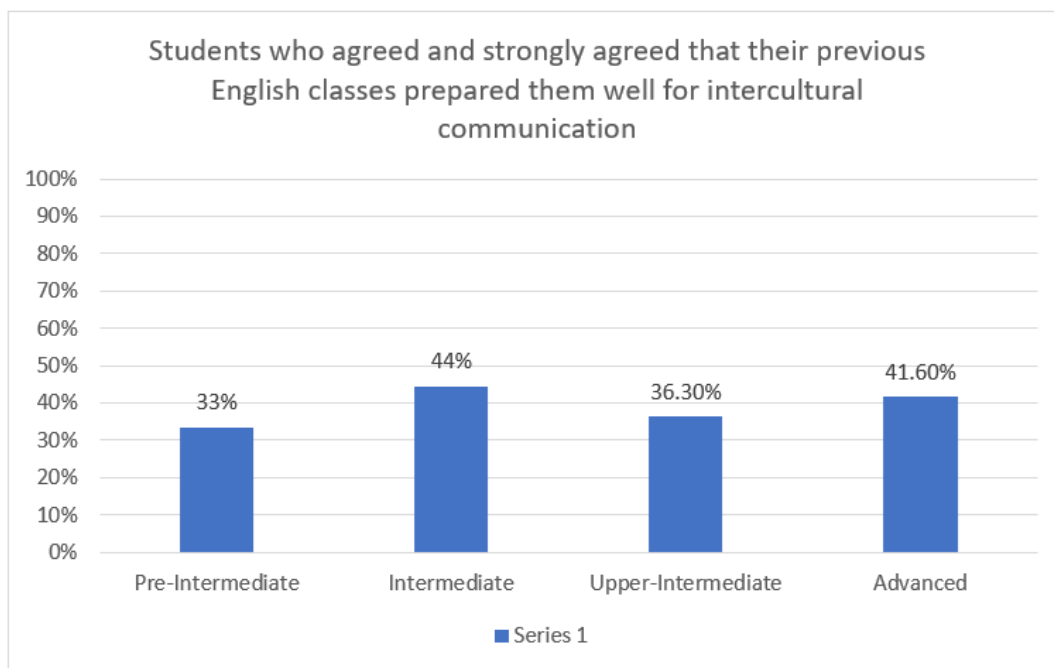
Figure 4: Vietnamese students' perceptions of their preparedness

Preparedness for the six savoirs

The following six diagrams all illustrate the extent to which students felt that their previous English classes had prepared them for the six specific savoirs of inter-cultural competence: *attitude, knowledge, awareness, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction* (Byram, 2013). As these illustrate when broken down into these particular aspects of inter-cultural understanding a pattern emerged - that teaching tended to focus on facts about

other cultures but did not explore other more complex aspects such as – the breaking down of stereotypes, conflict resolution, and alternative perspectives. As the final graph illustrates though – students overall found that their language lessons had been useful but not overwhelmingly so.

How often did your English classes discuss cultural aspects that are different from your culture?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

4.30%
10%
18.60%
28.50%
38.50%

How often did your English classes encourage you to challenge generalizations, stereotypes, and prejudices against other cultures?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

12.90%
1.40%
44%
20.00%
21.40%

My past English classes taught me some important facts about other cultures

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

1%
18.60%
21.40%
14.30%
44.30%

My past English classes helped me understand other cultures by seeing things from a different point of view and by looking at my culture from their perspectives.

9%
28.60%
12.90%
37.10%
12.86%

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither agree or disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

My past English classes helped me be aware of the differences between own and other cultures as well as the conflicts that might arise from those differences.

9%
37.10%
14.30%
25.70%
14.30%

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither agree or disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Figures 5-10: Vietnamese students' opinions on how well their previous English classes helped them develop the savoirs of inter-cultural competence.
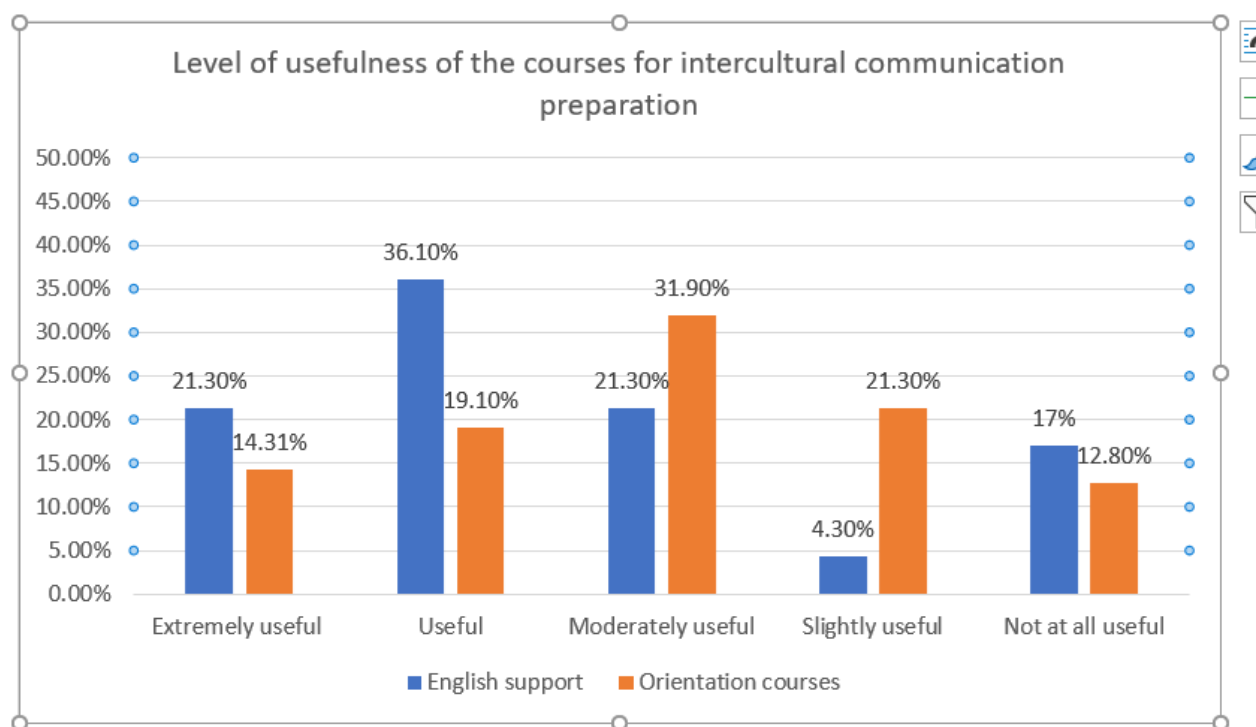
Figure 11: the perceived overall usefulness of English classes and orientation courses.

Friendship and relationships

Vietnamese students, on average, had relatively rich intercultural communication in the UK. Regarding the number of international friends they had, more than 80% reported having at least one friend, with nearly one fifth having more than 5 friends. Also, most of them communicated with their foreign friends at least once a week, and around 15% had daily communication with these friends.

In terms of gender, women tended to have slightly more contact with international friends. Roughly 60% of females had more than 3 international friends, compared to nearly 50% of their male counterparts. However, interestingly, the percentage of women with no foreign friends was slightly higher than that of males. In addition, roughly 40% of young women communicated with their international friends a few times a week, followed by one fifth who reported talking to these friends on a daily basis. The figure for their male counterparts was much lower.

Regarding level of study, undergraduates were likely to have more foreign friends than postgraduates. Roughly 35% of undergraduate students reported having at least 5 friends,

which is triple the figure for postgraduates. Also, 87% of undergraduates talked to their friends at least once a week, as opposed to just above 70% for postgraduates.

Number of international friends	Gender		Level of study		Total
	Female (N = 51)	Male (N = 19)	Undergraduate (N = 23)	Postgraduate (N = 47)	N = 70
No friends	17.6 %	15.7 %	8.7 %	21.3 %	17.1 %
1 − 2 friends	25.5 %	36.8 %	17.4 %	16.3 %	28.5 %
3 - 4 friends	37.3 %	31.5 %	39.1 %	16.3 %	35.7 %
5 friends and more	19.6 %	15.7 %	34.8 %	10.6 %	18.6 %

Figure 12: Vietnamese students' international friends

Frequency of communication	Gender		Level of study		Total
	Female (N = 42)	Male (N = 16)	Undergraduate (N = 21)	Postgraduate (N = 37)	N = 58
Everyday	19 %	6.25 %	19 %	13.5 %	15.5 %
A few times a week	38.1 %	25 %	38.1 %	32.4 %	34.5 %
Once a week	26.1 %	31.3 %	28.6 %	27 %	27.5 %
Few times a month	9.5 %	37.5 %	9.5 %	21.6 %	17.2 %
No communication	7.1 %	0 %	4.7 %	5.4 %	5.2 %

Figure 13: Vietnamese students' frequency of communication

Regarding the conversational topics that Vietnamese students chose when communicating with their foreign friends, the most common topics regardless of gender were study, daily greetings

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and weather. Next came food and travel, and hobbies. Cultural differences were also a frequent topic of discussion, which is positive in that it facilitated an exchange of cultural perceptions, potentially leading to critical cultural awareness.

The least common topics were found to be news and current affairs, and social and political issues, which are more complicated and require higher levels of cultural knowledge.
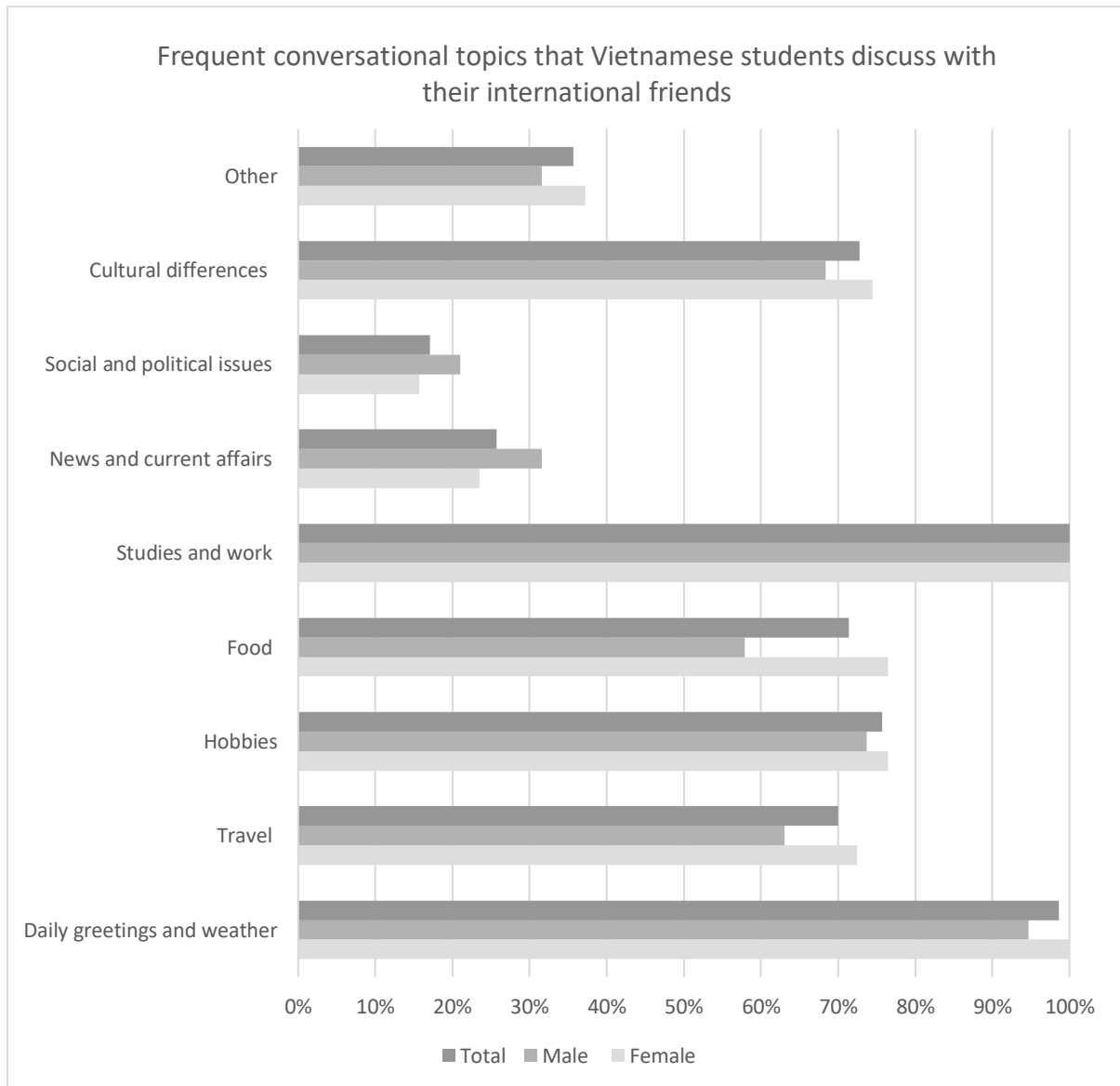

Figure 14: common conversational topics of Vietnamese students

Difficulties

Although more than 40% of Vietnamese students felt that their previous English classes prepared them well for intercultural communication, most of them reported having intercultural communication difficulties while studying in the UK regardless of their English proficiency. Surprisingly, more than 70% of advanced English users had difficulties although this figure was slightly lower compared to other English levels. Therefore, it can be inferred that a high level of English competence did not lead to a high level of intercultural communicative competence.

In terms of gender, men seemed to encounter more difficulties than women, the figures were roughly 90% and 80%, respectively. Specifically, women felt more well-prepared for intercultural communication by their previous English classes and also reported having more intercultural communication experience than men.

English proficiency	Have difficulties	No difficulties	No answer
Advanced	71.1%	24.7%	4.2%
Upper-Intermediate	86.4%	13.6%	0%
Intermediate	86.4%	9.1%	4.5%
Pre-intermediate	100%	0%	0%
Total	82.9%	14.3%	2.8%

Figure 15. Vietnamese students' intercultural communication difficulties compared to English level.

Gender	Have difficulties	No difficulties	No answer
Male	89.5%	10.5%	0%
Female	80.4%	15.7%	3.9%

Figure 16. Vietnamese students' intercultural communication difficulties – by gender

Regarding the causes of these difficulties, interestingly, although more than 60% of participants believed that their previous English classes had provided them with knowledge about other

cultures, lack of knowledge about other cultures was described by the students as being the most common cause for intercultural communication difficulties.

More than 70% of participants believed that language difficulties might stem from differences in the use of English (e.g., accents, word choices, slang), which made it the second most significant cause of challenges to intercultural communication. The global spread of English has resulted in the emergence of a plethora of English varieties and functioning within multiple varieties of English caused anxiety for the participants

Anxiety was also found to be a major barrier for intercultural communication. When communicating to someone in a foreign language, students might be anxious about not understanding the other interlocutor's message due to their speed of speech, different word choices or pronunciation, which discouraged them from seeking out interaction with others from different cultural backgrounds.
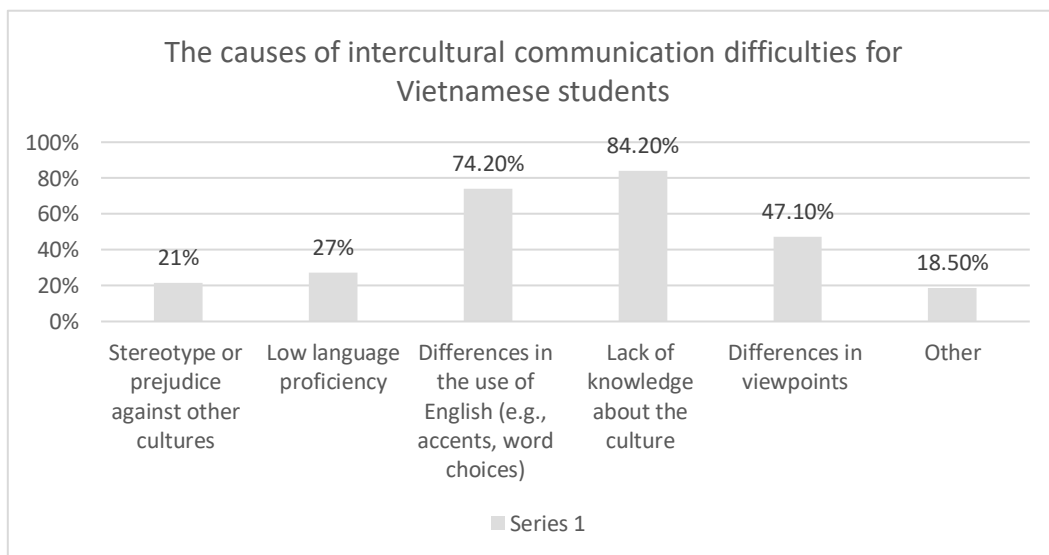
Figure 17: perceived causes of inter-cultural communication difficulties.

Summary

Students seemed to agree that English lessons had provided them with some knowledge about other cultures and helped them to develop a curious attitude towards intercultural communication. There was also general agreement among respondents that it is necessary to integrate a cultural dimension into English language teaching. However, data from the questionnaire showed that while English classes in Vietnam did help students prepare for intercultural communication, to some extent, more work needs to be done to help students

develop the five savoirs for intercultural communicative competence, especially raising their *critical cultural awareness.*

Findings from the interviews

The analysis of the data obtained from the interviews is presented in the section below. Selected quotations have been presented where they reflect a common response from most participants.

Preparedness for intercultural communication?

All five interviewees stated they did not feel that their English classes in Vietnamese schools prepared them for intercultural communication – although they were more positive about their experiences at private language centres.

> *I had the chance to attend extra English classes at English centres such as Apollo or ILA ever since I was very small. I remembered that those classes used Get Set – Go! textbook. The word choices and expressions taught in that textbook are natural expressions used in daily context in England. Compared to Get Set – Go!, the textbooks used in the Vietnamese education system are too heavily academic and not useful for intercultural communication.*

Other students also reported that the English classes they took in schools did not cover much content related to culture:

> *There was not much cultural content in the textbook that we studied at schools. A lot of characters in the textbook were Vietnamese. I remember this because I thought it was funny when two Vietnamese characters were talking in English… So, yeah, we didn't really have an intercultural context for studying.*

Attitude

Most of the interview participants adopted a relatively positive attitude towards intercultural communication. When asked if they found it difficult to make friends with people from another cultural group, one student responded:

No, most of the time. Mainly because we either meet each other in educational settings, or through mutual friends. As long as we respect each other, different nationality should not be a hindrance.

Students also started to develop a more open attitude and were more ready to suspend disbelief about other cultures through their experience with intercultural communication in the UK:

At the beginning, I liked making friends with Asian people, like Korean, Chinese more because they seem to be friendlier than British. But after a while I don't care about people's nationality anymore.

The findings from the interviews seemed to support what was found in the questionnaire: that English classes in Vietnam did help students develop a positive attitude towards intercultural communication to some extent; nevertheless, students rarely had the opportunity to challenge existing stereotypes of other cultures until they met.

Knowledge

All of the participants reported that the cultural knowledge provided by their English classes tended to be facts about other countries and was often found only in reading passages.

There was not much content related to culture, to be honest. We can still get to know about cultures briefly through reading passages though. But because they are reading exercises, so the information tends to be outdated and to me they are pretty useless.

They also expressed how culture tends to be taught through facts about British and American history and cultural heritage, which could lead to an assumption that these dominant cultures are superior and language speakers should adopt a cultural identity similar to that of these cultures.

Skills of discovery and interaction

When asked if their previous English classes inspired them to discover new information and new aspects of other cultures, students' views were relatively positive:

> *Yes, although there is not much cultural knowledge in the book, I think some are interesting. For example, I remember that I learnt about the Royals in England, and I searched for more about it on.*

Most participants responded that they acquired new knowledge through reading information on the internet, reading books and watching films.

Not only is it important for students to acquire the skills of finding out new knowledge, but they also need to be able to use that knowledge under the constraint of real time interaction. The interviewees reported that since there was no such real-time interaction opportunity in their courses, they did not have the chance to develop their *skills of interaction.*

> *I just knew about it – I knew new cultural knowledge – but I did not talk about it. There was nobody to talk about it with.*

Critical cultural awareness

Regarding *critical cultural awareness*, the interviewees' responses showed that this aspect of intercultural communication did not receive much attention in class. This is similar to the findings from the questionnaire.

Only one participant showed evidence of *critical cultural awareness* in her answer, emphasising the importance of learning about cultural differences *"cultural differences teach me to respect others, to be open to new perspectives, and to minimize stereotypes."* However, this interviewee had the chance to *"attend extra classes at English centres"* and *"participate in cultural exchange programmes";* therefore, she might have been more exposed to cultural differences than other participants.

Difficulties

All of the students reported that they encountered difficulties with intercultural communication. Lack of knowledge about other cultures and cultural differences were identified in all of the interviewees' responses:

> *Sometimes I feel like I do not have enough knowledge about the Dos and Don'ts in their culture, how to not accidentally insult them.*

This is comparable with the findings from the questionnaire which identified lack of cultural knowledge to be the main culprit for intercultural communication difficulties. Differences in the use of English and anxiety were also found to be common causes for intercultural communication difficulties:

> *I was very nervous because they (my classmates) talked so fast and used a lot of slangs that I don't know.*

This insecurity seemed to be the result of a native-speaker goal of English language teaching. Limited exposure to different English varieties made learners assume that their English, which might be different from that of a native speaker, is undesirable. Self-consciousness about their accent also made them reluctant to speak in English.

Another interesting finding is that one interviewee attributed her inhibition to engaging in intercultural communication to identity shift:

> *When I worked in Vietnam, I had foreign friends who are teachers at ILA, I was not passive in making friends. But here, it is different. It is not because of a language barrier. Do you know the saying about how people have different personality when they talk in another language? I feel like that, like I have to change to be more similar to people here, to be more British, you know. I don't know - but I don't feel like myself.*

These interviews provided an engaging story of students who wished to engage interculturally but who found challenges with doing so and who had doubts regarding perceptions of their own competence. However, many also described the building of positive intercultural relationships.

Discussion and implications

One reason students expressed for having concerns about their intercultural competence came from a perceived pressure to change identity when they engaged in intercultural communication. This related to concerns regarding cultural norms and the risk of causing offence. This has also been found in other previous studies (Chau & Truong, 2018). These studies have also suggested that this might be a result of the native-speaker goal - since this goal encourages learners to distance themselves from their cultures and adopt a new sociocultural identity (Marx, 2002). In addition, it could also stem from the dominance of the cultural representation of English-speaking countries in the teaching material – a concern raised by Newton et al. (2010). However, in this modern age when intercultural communication has become the norm, intercultural communicative competency rather than native-speaker competency should be viewed as the standard of English teaching and learning (Marx, 2002). Thus, it should be teachers' priority to encourage learners to be aware of their own identity in relation to others, rather than trying to adopt new ones.

Data from the questionnaire revealed a consensus between Vietnamese university students that a cultural dimension would provide them with a meaningful context, improve their motivation, and help them prepare for a globalised world. Overall, these students thought that formal English education in Vietnam did not prepare them well for intercultural communication. According to the participants, the textbook used in formal classes in Vietnam has little content related to culture and does not provide students with a meaningful context for learning English. In addition, students were not given the chance to engage in genuine interaction, which is a critical factor in developing intercultural communicative competence (Newton et al., 2010).

Building from Byram's (2013) five saviors of intercultural communicative competence, it is evident that students' development was more concentrated on *attitude* and *skills of discovery and interaction*. In contrast, *skills of interpreting and relating* and *critical cultural awareness* seemed to be the least developed facets. As for *attitude*, these Vietnamese students have a relatively positive attitude towards intercultural communication; they are curious to explore new aspects of other cultures and are willing to engage in intercultural communication. However, stereotypical views of other cultures still exist. The reasons behind this might be because of the lack of opportunity to challenge existing stereotypes and the focus on teaching cultural facts in class. As regards *knowledge*, findings from the questionnaire and the interview revealed that formal English classes in Vietnam did provide students with cultural knowledge.

However, the cultural content, as had been found in previous studies, tends to be mostly facts about American or British culture rather than providing students with a more diversified context or a more nuanced approach to it (Ho, 2016).

The *skills of discovery and interaction* were the two most identified aspects of students' intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 2013). Vietnamese students reported that previous English classes in Vietnam encouraged them to acquire new knowledge about other cultures, yet it seemed that they have a tendency to read a document rather than inquiring from an interlocutor, partly due to the limited opportunities to engage in genuine interaction with people from other cultures. Students did not have many chances to develop *the skills of interpreting and relating* in formal classes. However, some students were able to enhance this in extra English classes which provided them with more interactional opportunities. Despite being the core aspect of intercultural communicative competence, students' *critical cultural awareness* seemed to be the least developed.

Implications for English language education in Vietnam

It emerged from this study that the goals of English teaching and learning should be intercultural communicative competence rather than native competence. This aim is more realistic and practical for students. Since English is a lingua franca, effective teaching materials should equip students to communicate not only with native English speakers but also with non-native English speakers. Thus, it is critical to include different English varieties or different cultural representation other than British or American so students would be exposed to many types of cross-cultural interactions. For example, teachers could introduce students to samples of recordings from a variety of English speakers and encourage them to be confident with their own accents. It is also important to provide students with opportunities to engage in genuine interaction, especially with English speakers from different cultures. For example, teachers could arrange virtual encounter projects or encourage their students to chat or exchange emails with people of other nationalities. If such interaction is not feasible, classroom activities such as role-plays or scenario simulations could help students get a sense of intercultural communication - to some extent.

Regarding teaching cultural knowledge, more complicated topics such as news and current affairs or social and political changes should also be included in the curriculum for advanced learners. In addition, teachers should avoid only teaching visible cultural facts and instead

introduce students to more subtle or even non-observable aspects of cultures such as gestures or beliefs. However, it is impossible to teach all the knowledge that students may require, and teachers themselves might not have the chance to interact with all of the cultures that students may encounter. Therefore, acquiring cultural knowledge should be an ongoing process for both teachers and students. Therefore, in addition, to imparting knowledge, teachers should inspire and instruct students to discover cultural information on their own and develop their *skills of discovery and interaction.*

Conclusion

In general, Vietnamese university sojourners had a relatively rich experience with intercultural communication. The topics they chose to converse to their foreign friends about tend to be easy and common topics such as study, greetings and weather, while more sophisticated topics that require higher levels of cultural and social knowledge such as news and current affairs, or social and political issues appeared much less frequently. However, engagement was high and the experience rewarding. Despite this though, most reported facing challenges when engaging in cross-cultural interaction. Findings from both the questionnaire and the interview revealed that lack of cultural knowledge, differences in the use of English and anxiety were the most significant causes of intercultural communication difficulties among Vietnamese students. It can be concluded from this study that students have developed sophisticated self-coping and independent learning strategies for developing intercultural competence once in the UK. However, it can also be concluded that Vietnamese institutions and UK universities can do more to support and prepare students for the experience of living and learning in the UK.

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TikTok As a Tool for Teaching Sex Education in Schools

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Abstract

Tiktok is one of the most popular social media applications among children and young people. TikTokers therefore have the ability to present and to access information on sexual issues, interact with other users and learn about sex and sexual health via audiovisual features. This paper is based on literature and professional reflection. The goal of this article is to examine the potential impact TikTok may have on the sex education curriculum in schools around the United States, as well as how teachers may utilise TikTok in the classroom. Key ideas and various sex education scenarios are illustrated in the first section. The following section provides a more thorough explanation of social media sex education creators. A conclusion follows the third segment, which describes how TikTok can be used as a tool in school sex education along with challenges of this tool.

Keywords: *TikTok; sex education; social media; tool for teaching*

Introduction

The COVID-19 has caused a shift to online learning and given educators the opportunity to apply digital platforms in teaching. The main motivations for using social media apps are entertainment, sociability, informational needs, and knowledge (Yang, 2020). With an increasing number of users and contents, TikTok offers a platform for adolescents to explore sexual health information and online sex education covering a range of sexual topics such from how to deal with STDs to vaginal plastic surgery (Setty, 2022).

This article strives to explore the influence TikTok might have on teaching sex education in schools in the United States and how schools can use Tiktok as a teaching tool. The first section illustrates key concepts along with different contexts of sex education. A fuller understanding of sex education producers on social media is presented in the next section. The third section explains how TikTok can become a tool in sex education in secondary school, followed by a conclusion. This paper is based on literature and professional reflection - it therefore has just one research question which is: what is the potential for using Tiktok as a tool for teaching sex education?

Concepts and Contexts of Sex Education in Secondary School in England

Definitions

Sexual health is identified as a state of wellbeing involving physical, emotional, mental and social dimensions in relation to sexuality (Lameiras-Fernández et al., 2021). Sex education is the term for teaching about reproduction, sexual health and a diversity of sexual issues. The subject includes the abilities, information, and attitudes required to safeguard and advance sexual health. Sex education may be delivered via informal and formal settings. Laypersons such as peers and adult family members informally teach children about sex health in daily discussions - whereas in formal settings such as schools, care homes and health clinics, professional sex educators offer courses, workshops or counselling about sex (Döring, 2021).

Social media is best defined as digital media platforms that people use to socialise. Those platforms design pages and offer accounts that users can use to communicate to others. Content on social media platforms such as pictures, videos, text and sound are created, shared and commented on by users. Social media today is a central component of young people's lives (Fowler, Schoen, & Morain, 2022).

One of the most widely used apps among teenagers is Tiktok. TikTok users post videos of themselves and other people. Tiktok includes the hashtag TiktokEducation or LearnTiktok,

these are used by professional and amateur educators. As a result, there is a lot of opportunity for TikTokers to communicate with other people, discuss sexual concerns, and study about sexual health through a range of audiovisual features (Fowler et al., 2021). Many users, including women, ethnic minorities, and especially young people who might not feel comfortable approaching their teachers or school counsellors, can access sexual health-related material on TikTok (Ruan, Raeside, Singleton, Redfern, & Partridge, 2020).

Students' sex education needs

Commonly school based sex education worldwide focuses on risk prevention, the reproduction process, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual violence (Döring, 2021). However, it has not met the needs of young people's complex concerns and insecurities about sexual health such as well-being, pleasure and sexual identity (Laverty, Noble, Pucci, & MacLean, 2021). Accordingly, such a risk-focused approach has disappointed children and young people with its style and methods in schools (Döring, 2021; Laverty, Noble, Pucci, & MacLean, 2021). Some teachers are not comfortable, prepared, interested, or trustworthy when teaching about sexual subjects (re f). Some research has found the views of some teachers about sex education to be old-fashioned, judgmental, unknowledgable and boring (Langille, 2001). Consequently, some students have found their sex education unsafe, fearful, embarrassed and disrespected in front of those teacher characteristics (Pound, Langford, and Campbell 2016). Therefore while acknowledging that there is some excellent practice in sex educat - there is certainly space for the additional tool.

Expectations of students on sex education in United States

Students perceive sex education is important, especially navigating sexual decision-making in relationships as well as biological information (Astle et al., 2021). Although young people frequently have to navigate relational and sexual issues, they   received formal instruction of the sexual decision-making process than avoiding sexual activity or using protection (Shapiro and Brown, 2018). Sex education is both an academic area to research and a facility to prepare young people for their current and future relationships, however, students found sex education materials highly focused on abstinence, besides they were unrealistic and unrelatable (Laverty et al., 2021; Setty, 2022). What students expect from sex education, in contrast, is practical guidance on managing relationships and owning sexual decisions (Astle et al., 2021). These are the Five-Fingers Rule I generated from different research on what students want from sex education (Döring, 2021; Laverty et al., 2021; Setty, 2022; Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011).
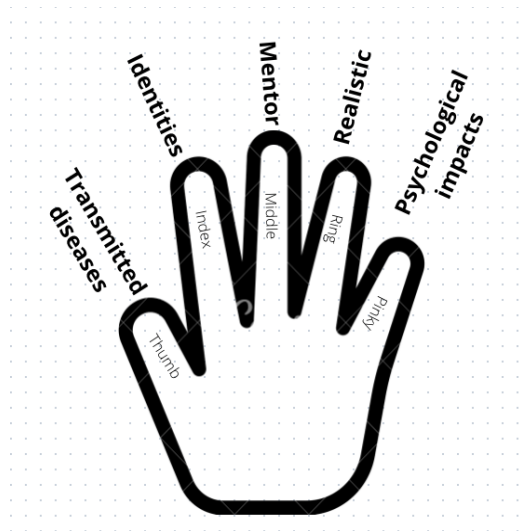
Figure 1. Five-Fingers Rule of Sex Education Expectation

Transmitted diseases: information about STIs (sexually transmitted infections) and condoms

Students hope sex education offers information on STIs and condoms.   Many young people had no basic knowledge on STIs and condoms and wished to learn more through sex education in schools (Setty, 2022). They explained their desire to understand symptoms and how to deal with STIs or pregnancy (Astle et al., 2021; Charest & Kleinplatz, 2022; Setty, 2022).

Identities: Sexual identities and behaviours

Another important suggestion for better sex education was more information about homosexual behaviours and sexual minority identities. This suggestion was equally popular as the subject of fundamental facts about sexuality. Many children suggested that more discussions about bi-sexual, gay and lesbian relationships may be more helpful than solely about heterosexual couples (Charest & Kleinplatz, 2022). Therefore, any confusion around STI transmission same-sex behaviour and safe sex among different sexual behaviours need to be identified (Astle et al., 2021; Charest & Kleinplatz, 2022).

Mentor/teacher

Another recommendation for enhancing sex education is one with which young people wished to be teaching on these subjects. They expressed a demand for sex education to be taught by a professional, as they explained that doing so could avoid unpleasant feelings given the relationship between kids and teachers (Laverty et al., 2021). More specifically, they addressed the need for someone who is from the same generation or closer to their ages (Astle et al., 2021, Laverty et al., 2021).

Realistic

The demand for relevant and practical sex education is a strong theme. The school sex education was reported to be unrealistic and outdated by many students (Astle et al., 2021). Relating the knowledge from school to reality is very important. Moreover, teachers tend to use abstinence-only material, therefore, this can lead to rebellion from students, who are still learning to be adults (Constantine et al., 2015). Finally, materials involved in sex-positive education are perceived as more realistic for children (Astle et al., 2021; Constantine et al., 2015; Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011).

Psychological impacts of sex behaviours

Students frequently requested a more comprehensive explanation of sexual behaviours regarding relationships as a way to improve the learning process. Their top three concerns were: 1) social impacts of sexual activities among students such as judgement, embarrassment and conflict with peers and adults, 2) psychological readiness for any possibilities of sexual behaviour such as maturity, dealing with pregnancy and engaging in sexual activity, and 3) impacts of sexual activities on emotions and relationship for instant attachment with partner or facing sexual assault (Astle et al., 2021; Kuborn, Markham, & Astle, 2022).

Global sex education approaches

The Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) framework is the top ethical model that directs and shapes professional sex education globally. It has received the support of organisations like the World Health Organization, UNESCO (Döring, 2021). The framework emphasises the human right to be safeguarded from sexual violence and harm and to show and enjoy their sexualities considering their age, determination, health and consent (Döring, 2021).

Gender equality, sexual diversity, and sexual consent are fundamental principles of the SRHR framework, as it is also government responsibility to provide sexual healthcare and sexual education that are accessible to everyone (Döring, 2021). The SRHR paradigm encourages responsible sexual self-determination gained from sexual literacy rather than specific behaviours (such as monogamy or sexual abstinence until marriage) (Döring, 2021).

Sex Education Providers on Social Media

In this part, an illustration of organisations and individuals including professionals and amateurs producing sex education contents on social media will be presented as well as some reflections on their products and audience.

Professional organisations

Professional organisations that promote sex health and offer sex education via social media. A nonprofit organisation called Planned Parenthood Federation of America offers sexual health services both in the United States and abroad. This organisation is a good example of having accounts on a number of social media platforms, where it posts information about the organisation's contact details, education messages, information regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights and its activities, and space for queries (Döring, 2021). The far more reliable sources of information about sexual health based on scientific data are from professional organisations (Setty, 2022). They also invest in digital sex education programs, using apps or sexual health bots with artificial intelligence, this brings them to be the most fruitful resource in the field (Döring, 2021; Setty, 2022).

However, it can be difficult for those professional organisations that promote sexual health consistently along with the continuously emerging social media platforms and swiftly adapt to changing platforms (Setty, 2022). Though TikTok, for instance, gained popularity among the youth and was the social media site with the biggest growth in 2020, the majority of professional groups dedicated to sexual health steered clear of it at that time (Döring, 2021). These organisations often take a while to adapt the newest digital platforms, moreover, approach limited audiences, short of offering human connection. Contrarily, those limited audiences are often researchers and professionals (Setty, 2022) .

Individual professionals

Individual professionals on the other hand are more successful than big organisations on social media services because of the more personal connections they offer. They reach more audiences by creating entertaining and more experiences of their own sexual lives. They become influencers, even stars among the youth and have their own fan clubs (Döring, 2021).

Following parts will describe two examples of successful professional sex educators: Hannah Witton from England and Dr. Jeniter Lincoln from the USA. Hannah who originally a famous YouTuber and studied sex history in University of Birmingham became a one of the youths' inspirations in sharing sex knowledge and personal concerns such as body image and size of breasts. Many followers interested in her authentic sharing about sexual pleasure in women, masturbation or porn, moreover, they found her knowledge in sexuality and disability issues helpful as well as her unique experiences on using a stoma. She is passionate about decreasing the shame and stigma people might have by different digital platforms (Flo.health, 2022). She was in the Top 100 Influencer list of Sunday Times in 2019 (Flo.health, 2022) and has attracted

more than 700,000 subscribers on YouTube compared to big organisations such as PlannedParenthood with over 100,000 in August 2022 (Youtube, 2022).

Second expert in sex education is a gynaecologist Dr. Jenifer Lincoln, who has 2.8 million followers on TikTok, so far attracted more young people than PlannedParenthood with only over 84,000 followers and many educators creating content as of August 2022. Her videos pointed out false information about women's health involved in how our bodies work, period, discharge, reducing negative feelings about them and addressing   misconceptions about sex. Dr. Lincoln might directly receive a few hundred online messages and posting videos helps her provide useful information to the audience in an ethical way (DeBianchi, 2020). Therefore, individual sex educators use social media more efficiently in reaching young people (Setty, 2022) than big organisations with more funding and a bigger number of professionals.

Peer sex educators

They provide sharing sex information via groups and forums in many different platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and weblogs. Peer sex educators focus more on practical evidence such as personal skills, attitudes and experiences and sometimes reference research information (Döring, 2021).

They try to inspire and uplift their fellow members of minority groups while also educating the general public and sharing their own hardships. They frequently advocate for sexual rights through trending slogans (such as the #metoo campaign regarding sexual assault and the #bodypositivity message for greater self-acceptance) and inspire others to participate in. Within minorities, small groups of them still can voice their opinions and experiences such as LGBTIQ+ community (Lovelock, 2019), disability community, non-binary trans (Miller, 2017) or sex toys among women (Döring & Poeschl, 2018).

Conversely, many use social media as channels to show their hate toward particular policies and religions and spread hateful ideas, such as MGTOW (Men Going Their Own Way) portraying women as expendable sex objects (Ribeiro et al., 2020), Incel (Involuntary celibates) sharing sexual intercourse with women without their consent and manipulating girls to bed from PUAs (Pick-up Artists) (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019).

Tiktok Serves as a Tool in Sex Education

The impacts of TikTok on sex education

TikTok serves as an emerging social site to disseminate health information in methods that are distinct from those used by regular video-based social networks. TikTok is a place where interactive elements, procedures, and dynamics are prevalent (Schellewald, 2021). The special advanced technologies on TikTok promote more engaging activities. Many TikTok features such as duet, green screen and text annotation create a bigger discussion of OBGYN (obstetrician-gynecologist) between professionals and relatable audiences (Stein, Yao, and Aitamurto, 2022). Those videos in fact raised questions on the notion that medical experts should generally stay professional on social media. Instead, contents portrayed them as both qualified medical professionals happy to impart their skills and knowledge, and as individuals showing personal views, preferences, social obligations, and challenges.

TikTok and expectations of students on sex education

Following section will review how TikTok meets students' expectations on sex education mentioned above with the Five-Fingers Rule.

Transmitted diseases and condoms:

TikTok seems to bridge the gap of sex education and emphasises the need to learn more about sex health. As of October 2021, total views of tagged TikTok videos with hashtag Sexually transmitted infection is 1.2 billion (Zenone, Ow, & Barbic, 2021). In a recent discourse analysis by Brown (2022), many comments on sex education videos indicated that TikTok videos taught them more than their classes, which promoted the best way for all is abstinence. On the other hand, some youngsters voiced discomfort over the idea that STD knowledge was deemed "too serious" for social media (Byron, 2015).

Identities (sexual identities and behaviours):

Role models and resources may be found on social media for more understanding in all identities and lifestyles (Stein et al., 2022). Themes like pansexual identities, polyamorous relationships, demi-sexual needs, queer porn, or gender transitioning, which are frequently discussed by young people on TikTok, are typically outside the purview of mainstream sex education (Fowler et al., 2022; Stein et al., 2022). Despite the benefit of role models or expanding the idea of sexual identities, it may let students confuse about their sexual identities since they are still growing and building their full personality and ego.

Mentor/instructor:

TikTok seemingly provides all perspectives from different cultures, religions and communities, and approaches from organisations, individual professionals, and peer educators (Fowler et al., 2022; Stein et al., 2022). Even though they are frequently asked, questions about sexuality may carry a lot of shame and guilt (Stein et al., 2022). People of all ages use the internet for answers to their sexually related inquiries and issues (Delmonaco & Haimson, 2022). However, the perspectives of those answers could be various, therefore, it may be more harmful for students to follow all answers from the internet as well as challenging to find reliable resources.

Realistic and updates:

Sex health organisations have spent fundings on making campaigns, updating digital evaluations and interventions, which can be easily spread out on TikTok via hashtag feature (Döring, 2021). Individual professionals moreover share their expertise to viewers and create in time response by duet. Peer educators additionally share diverse experiences and lifestyles via new trends and movements (Fowler et al., 2022). As mentioned above, each provider has their own flaws in sharing and providing information to audiences.

Psychological impacts of sex behaviours:

Compared to school sex education, TikTok discusses themes connected to sexual pleasure more regularly (Setty, 2022). Videos on TikTok not only places a considerably greater emphasis on promoting sexual health and enjoyment (Stein et al., 2022). Peer and professional sex educators support a sex-positive perspective and talk openly about sex toys, masturbation, orgasm, and solo and partnered sex techniques (Döring, 2021; Setty, 2022; Stein et al., 2022).

How can schools in United States use TikTok in sex education?

TikTok may be used in a variety of ways to teach about sex education and has the ability to be a beneficial tool for educators. Teachers can use videos posted on TikTok by others who may be more knowledgeable than they are in sex education. As was already indicated, some teachers are uncomfortable discussing reproduction and other sexuality-related subjects in the classroom (Lynagh, Gilligan, and Handley, 2010). Students can access a wide range of perspectives and experiences by watching TikTok videos. Further, using TikTok resources in a classroom of young adults can be an effective method to foster a feeling of trust and comfort (Eghtesadi and Florea 2020).

Teachers should priorly verify the information being posted on TikTok before using it as teaching material to avoid disseminating misinformation. Outside classrooms, instead of giving

pre-reading material as homework, teachers can give students reliable videos for them to watch as many young people watch TikTok videos everyday (Setty, 2022). As previously mentioned, students are very curious about sex education and often seek for online sex education to keep anonymity, it is important to give them resources such as accounts of professional sex health organisations, individual professional sex educators and reliable peer sex educators that are already checked to help young people avoid false information on TikTok (Döring, 2021). Duet features on TikTok allows students to give comments and feedback on what they think and feel about these videos. Those videos can be put as assignments and not necessarily published (Rand & Brushett, 2021). In classrooms, TikTok videos can be used in order to address the topic and give more detailed knowledge and unique experiences (Fowler et al., 2022). These videos as mentioned can cover information that is curriculum-based and further (Fowler et al., 2022), therefore, they can enrich discussion among classrooms. On the other hand, school sex education has certain success, it is there Tiktok can be an additional tool but not a replaced teaching method.

Challenge for using TikTok as education tool

Misinformation is arguably the biggest issue for anyone trying to use TikTok as a teaching tool (Eghtesadi and Florea 2020). As an illustration, users have made TikTok videos demonstrating how to do an abortion themselves by using cinnamon and lemon juice (Döring, 2021). Specialists have used TikTok to debunk this myth and explain that spreading erroneous information can render it more difficult for people to get the care they need in a timely manner. Without a control on the dissemination of false information, myths and stigmas can reach many people rapidly. Although TikTok recently changed policy about false information, measures to date have mostly concentrated on TikTok relating to elections and pandemics (Marquez, 2021).

Additionally, content producers give genuine and in-depth discussions about various sexual practices and their emphasis on pleasure are occasionally dangerous to the audience. Peer sex educators who publicly display unusual sexual behaviours may not necessarily promote sexual empowerment. Instead, they may place stress, doubt and confusion on youths to engage in riskier sexual behaviour or lose their sense of their gender or sex identity as well as suspect conventional sex lives (Cookingham & Ryan, 2015). Also, several teenagers thought that instructional messages should not be posted on social media and that social media should only be used for socialising (Byron, 2015).

Conclusion

The expectations that I reviewed from international research may not apply clearly to students in United States. Consequently, this may need an in depth exploration of cultural differences between England and other countries about sex education.

This work is an early stage of what I hope will become a long running project. Eventual methods will include video analysis (many very short videos), therefore, this will require a design appropriate for TikTok's unique structure and possibly at a later stage exploration into student perspectives. However this will require further ethical design too. This essay is context and some conceptualisation and a pragmatic standpoint, which is TikTok (or similar) are here to say, it is a source of sex education, and it can be a positive one. TikTok provides a social media that educators might engage with as a possible resource for teaching about sex since it establishes a unique setting for interaction with a worldwide context of prospective students and peers. TikTok not only fosters inventions, connections, and creativity, but it also provides an online space for experts of sex education to exchange knowledge and insights. TikTok enables teachers to impose limits that cultural norms and sexual shame impose on learning environments. It helps educators to communicate with people both domestically and abroad. Not just educators or health experts, but everyone is able to take part in the discussion. By doing this, a more fair learning environment is created. In contrast, Tiktok may include risk factors in adolescent sexual socialisation.

TikTok is increasingly considered as an effective tool for sharing information and engaging with a broad audience, despite the obstacles associated with using the platform in sex education. TikTok can, in particular, provide access to a deeper and more varied experience to educate and discuss about sex education. Teachers may improve the use of the method by identifying misinformation, and sex health and sexuality stigma on it and selecting information from reliable accounts in order to avoid challenges such as misinformation, risks and dangers under in using Tiktok as a teaching tool.

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Teaching about climate change: the perceptions and experiences of teachers

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Abstract

This paper is an exploration into teachers' perceptions of raising climate change awareness among secondary students in England. The paper starts with the presentation of a summary concept framework of teachers' views on teaching about man-made climate change, based on previous research. This is followed by an exploration, into the views of four current teachers working in schools in England. This is based on four interviews. This interview data is presented to provide insights from teachers' voices, about teachers' understanding of, and attitude towards climate change education. The paper also specifically explores teachers' attitudes towards student activism. The conclusion reached is that teachers are aware of the importance of climate change education and supportive of student activism, possibly increasingly so, but find challenges with bringing this into the classroom. These challenges come from a pressurized curriculum and limited resources.

Keywords: *human-made climate change; activism; school strikes; teacher voice; environment education*

Introduction

The past five years has witnessed a growth in youth movements related to human-made climate change - with the most visible and controversial aspects of these movements being school strikes for climate (Rainsford & Saunders, 2021). Youth leaders of these movements have explicitly described a shift in leadership over climate change concerns moving from national leaders to the younger generation – those who will shape the world (Kowasch et al., 2021). Given the importance of addressing human-made climate change - education which aims at a profound, long-term understanding among younger generations is vital. This paper, on teachers' perceptions of raising climate change awareness among students, can provide insight for environmental organizations and individuals who would like to work with schools in raising environmental awareness. It can also be useful for educational leaders.

The research, for this paper, which was conducted with secondary teachers from England aims to answer four questions:

- How important do teachers think it is to raise climate change awareness among students?
- In which way do teachers feel empowered to raise climate change awareness among students?
- What are the difficulties teachers face, in raising climate change awareness among students?
- What are teachers' views on students taking classes off to participate in climate activism including strikes?

Conceptual framework

Climate change education, in England, is largely considered to be an additional part of existing environmental education within science and geography as subject areas (Greer, King & Glackin, 2022). This is even though environmental education was introduced to the English National Curriculum, as far back as 1990, as a cross-curricular theme (Hawkey, James and Tidmarsh, 2016). Currently schools in England have considerable freedom in pursuing the way they want to teach environmental education or education for sustainable development (in policy

documents the words climate change education are not specifically used). However, for individual teachers working within rigid school policies this may be less so (Kurup, Levinson & Li, 2021). As this study reveals, a live, pragmatic debate exists within schools in England over whether human-made climate change should be taught within the sciences alone or more holistically across the entire school - including through a range of subjects and through additional activities (Greer et al., 2022).

Climate change awareness among teachers

The majority of anglophone research into attitudes towards climate change education has been conducted in the USA (Plutzer & Hannah, 2018). This is despite the fact that man-made climate change is more consistently taught about in other systems (Liu & Roehrig, 2019). Previous research has discovered that teachers engaged in climate change education tend to fall into three perspectives. These categories create a useful typology. The first are those with a basic-facts approach and the second is those with an extended approach (Plutzer & Hannah, 2018). Both these types of teachers are positive about teaching about human-made climate change and feel confident doing so. However, the first tend to believe their responsibility is limited to giving scientific facts related to climate change, and its origins in human activity, in order to counter misconceptions students may access elsewhere, especially via social media (Vare, 2020). The other (extended approach) is to integrate critical thinking, and problem-solving skills through environmental projects, that are often cross-curricula, that help mitigate and adapt climate changes (Grady-Benson& Sarathy, 2016).

There is though a more problematic third category found in studies within the last decade. These are teachers who perceive that a neutral position, means avoiding explicitly advocating for the environment and who attempt to create balance by presenting climate change denialism as a valid alternative perspective (Ho & Seow, 2015). This teaching of a false-neutral position has been found to exist even though this is clearly not the scientific consensus and has not been so for several decades (Colston & Thomas, 2019). These teachers may themselves feel conflicted regarding their belief in human responsibility for climate change - and may be unsure regarding the purpose of climate change education (Colston & Vadjunec, 2015). This cognitive conflict has been found to lead to a significant number of disengaged teachers (Boon, 2016). Various studies have shown that when knowledge about human-made climate change is not well understood by teachers in a setting - then willingness to teach this topic can be very low (Boon, 2016; Herman, Feldman, & Vernaza-Hernadez, 2017).

Teachers, regardless of their understanding or beliefs also face multiple challenges when it comes to teaching about human-made climate change. External factors such as parents' reactions or opinions from the community can create hesitation among educators about teaching this topic. Pragmatically teachers have also reported finding it difficult to relate human-made climate change to other topics because they do not have enough information, and because of time and resource pressures (Vare, 2020).

Teaching about human-made climate change, despite the established scientific consensus, remains a surprisingly controversial topic - and a particularly under researched aspect has been teachers' attitudes toward students' involvement in climate change activism such as going on a strike or protest (Herman et al., 2017).
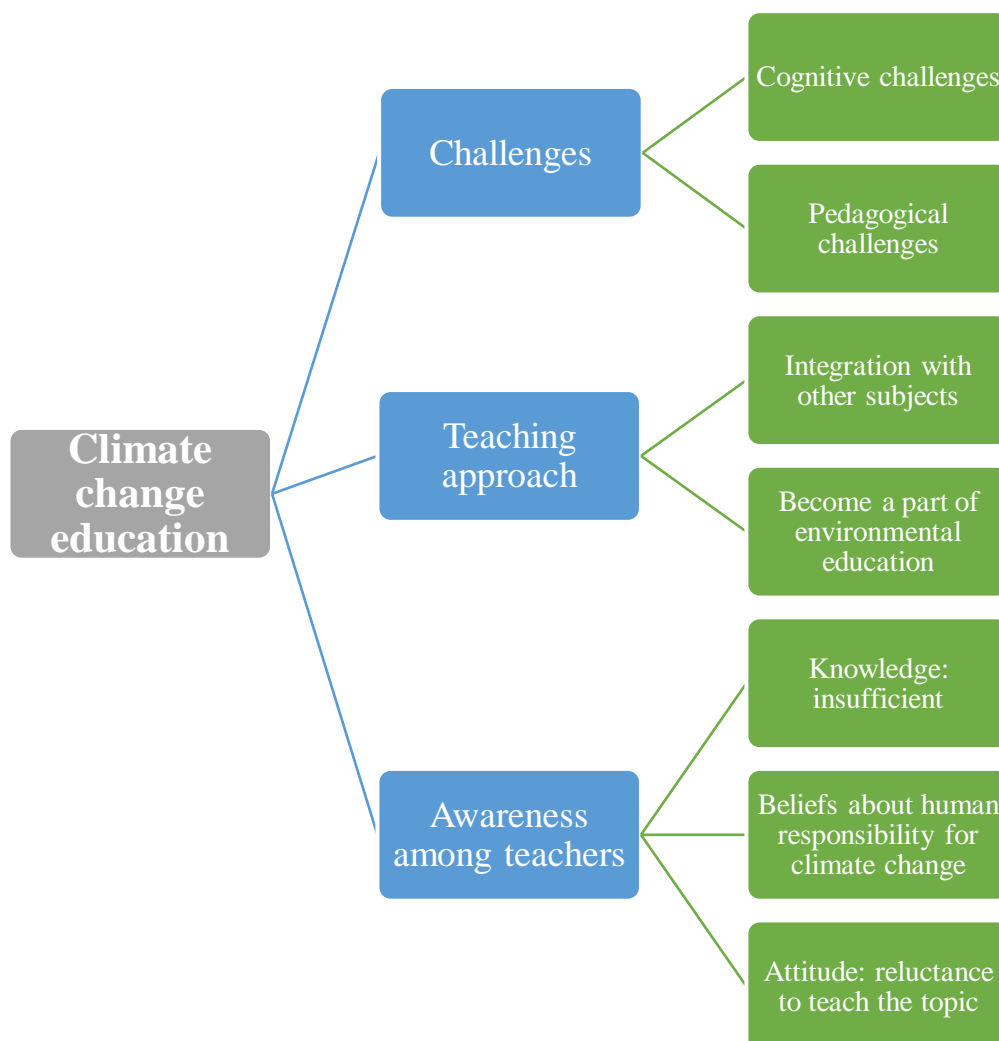
Overview diagram

Figure 1. Overview of climate change education – challenges and debates

Informed by this framework (diagram above) - this paper accesses the voice of teachers in England to understand their strategies, beliefs, the difficulties they might face and how these relate specifically to the English education system. Furthermore, it explores what teaching approaches are suggested by teachers and whether they think human-made climate change education is important or not. To this extent this paper can be defined as emerging from a interpretivist perspective – as its purpose is to elicit teachers' individual perceptions and meaning making through teacher-voice (Rapley, 2018).

Conducting the interviews

This paper is a report into the early stages of this research project. Specifically it reports on an initial scoping study in which four teachers were interviewed. Interviews were used rather than questionnaires – so as to enable a largely unstructured exploration into a previously under researched field (Silverman, 2014). Using interviews enabled subtle distinctions in viewpoint to emerge, and lastly use of interview positions this paper in the genre of teacher voice and teacher empowerment research (Frost, 2015). All four interviews were held in the middle of July 2022. Four participants were interviewed. The participants were (and are) secondary school teachers in the UK. They had at least 5 years teaching experience each and they teach different subjects. Their names have been changed in order to provide anonymity and their school's name has not been used. Their teaching subject has been mentioned because their teaching background provides readers with a better context for understanding the answers that they gave.

- *Interview number 1: Fed – History teacher – 14 years of experience*
- *Interview number 2: Daniel – Business and Economics teacher – 20 years of experience*
- *Interview number 3: Ivy – Health and Social Care teacher – 5 years of experience*
- *Interview number 4: Sophia – Psychology and Sociology teacher – 6 years of experience*

All quotes are verbatim and have not been grammatically corrected.

Ethical considerations

This research has been conducted in accordance with BERA ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018). Voluntary participation and informed consent were of the utmost importance when conducting the research. This was ensured throughout different phases of the study. At first, when participants were recruited for the research, an introductory email was sent to different teachers

to invite them to participate in the study. The information exchange at this stage was done via email correspondence, enabling written consent from participants to be saved. During the study, all participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study anytime they wished. Before the interviews, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and their rights as a participant. A consent form was also sent to them prior to the interview. The transcript was also sent to them to double-check. This was also an opportunity for them to rethink what they said and make adjustments if they wished.

Findings

Time resources and culture

Evidence gained from the interviews showed that time is among the biggest and most obvious barriers teachers face that stops them from raising climate change awareness among students.

> *I know that I wouldn't have time properly. I have to teach. I have thirteen different classes going on. I can do my bit, but I guess it's something that can be discussed among school leadership to talk about how we can bring in a little bit about climate change as a theme […]*
>
> *(Fed – History teacher)*

Besides time, lack of resources is another factor that interviewees described as an obstacle. limiting their school's efforts to raise climate change awareness.

> *We need funding, you know, that actually inviting people, coming in, requires a coordinator to handle work […] we need someone to have time to get in touch with different people and organizations, companies to bring them into school […] I think the factor stopping this can be money […]*
>
> *(Fed – History teacher)*

> *Teachers are not meant to be the only person to teach you stuff, they are meant to guide you towards where you can find the information yourselves. So teachers should be supported to know the available resources like websites so that students can find the information. Teachers should know what is out there and how to direct students to the resources.*
>
> *(Daniel – Business and Economics teacher)*

School culture was also identified as a reason that prevented effective climate change discourse among teachers and students.

> *[…] I think it's having a consistent message. Quite a few know about climate change. I think most people have knowledge - but the most difficult part is to have a consistent message of what it is that we are trying to do, how are we going to do it and how are we going to implement it. So it is making sure that from the top there is a consistent message that runs around the school so the students know what the issues are […]*
>
> *(Sophia - Psychology and Sociology teacher)*

As this teacher acknowledges - many know about human-made climate change but knowing is different from acting towards addressing climate change. The consistency that she is seeking is presented by her in two dimensions: consistency between the teacher's knowledge and their actions delivering the message to students and consistency among different parties inside the school, from the senior leadership to teachers and students.

Finding space to teach about climate change

Integration across subjects was suggested by most of the interviewees. This approach is not new in England. However, these teachers acknowledged that it was still only partially developed.

> *We can still find ways to involve climate change in more lessons. I think teachers are trained to be quite flexible so they will be able to involve different topics in their teaching. I think there should be a bigger push for teachers to do that and there is a need for schools to ask teachers to do so.*
>
> *(Ivy – Health and Social Care teacher)*

> *[…] It could be a climate change week where we address the issue of climate change for the whole week across every different lesson.*
>
> *(Fed – History teacher)*

This suggestion resembles the theme weeks often found in secondary schools, in which each week, the school will discuss one specific topic.

Extra activities inside schools

Extra activities were another suggestion for teaching climate change - that came from the interviewees. The way it was suggested that these activities could be run varied:

> *Local community, school's hub or community hub can hold a talk where climate change activists come and talk about climate change. We could do an annual program. So right now, we have one person at school that coordinates the climate change agenda. That's good but it's kind of a secondary job. Their main job is teaching. We have never discussed about it or talked about it with the whole staff. That's something that could be done on a much bigger scale.*
>
> *(Fed – History teacher)*

> *I think assembly would be a good time to raise these concerns so every year group hears. You also have personal tutor groups, when teachers can work closely with students; those would be the best time to demonstrate that. And I think carrying out activities in school, like planting herbs, planting food and vegetables, I think that would be good as well because I think that demonstrates students can be proactive about it and students can take part in change instead of just listening.*
>
> *(Sophia - Psychology and Sociology teacher)*

Belief in the importance of the school

Teacher beliefs in climate change education are important because it will affect what and how they teach. All the teachers interviewed agreed that school plays an important role in raising climate change awareness among students and all thought that their colleagues would largely feel the same way.

> *It is important because climate change is real and students spend most of their time at schools, but I think we're getting there.*
>
> *(Sophia - Psychology and Sociology teacher)*

> *I think it's quite important because we have different students from different social and economic backgrounds - so some of them might come from well – educated*

homes. Their home is very aware of the situation - but we also have students from areas that might have no good chance of accessing information, so this is where we step in.

(Ivy – Health and Social Care teacher)

However, when asked what they think about the quality of climate change education at their school, they provided some interesting evaluations of it.

Yes, I think climate change is something that is addressed and we are aware of, but I don't think it's pushed much. We're doing a little bit but certainly we can do a lot more. Hmm… sometimes I feel like we're trying to teach students about environmental issues in general, not only climate change.

(Fed – History teacher)

This belief that her school is taking action towards environmental problem in general rather than climate change specifically was repeated throughout the interviews.

I think they make conscious efforts in terms of protecting the environment in general rather than climate change specifically. We have different bins around, and students are responsible for emptying those bins. They are responsible for putting the right items in the right bins. We don't have any plastic cups in schools, every student needs to have their own water bottle that they can reuse. So they can't go and get plastic cups somewhere else. So it is mandatory that students have their own cup. In terms of the canteen, we are also promoting that members of the staff bring their own food container, they can go to the canteen to get the food and wash it out. We're trying to get rid of things like plastic forks, plastic knives and the non-reusable container. I think there is an understanding and they are pushing toward it but I think there is a lot more needs to be done.

(Sophia - Psychology and Sociology teacher)

It can be seen that this teacher's school certainly has a vision of protecting the environment. However, this teacher was also fully aware that the focus of her school's actions is more generalized than specifically raising climate change awareness. Similarly, this teacher also thinks climate change does not have much attention within his school but the reason he gives is intriguing.

[…] Some schools have a higher emphasis on it. For example, schools with a large number of international students will embrace this matter more, however, I taught in a local secondary school which was involved in how it impacted at a local level. It doesn't mean that we don't mention about it, we do, but we prioritize things that relate closely with us. So, it all depends on the context of the school you work in.

(Daniel – Business and Economics teacher)

From this it seems that the teaching and learning of climate change education are driven by the context of the school and more problematically that climate change is often seen as a global rather than a local issue. Climate change is happening on a global scale and is an undeniably global problem. However, this is not always a helpful perception for schools which may focus very much on the needs of their local community. As this teacher identifies it is the local impact, of this global phenomena, that can at times have more resonance. If the emphasis on this is missed – commitment from teachers and students can be weakened.

Beliefs about being empowered to teach

All the teachers agreed that while they acknowledge their school's efforts in supporting teaching about climate change, they still think that their school has room for improvement.

[…] So they (teachers) don't want to spend time teaching what is not tested. I think that's why it's important to find teachers who have interest in the topic. If you want to inspire students, you need to have passion yourself in order to pass the passion on. If the teacher isn't passionate themselves about climate change, how can they inspire other people. Maybe we need outsiders, an expert to do it because those who are passionate about the topic can really inspire students.

(Daniel – Business and Economics teacher)

The answers, as shown above, revealed two different viewpoints. On one hand, some teachers believe teachers should be inspired and be empowered to teach climate change. On the other hand, other interviewees believed that only teachers interested in climate change should be selected to teach about it.

Support for student involvement

In recent years, young students have become more involved in climate change activities such as school strikes for climate change. This shows that students are now aware of their voice on social issues. When asked, all interviewees showed their support for students' actions.

> *I think it's good for students to understand that they have voice and their voice matters. I think it's important for adults and governments to understand that children do have a voice and that it matters.*

> *(Sophia - Psychology and Sociology teacher)*

The main theme in all their answer was students' voice while the interviewees also mentioned the benefits that these activities can bring.

> *Brilliant, good for them. Education is something continuous and the strike is just for one day. […] I think if they can actively participate in it, they can come back to class, talk about it, and share their opinion about it whether it's good or bad. […]*

> *(Fed – History teacher)*

However, all expressed some concerns. For some these concerns were limited to safety:

> *It's not only about students taking class off to join protests, it's also about safety. You're meant to know where students are. If they are off site, how do you know they are safe,*

> *(Daniel – Business and Economics teacher)*

For others they had further concerns regarding missing time at school. Once again, test and assessment were mentioned as elements that cause teachers to worry.

> *Students taking time out of class is a bit concerning, especially in 6ᵗʰ form, they have only two years to prepare for the test. Missing time off can be quite detrimental to their grade but I think they are fighting for a better good, better environment and for a better life.*

> *(Sophia - Psychology and Sociology teacher*

Discussion

Based on the evidence collected from the interview, it can be seen that climate change education is considered to be important by these teachers. These teachers were fully aware of the importance of teaching climate change to students. There was no evidence of false-neutrality, rejectionism, or denialism among these teachers. Making these results distinct from previous studies (Colston & Thomas, 2019). This may be to do with context, English language studies have often focused on the USA (Plutzer & Hannah, 2018). or it may be a change through time. Studies into attitudes towards human-made climate change may prove to be highly time specific.

On the other hand, they described obstacles that prevent them from teaching, that are familiar from other studies (Liu & Roehrig, 2019). These include: lack of time, lack of resources – including financial resources, an unsupportive school culture, and the pressure of preparing students for tests. There were though differences between the interviewees - towards their students' involvement in climate change activities. They all wanted to encourage and support their students to participate in climate change activities - while at the same time, they expressed varying degrees of concern about their safety and studies. The most supportive limited their concerns to safety only, while others were concerned about other impacts too. Details are portrayed in the following diagram:

Teacher's belief and attitude		Reality
- Belief in the importance of teaching climate change	**Teaching climate change**	- Lack of time - Lack of resources - Unsupportive school culture - Test and assessment pressure
- Support - Encourage - Compliment	**Student's involvement in climate change activities**	- Concerns about safety - Concerns about students' results in tests
- Schools play an important role in climate change education - Schools are aware of delivering the message to students - Schools should encourage and inspire teachers to teach climate change	**School roles in climate change education**	- Schools still have a lot to do to improve climate change education - Teachers are not yet inspired or encouraged to teach about man-made climate change.

Figure 2. Climate change education: belief and reality

The obstacles they described such as tests, time, and resources that teachers face they also described as being at a systematic level, which seemed out of their control (as teachers). Given that getting students to pass the test is one of the key tools used to demonstrate a teacher's

ability, credibility and effectiveness, it is understandable for them to choose to focus on the test rather than what is not included in examined content.

Conclusion

From this scoping study it seems that climate change education has not yet found its own embedded position yet within English schools. Although teachers are fully aware of the importance of climate change education, they lack time, resources, and in some schools a supportive culture. However, this study also revealed a very high level of understanding and commitment. The false neutral position identified in earlier studies, by which teachers teach aspects of climate denialism, was not found at all. They also all believe that teachers have a vital role to play in climate education. They were largely supportive of student voice over this issue, although they were divided on their specific support for climate strikes. However, this initial study gives room for cautious optimism – within England at least.

This short paper will be used as a discussion document within training in schools that the two authors are affiliated with and as such will become part of an ongoing conversation about teaching climate change in schools. This short scoping study is, by definition, limited in scope. However, it is the beginning of a journey for the authors and is a starting point for further research both quantitative and qualitative into this topic – research in which teachers' voice can be accessed as part of an ongoing cycle of engagement with practitioners.

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Appendix A – Interview Schedule

- What subject do you teach and which age ranges?
- Do you teach climate change awareness in your classes?
- Is climate change taught elsewhere in the school – do you know how and where?
- How important do you think it is for teachers to raise climate change awareness among students?

- Do you feel prepared to teach about climate change?

- Do you feel adequately resourced to teach about climate change?

- In which way do teachers in your school feel empowered to raise climate change awareness among students?

- In which ways could teachers in your school be more empowered to teach about climate change?

- What are the difficulties teachers face, in raising climate change awareness among students?

- What are your views on students taking classes off to participate in climate activism including strikes?

- What views are there, in your school, on students taking classes off to participate in climate activism including strikes?

- Can you give me examples of good practice (yours and others) when teaching about climate change)?

A Bottom-up Construction of the Humanities Curriculum: The Hong Kong Experience

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Abstract

This paper documents the experiences of a group of Hong Kong school teachers in constructing the humanities curriculum through a cross-curricular subject called Liberal Studies (LS). The origins of the humanities curriculum in compulsory schooling are often tied to the key tenets of liberal education (aka liberal arts education). In this regard, Hong Kong is an interesting case in that LS is portrayed by the government as a means to tackle the inertia of a subject-based curriculum. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with twenty LS teachers, I made sense of their pedagogical experiences through the lens of Broudy's (1984) four purposes of liberal education in contemporary education. It is hoped that this study will shed light on the role of teachers in developing a subject curriculum that is responsive to students' daily-life experiences and is capable of fulfilling the purposes of liberal education.

Keywords: *Hong Kong, humanities curriculum, liberal education, liberal arts education*

Introduction

This paper documents the experiences of a group of Hong Kong high-school school teachers in constructing the humanities curriculum in a bottom-up manner. This was facilitated by the introduction of a compulsory secondary school subject called Liberal Studies (LS) in 2009. According to the CDC and HKEAA (2007), LS aimed to 'liberate students' minds' by cultivating critical thinking and promoting enquiry-based learning. The subject served as a key component in the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum to 'connect knowledge and concepts across different disciplines' and 'study contemporary events not covered in single disciplines' (CDC and HKEAA, 2007, p. 3). The rationale behind the introduction of LS was to strengthen the linkage across school subjects and to promote cross-disciplinary learning through a humanities curriculum. Although there are a number of studies that highlight the importance of the humanities curriculum in contemporary schooling, empirical research on teachers' experiences of constructing the curriculum tend to be few. In light of this lacuna, this study hopes to address the following research question: How did LS teachers construct a humanities curriculum?

Value of Liberal Education in Compulsory Schooling

One of the earlier projects that espouse the value of liberal education (sometimes referred to as liberal arts education) was the Humanities Curriculum Project initiated by Lawrence Stenhouse in 1967. Stenhouse (1983) argues that subject-based curriculum has fostered a didactic way of knowledge transmission, which places two much on the acquisition of abstract, decontextualised school knowledge, and thus diverts students from paying attention to broader issues concerning the human condition and the general wellbeing of society. Stenhouse's critique of the school curriculum echoed with Hirst's (1974) earlier view that liberal education entails the cultivation of mind, that is, the habits of thinking. These scholars have laid the ground work for the construction of the humanities curriculum which is undergirded by the key tenets of liberal education.

On the nature of liberal education, Broudy (1984) highlights the value of liberal education in contemporary education. He argues that there are four purposes of liberal education to schooling, namely, the (i) replicative, (ii) applicative, (iii) associative, and (iv) interpretative purposes (Fennell and Simpson, 2021). These purposes are arranged in ascending orders of importance. The replicative purpose refers to students' ability to recall relevant prior

knowledge, a prerequisite of deliberating socio-political issues. The applicative purpose concerns students' ability to apply relevant knowledge to analyse a certain socio-political issue. The associative purpose refers to students' awareness of the interconnected of several socio-political issues. Last but not least, the interpretative purpose concerns students' practical mastery of knowledge and their ability to apply knowledge to explain a wide range of contemporary socio-political issues.

In his later works, Broudy (1988) elaborates that liberal education promote democratic citizenship in two ways: 'as stencils of interpretation' and 'as inclining [the citizen] toward critical examination of issues, a desire for logical coherence, and a tendency to see problems in many contexts' (p. 65). In recent decades, constructivism, as a learning theory, lends further support to the key tenets of liberal education. In crude terms, constructivism underscores the agency of the learner in constructing new 'knowledge' of the social world through constant reflections on his/her interactions with the immediate surroundings (Bada and Olusegun, 2015). This resonates with the aim of liberal education in a sense that students, as learners, should show more concern about the general wellbeing of society rather than simply about the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge.

Broudy's (1984, 1988) discussions on liberal education are relevant to this study because they largely resonate with the design of the LS curriculum in a number of ways. First, LS was not buttressed in in a single disciplinary tradition; instead, its subject curriculum comprised six interrelated modules: namely, 'Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships', 'Hong Kong Today', 'Modern China', 'Globalisation', 'Public Health', and 'Energy Technology and the Environment.' Each module consisted of one to three enquiry questions, followed by some elaborations on the possible topics to be covered. Second, LS aimed to cultivate students' ability to analyse socio-political issues from multiple perspectives. This meant that deliberation of socio-political issues would be a key component of routine teaching. Third, LS sought to cultivate students as 'informed, rational and responsible citizens' (CDC and HKEAA, p. 4) who could construct their arguments and could make informed judgements. These curricular features of LS suggested distinct pedagogical conditions which were very different from conventional subjects whose subject curricula were bounded by the discipline's conceptual structure.

Research Methods and Data Analysis

This qualitative study adopted an interpretivist approach to understanding LS teachers' experiences in constructing the curriculum. This followed that I focused on interpretating teachers' thoughts and beliefs rather than drawing correlations or causations between variables. I employed semi-structured interviews with LS teachers, supplemented with documentary analysis of secondary literature, such as scholarly studies, curriculum guidelines, and government documents. As a supplementary research method, documentary analysis helped to corroborate or contradict interviewees' account of their experiences, thus enhancing the validity of research analysis. The interviews were semi-structured to maintain a certain flow of topics while allowing some flexibility to explore other related topics of LS teaching.

Data collection took place between summer 2020 and spring 2021. A total of twenty LS teachers were interviewed during that period. All interviews were conducted online through various online communication applications, including Google Meet, Skype, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. This was due to the outbreak of the Corona Virus Disease (hereinafter COVID-19) since late 2019, which prompted the Hong Kong Government to shift teaching to online settings in early 2020.

Conducting interviews online had its own advantages and disadvantages. Regarding the advantages, it reduced the logistics of interviews because on-site visit was not necessary. For this reason, the interviewees were more willing to agree to participate in this study since the interview could be conducted through a computer screen, which was very similar to online teaching. Additionally, since most interviewees were working from home and away from the school office, they were more willing to talk about sensitive matters, such as staffing arrangement and Hong Kong politics without the fear of being overheard by their colleagues or superiors. This advantage proved to be crucial to my data collection because LS was heavily politicised during the protests from 2019 to 2020 and that subject teachers were under immense pressure in covering politics-related topics. This was evident in the comparison between teachers interviewed at home and at school. The former appeared to be more at ease whereas the latter were much more cautious in talking about local identity politics.

Nevertheless, conducting interviews online had its own disadvantages. First, it gave the interviewees to the option of disabling their camera feed. This largely reduced the authenticity of the interviews because it became difficult to interpret whether the interviewees' responses were genuine. Also, all communications were mediated through the microphone, which made

the interactions less spontaneous. In some occasions, I had to accommodate the time lag between what the interviewees said and what I heard as a result of unstable internet connections. This somewhat affected the flow of the interviews.

All interviews were conducted in the interviewees' native language, Cantonese, to facilitate their recount of their pedagogic experiences. Prior to the interview, I emailed the information sheet and consent forms to the interviewees. I then briefly explained the purpose of my study and assured them that their names would be anonymised. The collected data was stored in my encrypted laptop and it would be accessed by me. The recorded interviews were then translated and transcribed into English. I adopted a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012) to interpret the research data. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is a way of making sense of qualitative data through grouping them into clusters. This is achieved by first developing codes to mark data which exemplifies similar ideas or concepts. Then, through grouping these codes, the researcher infers themes, meaning that these codes begin to form a particular idea or narrative. During the coding process, I develop four major themes, including 'formation of a subject taskforce', 'selection of socio-political issues', 'increasing political pressure', and 'the nature of LS'.

Findings and Discussions

I made sense of my research findings through Broudy's (1984) four purposes of liberal education in contemporary schooling. In attempting to fulfil each of the four purposes, the interviewees' experiences reflected the opportunities afforded by the distinct nature of LS as well as the practical challenges faced in implementing the subject. These opportunities and challenges were increasingly affected by the escalating political conflicts in the 2010s that revolved around local identity politics (Vickers and Morris, 2022). These conflicts increasingly placed LS at the centre of political controversies and subjected LS teachers to escalating levels of political pressure.

Navigating the Nature of Liberal Studies

When asked about their perceptions of the nature of LS, most of the interviewees agreed with the educational authorities' positioning of the subject as one that aimed to provide pedagogic space for students to deliberate contemporary socio-political issues. Some interviewees, such as Kaden (T11), Steven (T12), and Jackson (T13), reported that the subject's issue-enquiry nature provided more leeway for teachers to focus on students' habits of thinking, since, in

conventional subjects, teachers were more preoccupied with the transmission of subject knowledge. In particular, Kaden (T11) and Steven (T12) compared the nature of LS to sociology, a discipline that is largely buttressed in the notion of the sociological imagination by C. Wright Mills (1959). They elaborated that LS offered students the opportunity to make sense of their personal experiences in relation to the broader social milieu.

Although the majority of the interviewees applauded the nature of LS, the actual implementation of the subject was very challenging. At the beginning stage of its implementation, interviewees who were mid- and late-career teachers were struggling to grapple with the breadth and depth of the subject curriculum. Without the traditional configurations of a definable subject knowledge based and conceptual structure, the interviewees were unsure how far and deep they should cover when selecting socio-political issues and elaborating key concepts. This was compounded by the fact that the majority of interviewees were trained within their disciplinary traditions; relevant training on cross-curricular components were minimal. Therefore, many of them were not confident in handling curricular contents beyond their subject expertise. In light of this, the interviewees spent a great deal of time on experimenting the depth and breadth of the subject curriculum. Moreover, as LS was highly dependent on current affairs, subject teachers needed to be constantly aware of the need to revise their teaching materials; this contrasted with conventional school subjects whose subject knowledge remained largely unchanged over a long period of time. Therefore, the production of school-based teaching materials was immensely stressful.

As a result of these challenges, earlier attempts to implement LS tended to be limited to the replicative purpose of liberal education (Broudy, 1984). This was reflected in the interviewees' exam-oriented approach to teaching LS at the beginning years of its implementation. As the interviewees were generally not confident with structuring their lessons in an issue-enquiry way, they mostly reverted back to teacher-centred pedagogies, such as distributing 'fact sheets' of current affairs and glossary of examination question types, to ensure that students were at least acquainted with the essential background knowledge of some current affairs. This was often achieved at the expense of the lesson time for the deliberation of socio-political issues.

Tackling Students' Habit of Thinking

After the first few years of implementing LS, the majority of interviewees began to grapple with the distinct nature of LS in the mid-2010s as the subject gave teachers a great deal of

freedom to structure their lessons without the burden of subject knowledge. This enabled the interviewees to pay more attention to students' habits of thinking. In this regard, many interviewees, such as Jason (T04), Kelly (T05), Benny (T16), and Grace (T08) recounted their pedagogical encounters and observed that many students were unable to analyse social problems from multiple perspectives. That was, students tended to attribute a certain social problem to one single cause. Typical examples included attributing the failure of environmental policies to individual factors, such as habits of consumption and individual greed. In light of this, some interviewees included class activities that prompted students to reflect on their habits of thinking. These activities, as the interviewees explained, served to set the students the appropriate 'frame of mind' in analysing social phenomena or problems.

The distinct nature of LS also discouraged students from resorting to rote memorisation to prepare for quizzes and examinations. Many interviewees observed that less academically motivated students tended to memorise blocks of factual knowledge in hopes of regurgitating them during quizzes and examinations. Consequently, their scores were not satisfactory. The interviewees explained to their students that mere regurgitation of facts would not grant them any points; instead, it was the manner by which these facts were used to support the arguments that counted. Meanwhile, more academically motivated students were able to realise that, to do well in LS, they needed to be constantly aware of their habits of thinking so that they could analyse social problems from multiple perspectives, thus enriching the depth of their arguments.

The interviewees' experiences in the later period of implementation reflect the fulfilment of the replicative purpose of liberal education (Broudy, 1984). This meant that the interviewees were developing ways to guide students to apply the background knowledge flexibly in tackling examination questions. This was facilitated by the distinct design of LS in that the subject paid more attention ways of reasoning rather than the mere acquisition of subject knowledge. This pedagogical focus exposed some students' predisposed habits of thinking that were not conducive to the cultivation of critical thinking. Also, under teachers' guidance, students realised that LS was not about rigid regurgitation of factual knowledge; rather, it was about the flexible use of factual knowledge to construct a solid argument on socio-political issues.

Selecting the Right Socio-political Issues for Teaching

Aside from tackling students' habits of thinking, the interviewees began to develop systematic ways of categorising socio-political issues so as to keep abreast of current affairs and to update their teaching materials effectively. The majority of interviewees began to use the modules and their subsidiary themes as categories to 'archive' current affairs. A common way among the interviewees to categorise socio-political issues for LS teaching was the 'regular issues' and 'emergent issues.' The former referred to significant events that were illustrative of many key terms/concepts within the LS curriculum. They were so important that they would be taught across cohorts of students. A typical example of a regular issue, as quoted from the interviewees, was the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) which broke out in Hong Kong in 2003. The interviewees reckoned that the SARS pandemic could be related to the modules 'Hong Kong Today', 'Globalisation', and 'Public Health.' The interviewees, such as Whitney (T17), Kaleb (T07), and Kaden (T18) said that they had been using this incident as a regular issue for about seven years before replacing it with a more recent pandemic in late 2019 – the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, emergent issues referred to events that took place relatively recently and were illustrative of several key terms/concepts within the LS curriculum. Although they were less likely to be incorporated as a core part of routine teaching, these emergent issues could be used as a lesson lead-in or a piece of take-home assignment. A typical example of an emergent issue would be the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) which broke out in 2012. This allowed students to compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the pandemics so as to highlight the various factors contributing to the outbreak and containment of the bacteria/virus. This allowed students to brush up their critical thinking skills and to recognise the interconnectedness of social phenomena.

The systematic ways of categorising socio-political issues can be interpreted as fulfilling the associative purpose of liberal education (Broudy, 1984). This meant that the interviewees were constructing meaningful connections among socio-political issues of similar nature using the modules and their subsidiary themes. This allowed students to apply the same sets of key terms or concepts across a single socio-political issue, thus enabling them to construct arguments that were generalisable to the broader trends of social development. Moreover, this method of 'archiving' socio-political issues enabled the interviewees to update their teaching materials more effectively because emergent socio-political issues could simply be contextualised under regular ones without making significant changes to the structure of the LS curriculum.

The 'Liberal Studies Method' of Making Sense of Society

Among the interviewees, several of them mentioned elaborate models of the constructed LS curriculum. One of them was told from Kelly (T05), who was an early-career teacher and she benefited from working in a school that highly appreciated the nature of LS. As a result, her subject taskforce adopted a purely issue-enquiry approach to LS teaching. This was, the entire subject curriculum comprised five to six 'core issues.' Each of the six modules were to be used as a distinct perspective to approach the core issues. Kelly (T05) used 'food safety' as an illustration of this curriculum construction. She would first discuss several food poisoning incidents in Hong Kong to highlight the contributing factors as well as its impact on the local population. Then she would instruct her students to form into groups and to conduct mini-researches on food poisoning incidents in selected countries, such as mainland China, Brazil, and Sweden. Her students were required to present their findings, and highlight the similarities and differences with the case of Hong Kong. The entire process involved all six modules and facilitated students' understanding of Hong Kong as well as the globe.

Although such curriculum constructions only emerged from a small number of the interviewees, it did suggest that the LS curriculum, under favourable conditions, was capable of fulfilling the interpretative purpose of liberal arts education (Broudy, 1984). That was, LS was used as a lens to make sense of society. The modules, namely, 'Personal Development and Interpersonal Relationships', 'Hong Kong Today', 'Modern China', 'Globalisation', 'Public Health', and 'Energy Technology and the Environment', were deployed as distinct perspectives to analyse social phenomena. According to the Broudy (1984), the interpretative purpose of liberal education denotes the true liberation of the mind because individuals are free from disciplinary ways of thinking and can understand the complexity of the contemporary world from multiple perspectives, just as what the curriculum guidelines of LS intended to achieve (CDC and HKEAA).

Concluding Remarks

At the time of writing this paper, LS was replaced with Citizenship and Social Development (CSD) (Chan, 2020). Although the Hong Kong Government claimed that such a replacement was an optimalisation of the NSS Curriculum (EDB, 2021), Vickers and Morris (2022) contend that it a wholesale reorientation of the school curriculum under the notion of 'national security', as prompted by the enactment of the National Security Law in late June 2020. They argue that

the replacement of LS as CSD in late 2020 epitomises a tightening of curriculum control from mainland China to align with Xi Jinping's agenda of constructing a Han-centric notion of 'Chinese nation' at the expense of eradicating vernacular cultures. This is reflected in the radical changes to the original subject curriculum that emphaised the importance of mainland China to Hong Kong. For example, the six interrelated modules of LS were replaced with three broad themes, namely, 'Hong Kong under "One Country, Two Systems"', 'Our Country since Reform and Opening Up', and 'Interconnectedness and Interdependence of the Contemporary World' (CDC and HKEAA, 2021). Additionally, teachers needed to follow the official textbooks disseminated by the educational authorities; they are only allowed a limited degree of freedom to select and tailor-make materials. Moreover, the assessment format changed from extended essay writing to multiple-choices and short questions. These drastic changes suggested that the interviewees were expected to operate under a very different pedagogical context – one that hugely restricted teachers' pedagogic freedom.

In face of such changes, the majority of interviewees mourned over the loss of pedagogical spaces for students to express their opinions on current affairs. Perhaps more importantly, the interviewees felt that their efforts of implementing LS were not appreciated by the authorities; the school subject was dubbed as a scapegoat for political conflicts. While the majority of interviewees in this study were disappointed with the replacement of LS as CSD, some of them expressed that they would like to continue 'the spirit of LS', which roughly referred to the cultivation of critical thinking, issue-enquiry learning, and multiple-perspective thinking, in other humanities subjects, such as geography, economics, history, and Chinese history.

Having said that, the bottom-up construction of the humanities curriculum through the case of LS in Hong Kong still lends important insights to teachers' capacity in making the school curriculum relevant and responsive to current affairs. In particular, teachers can play a crucial role in tackling students' habits of thought and in selecting appropriate socio-political issues to cultivate students' critical thinking skills. Professional development programmes can strengthen training on these two aspects as that elements of liberal education can be better applied across school subjects.

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Data-Driven Practices in Malaysian Education Blueprint (2012-2025): What Can Malaysia Learn from Europe?

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Abstract

Information and communication technology (ICT) are increasingly mediating data-driven practices to inform decision making and foster a culture of school data sharing activities. In this paper, the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2012-2025) has been reviewed to identify key issues that could lead to policy-implementation gaps. 84 selected articles, theses, and policy review papers were synthesised using the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) to understand the current progress of data-driven practices in the Blueprint. The findings highlighted three major issues: a lack of school autonomy, school leadership and the lack of ICT competency, and the lack of system efficiency. The paper also explores at the growing research efforts on learning analytics and data ethics that have been conducted in several European countries in relation to the use of learning analytics, protecting individual's privacy, and establishing data ethics and how they plan to adapt these into their national education policy.

Keywords: *systematic review; Malaysia Education; data-driven practices; policy review; school management*

Introduction

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 is the current education policy in Malaysia, and it is widely regarded as the reference for shaping the nation's education landscape (Bush et al., 2018). This blueprint lays out a comprehensive plan for the development of education in Malaysia over the course of 13 years, with a focus on key areas such as student outcomes, teacher quality, and school leadership. One of the central components of the Malaysia Education Blueprint is its emphasis on data management strategies to improve the delivery of education in the country. This includes the use of data to track student progress and inform instructional decisions, as well as the use of data to evaluate the effectiveness of different education programs and policies. Overall, the Malaysia Education Blueprint aims to create a more data-driven and results-oriented education system that will help to ensure the best outcomes for all students in the country.

Despite the Ministry of Education's efforts to implement the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 through various trainings for teachers, provision of ICT infrastructure for each school, and centralised data platforms, it appears that the utilization of data-driven practices by school principals remains limited. These practises pertain to their ability to use data in decision-making and to foster a data-sharing culture at the school level. According to a national survey in 2011, most principals put understanding, using data, and leading school performance assessments as low on their priority list in their instructional leadership (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). The findings also revealed that principals had limited use of data to inform decision-making, implying that a data-driven school culture in the Malaysian schools is not yet ubiquitous.

With only two years left till the year 2025, the Malaysia Education Blueprint has been criticised for its implementation. Bush et al. (2021) brought into question the feasibility of overall policy implementation, because they discovered that the blueprint has set an ambitious target of transforming the education system to make Malaysia appears in the top third of countries in international rankings such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) by 2025. At this moment, Malaysia's recent performance in PISA 2018 is slightly higher compared to 2015, after the

launch of the blueprint in 2013, with scores of 440 in Mathematics, 415 in Reading, and 438 in Scientific literacy.

The TIMMS performance for Malaysian students is still far behind from other developing countries such as Vietnam and Thailand. According to the blueprint, Malaysia's performance at the TIMSS and PISA 2018 is expected to be on par with the international average. Yet, Malaysia is still far below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average. There are some worries on Malaysia's ability to perform at least on par with the OECD average in the next coming 2022 PISA. The situation has become more challenging as schools are experiencing strange, stressful, and unpredictable moments when dealing with crisis situations such as natural disasters or pandemics. (Harris & Jones, 2020; Metcalfe & Perez, 2020; Pollock, 2020).

When schools face unexpected events, such as natural disasters or pandemics, they are forced to deal with a new set of challenges that are strange, stressful, and unpredictable. This can put a significant strain on school administrators, teachers, and students, who are already dealing with the aftermath of the crisis. In these situations, it is even more important for schools to have access to accurate, up-to-date data that can help guide their decision-making processes. Data-driven practices provide a valuable framework for schools to understand the current state of their students, staff, and resources, and make informed decisions to help mitigate the impact of the crisis.

However, despite the provision of various trainings for teachers, ICT infrastructure for each school, and centralised data platforms at the ministry level, many schools are still struggling to develop a data-driven approach. This may be due to a lack of understanding about the value of data, a lack of resources to support data-driven initiatives, or a lack of time to implement data-driven practices in the midst of a crisis. Whatever the cause, it is clear that there is a need to prioritize data-driven practices in order to help schools effectively navigate these challenging times.

Previous studies suggest that data-driven practices could bridge between the policy design and the implementation gap (Brown et al., 2017; Fernandes, 2019; Halverson et al., 2007; Mandinach, 2012; Mandinach & Honey, 2008). Individual, cultural, or systemic deficiencies in school data practises could discourage the policy from achieving its target (Arokiasamy et

al., 2015; Gil-Garcia et al., 2018; Rickinson et al., 2017; Schildkamp & Lai, 2013; Vanlommel, 2022; Willms, 2018). From these variables, this paper explores in-depth on key issues of data-driven practices in the implementation of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2012-2025).

Therefore, research papers, theses, and policy review papers on school leadership, education information/data management, and teacher workload are being synthesised in order to understand the current progress of data-driven practices in the policy implementation. The results of studies on the implementation of data-driven practices in education in Malaysia are expected to give insight into the effectiveness of the efforts made by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to transform its delivery capabilities and support educational changes through data-driven practices. The findings would indicate whether the target of transforming MOE's capabilities has been achieved, or if the efforts have been hindered by other factors. It is essential to assess the impact of these practices on the delivery of education in Malaysia, as well as on the satisfaction and well-being of teachers and students. By evaluating the results of these efforts, policymakers and educators can identify areas for improvement and make necessary changes to ensure that the goals of transforming MOE's capabilities and supporting educational changes are achieved.

Moreover, the results can also provide valuable information on the challenges faced by educators and schools in the implementation of data-driven practices, as well as the impact of these practices on the quality of education and student outcomes. This information can be used to develop effective policies and programs to support the successful implementation of data-driven practices in education, leading to improved performance and outcomes for teachers and students.

Methodology

A systematic review and meta-analysis were chosen for this paper as they are powerful tools for synthesizing the findings of multiple primary studies. The systematic review is a comprehensive and transparent method for searching, selecting, and synthesizing relevant studies to answer a specific research question (Rahi, 2017). The meta-analysis, on the other hand, is a statistical method used to combine and summarize the results of multiple studies to provide a more accurate estimate of the overall effect of a particular intervention or treatment (Page et al., 2021).

In conducting this systematic review and meta-analysis, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were used to ensure that the review was conducted in a rigorous and transparent manner. PRISMA is a widely recognized set of guidelines for reporting the methodology and results of systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

The articles for this systematic review were gathered from a wide range of online research databases, including EBSCO, ScienceDirect, Emerald, Semantic Scholar, and Google Scholar. The search keywords used included 'School Leadership' OR 'School Management', 'School Information Management' OR 'School Data Management', and 'Teacher Workload'. The search results retrieved 547 studies, of which 382 were eliminated due to duplication. After eliminating the duplicates, the total number of studies accumulated was 265, of which 210 were eligible for full-text access. The total number of included articles in the analysis was 84 after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Each article was subjected to a manual review and analysis.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure that only relevant and high-quality studies were included in the systematic review and meta-analysis. These criteria help to minimize the risk of bias and increase the validity of the results. In this systematic review, the following inclusion criteria were established:

- The studies must be published in English and Malay language;
- The studies must focus on school leadership, school management, school information management, school data management, and teacher workload;
- The studies must be based on primary research data, such as surveys, experiments, and case studies;
- The studies must include original data analysis and interpretation, rather than simply summarizing other studies.

On the other hand, the following exclusion criteria were established:

- The studies must not be based on secondary data, such as review articles, editorials, and news articles;
- The studies must not be based on unpublished data, such as dissertations, theses, and conference proceedings;
- The studies must not be based on data collected before the year 2013.

These criteria helped to narrow down the number of studies from 547 to 84, ensuring that only high-quality and relevant studies were included in the systematic review and meta-analysis. The PRISMA guidelines (see Figure 1) were chosen for this systematic review and meta-analysis because they provide a comprehensive and transparent framework for conducting and reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses, ensuring that the results are trustworthy and reliable.
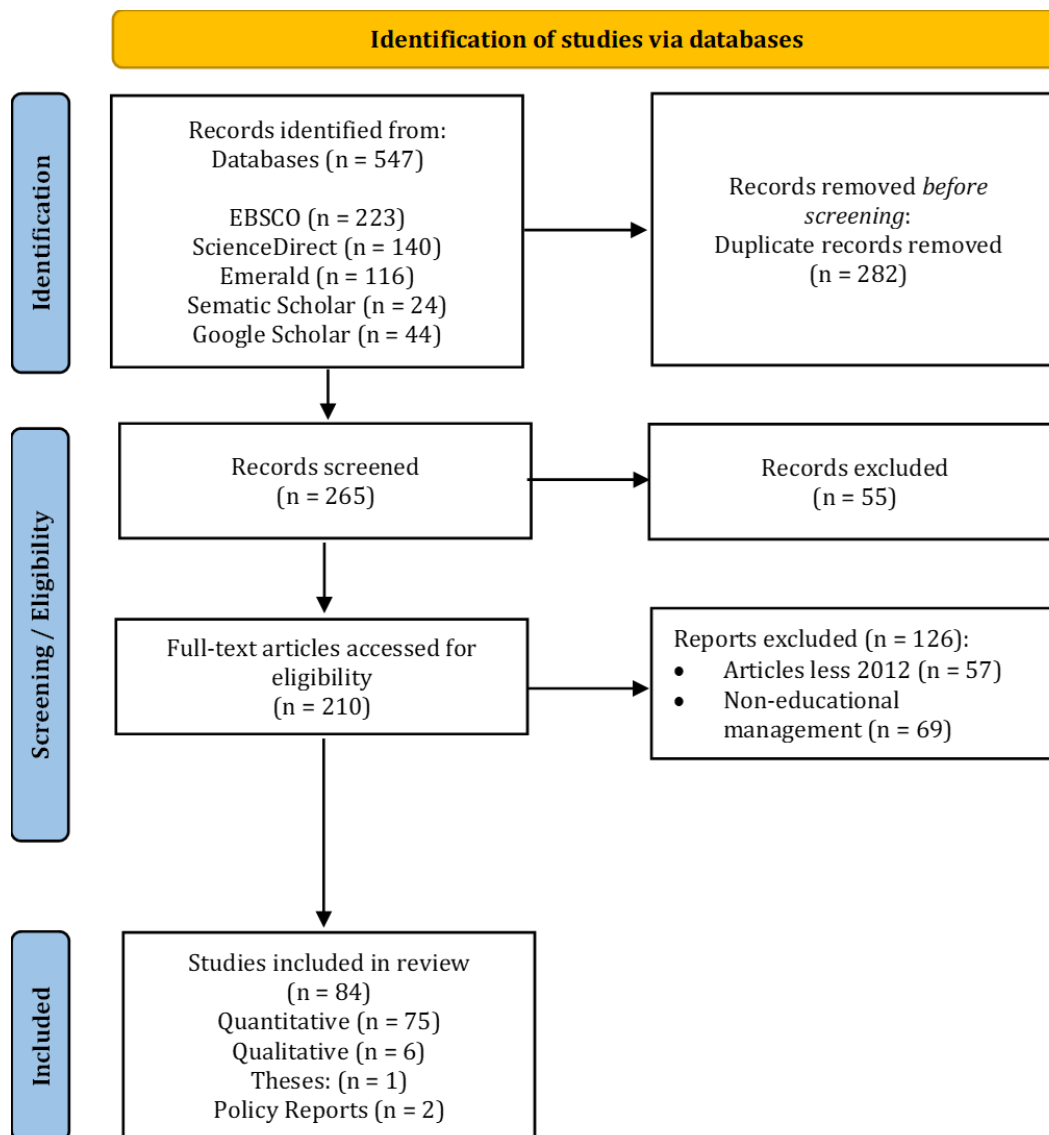

Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart for the selected studies

Findings and Discussion

Based on the analysis of 84 research articles published in the Malaysian educational context from 2013 to 2022 on the topics of school leadership/management, information/data management, and teacher workload, three key issues were raised and synthesised as follows:

Lack of School Autonomy

The references in The Blueprint of the Ministry of Education Malaysia emphasize the importance of instructional leadership and data-driven practices for effective policy implementation. It is stated in the Blueprint that schools are encouraged to adopt an online performance reporting system to track student progress and assist principals as instructional leaders in developing data-driven solutions to improve student outcomes by 20%.

However, according to Bush et al. (2018), integrating data-driven practices with instructional leadership in the centralized Malaysian education system can be challenging due to limited autonomy. Schools are authorized to manage data collection and reporting, but their interpretation and decisions are restricted by predefined responses from local education authorities. Gill and Berezina (2021) found similar results in their examination of PISA 2015 School Questionnaire data for Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. They concluded that decision-making in Malaysian schools does not drive changes or improvements in school performance, compared to Singapore and Indonesia.

Bush et al. (2021) reported that teachers and principals are concerned with standardized data-driven decisions from the state/district level to the school level. Schools are given specific instructions on how to implement interventions, leaving little or no room for flexibility to local or school contexts (Hassan et al., 2019; Ismail et al., 2019). This lack of autonomy and flexibility in data interpretation and decision-making can contribute to teacher burnout, which is linked to depression, anxiety, and stress (Johari et al., 2018; Nordin et al., 2019; Othman & Suleiman, 2013; Rathakrishnan et al., 2020; Roslan et al., 2015).

A study by Othman and Sivasubramaniam (2019) using The Malay Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) found that teachers have high rates of depression (43.0%), anxiety (68.0%) and stress (32.3%) symptoms. Ismail et al. (2019) reported similar findings in a survey of teachers' workload, in which they found that excessive bureaucracy was a major source of stress for

teachers and limited their ability to make professional judgments based on student performance data.

The use of school data is an important aspect of the education system, as it helps to make informed decisions about curriculum, instruction, and even achievement goals (Ab Latif et al., 2021). However, if the level of autonomy schools has in making decisions is limited, this can lead to negative consequences such as teacher burnout and depression. This can be detrimental to both teachers' work satisfaction and students' academic outcomes. To address this issue, it is crucial to provide teachers and school leaders with more freedom in how they interpret and use data (Schildkamp & Lai, 2013). This will allow them to feel more 'ownership over the decision-making process' (p.5) and be more proactive in using data to make informed choices that can help to improve the quality of education and support students' success (Prøitz et al., 2017). By giving schools and teachers greater autonomy and control over the use of data, policymakers can help to promote a more dynamic and effective education system that is better equipped to meet the changing needs of students and schools.

School Leadership and Lack of Competency

Instructional Leadership

The school leadership style in the Malaysian context has been described as transformational and distributive, with the principals being the ultimate instructional leaders (Abdullah et al., 2019; Adams et al., 2020; Ahmad & Ghavifekr, 2017; Amzat & Yusuf, 2019; Aziz et al., 2015; James et al., 2022; Muda et al., 2017). According to a survey conducted by Aziz et al. (2018) among 402 secondary school teachers, the majority of teachers agreed that their principals demonstrated high levels of instructional leadership, by setting goals, supervising activities, and promoting a learning environment. However, Bush et al. (2018) suggested the implementation of a contextual approach to instructional leadership in Malaysian schools, to better meet individual school and national needs. This is because a principal with limited autonomy may have limited capacity to develop their own skills and respond effectively to different situations, tasks, and people (Harris et al., 2017; Noman et al., 2018).

In the literature, there is evidence to support the argument that principals with limited autonomy may have limited capacity to develop their skills and respond effectively to different situations, tasks, and people. For example, a study by Saarivirta and Kumpulainen (2016) found that when

school leaders have limited autonomy, they often experience reduced levels of control over their own work and are unable to make decisions that align with their own professional beliefs and values. This can lead to feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction, which in turn can have negative impacts on their ability to lead and manage their schools effectively.

Similarly, a study by Leithwood et al. (2017) found that school leaders who are constrained by external mandates and limited decision-making authority often struggle to align their work with their personal goals and priorities. They also tend to be less effective at motivating and inspiring their staff, which can negatively impact staff morale and student achievement.

The evidence from these studies supports the argument that giving principals greater autonomy can help them to develop their skills and respond more effectively to different situations, tasks, and people. This, in turn, can help to promote a more dynamic and effective education system that is better equipped to meet the changing needs of students and schools.

Technology Leadership

There has been a significant increase in research on technology leadership in education, including digital leadership (Kin & Abdull Kareem, 2018; Kin & Kareem, 2019; Yusof et al., 2019) and mobile leadership (Omar & Ismail, 2020), which focuses on the implementation of ICT policies in education. Previous studies have shown that technology leadership among school principals is at a high level, with a focus on systemic improvement (Chua & Chua, 2017; Fong et al., 2013; Hamzah et al., 2016; Thannimalai & Raman, 2018; Wei et al., 2017). A systemic improvement allows principals to improve the process of generating student performance data, interpreting students' results, and communicating data analysis (Ghavifekr et al., 2017; Ghavifekr et al., 2016; Ghavifekr & Quan, 2020; Ghavifekr & Wong, 2022). A case study of best practices in school leadership by Abdullah et al. (2013) found that the principal's belief and attitude towards ICT utilization led to school improvements in terms of realigning school practices, building teacher capacity, gaining community support, and creating a culture of technology usage.

ICT Competency

Despite the positive impact of the principal's vision and belief on school improvement through ICT utilization, past studies have indicated that they lack competency in ICT fundamentals,

database management, and data-driven management. A review of the quality of principals in the implementation of smart schools by Ibrahim et al. (2013) found that most principals were not proficient in using various software, including word processing, spreadsheets, databases, and email. A study of 526 Malaysian secondary schools by Arokiasamy et al. (2015) found that most principals agreed that they lacked proficiency in database, spreadsheet, presentation/multimedia software, the Internet, and information seeking. A cross-sectional survey of 879 teachers by Ibrahim et al. (2018) indicated that school leaders' information management activities through online interaction, file sharing, online meetings, and planner sharing were still at a low level. This deficiency could hinder the flow of information and communication within the organization, as well as reduce the effectiveness of intra-team communication (Hamid et al., 2021; Hamid et al., 2019; Ibrahim, 2015).

Lack of System Efficiency

The implementation of School Based Assessments (SBA) and School Management Systems (SMS) in The Blueprints are expected to reduce burden, achieve better time management, and improve report quality (Shah, 2014); but, according to UNICEF (2020), data from these systems are not interconnected and have limited inter-operability because they are administered and operated by separate the MOE's divisions. Since the systems were made by different vendors at different times, it takes time and effort to make sure they can communicate each other. As a result, data is frequently duplicated and sometimes misaligned between systems.

In addition, there are two issues of ICT infrastructure support and system synchronization. First, a case study conducted by Wong and Daud (2017) with 6 principals revealed that all of them were disappointed with a poor internet access in schools. This ICT networking problem makes it difficult for school administrators and teachers for doing routine administrative work such as reporting students' attendance, submitting daily lesson plans, and providing feedback on students' learning progress. In other instances, the majority of teachers in remote schools reported that poor internet coverage makes system access difficult, delays database access, and ultimately doubles their workload since they must print a significant number of reporting instruments (Samsudin et al., 2014). Also, Kenayathulla and Ibrahim (2016) highlighted that poorly designed management systems make data entry time-consuming due to the high traffic and usage. Teachers were reported to be dissatisfied with keying in data at home until late at night.

Second, most systems and applications are utilised only for compliance and reporting (Albert Jonglai, 2017; Nordin, 2014). Each school must submit critical performance data to the state education authorities or MOE. A designated teacher would compile all data entries or each system. The Education Data Repository will integrate various systems into a single dashboard, but schools must still compile their own reports manually. If individuals need to gain access to this information, they must submit a request to the teachers in charge of the various systems and applications. According to the report from UNICEF (2020), the process of obtaining this information includes accessing APDM, e-attendance, SSDM (character), SAPS (academic records), PAJSK (co-curriculum records), and other student-related systems and applications to compile data on each student. This information has yet again to be combined manually and processed so that it may be used for reference. The manual process in subsequent reporting systems seems to slow down the process of data integration and reconciliation and hinders The Blueprint's target of simplifying teachers' data collection and reporting duties.

The Path Forward: What Can Malaysia Learn from Europe?

Three key issues, as discussed above, have become hindrances to the implementation of data-driven practises in The Blueprint: a lack of school autonomy, school leadership and a lack of ICT competency among principals and teachers, and a lack of system efficiency. Among these hindrances, giving more autonomy at the school level could encourage principals to use data to determine problems caused by ICT incompetence and system inefficiencies, and eventually working to find feasible solutions (Lasater et al., 2019; Vanlommel, 2022). Giving principals more autonomy at the school level also means offering them a greater sense of ownership over data, from collecting, documenting, and reporting to being data-driven, which implies actively using data to make decisions (Fernandes, 2021; Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021). In other words, with autonomy, decision-making authority can be pivoted from central authorities to schools, and schools' commitments to The Blueprint can be shifted from ensuring compliance to fostering change. However, there is currently a lack of research in the Malaysian education setting that explains how school data is used and how it might be shifted to data-driven decision-making.

The level of autonomy that schools have to make decisions in a country can have a significant impact on how data is used. According to Schildkamp et al. (2014), schools in countries with greater autonomy have adequate policy space to make data-driven decisions regarding

curriculum, instruction, and achievement goals. This has been supported by other studies particularly from the western literature (European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2016; Jimerson & Childs, 2017; Watkins et al., 2021). On the other hand, data-driven practices in education can also be influenced by the policy of a country. Policy can provide pressure, set targets for schools, and assist them in making decisions (Lai & Schildkamp, 2013). Hence, for data-driven practices to be more efficient, a well-designed policy needs to be in place.

In Europe, some countries such as Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands have advanced educational innovation by adopting learning analytics strategies that integrate infrastructure and competence centres into their national policies. However, most countries in Europe have yet to adopt national regulations or guidelines governing data ethics in schools (Chen & Liu, 2015; Mandinach et al., 2015; Steinmann et al., 2016) Nouri et al. (2019) found that there is emerging research on ethical concerns of learning analytics in Austria and Norway. For instance, Austria's strict data protection laws require that de-identification of data and other obstacles be addressed before learning analytics can be implemented in schools (Leitner et al., 2019). A review of existing national policies on massive open online courses (MOOCs) in Norway revealed a need for increased information security of consenting users after examining student behaviour and attitudes towards privacy (Slade et al., 2019).

By reviewing the implementation of current policies and envisioning future reforms, countries can improve the quality, access, equality of opportunity, effectiveness, efficiency, and competitiveness of their education systems (Vasquez-Martinez et al., 2013). It is important to note that data autonomy should not only be limited to the principal's authority to make decisions based on data, but it should also encompass informed-autonomy privacy, which refers to an individual's capacity to handle data while also obtaining consent to protect personal information while maintaining privacy and ethics (Fracassi & Magnuson, 2021).

If Malaysia were to adopt clearer policies and regulations regarding data use in education, it could benefit in a number of ways. For one, it could improve the efficiency of data-driven practices in education. Additionally, clear policies could help address any ethical concerns related to the use of data in education, such as the protection of personal information and privacy. Finally, well-designed policies could improve the quality, access, equality of opportunity, effectiveness, efficiency, and competitiveness of Malaysia's education system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current research on school data use practices in Europe highlights the importance of a comprehensive and well-designed policy framework in facilitating data-driven decision-making in education. The findings suggest that the level of autonomy schools have in a country can greatly affect how data is used, and that greater autonomy can lead to more effective data-driven decision-making. However, data-driven practices can also be influenced by a country's policy, and it is important for policymakers to ensure that a sensible policy is in place to guide the use of data in education.

In the context of Malaysian education, there is a need for a similar policy framework to support data-driven decision-making in schools. A continuation of the present Blueprint by granting schools greater autonomy could be a step in the right direction (Lee & Samuel, 2020). Further research is needed to develop a contextual policy framework based on previous studies' recommendations. Despite the obstacles and limitations in the existing policy implementation, it is important for policymakers at the MOE to explore new policy directions that incorporate teachers' experiences and sensemaking of data-driven practices (Anderson et al., 2015). A sensemaking perspective suggests how to resolve ambiguity and build shared meanings (Coburn, 2005; Rigby, 2015; Sutherland, 2020) in order to achieve the targets set by past and present policies. By taking these recommendations into account and designing a comprehensive policy framework, Malaysia can improve the quality, access, equality of opportunity, effectiveness, efficiency, and competitiveness of its education system.

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Researching Chinese Students in the UK – the Use of Ethnography in Social Media Studies

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Abstract

The growing prevalence of digital media has led to an increasing number of studies investigating its role in people's lives. Traditionally, ethnographers go to the fieldsite physically to understand people and their culture. Now, with a large amount of social interaction taking place online, ethnographers have also began attempting to use digital methods to understand people's online practices, interactions, and cultural production. This paper documents both online and offline ethnographic methods employed in a pilot study that set out to understand the ways that Chinese students portray their lives on social media when studying at UK universities. With a focus on in-depth reflections on methodologies and data collection processes, this paper aims to provide a point of reference for researchers who are interested in doing ethnography in the digital field.

Keywords: *social media, (digital) ethnography, methodology, fieldwork*

Introduction

Previous literature has often used quantitative methods to analyse people's social media behaviours and how it relates to other factors, such as their mental health and learning abilities (such as Ivie et al., 2020; Sharma & Behl, 2022). Yet, to understand people's subjective experiences of their interactive engagement with social media, it is necessary to apply qualitative methods to explore the process of their meaning-making. In recent years ethnographers who traditionally use observation and interviews in the physical field have now started to apply digital methods to understand online culture and people's digital lives. This paper has described, analysed and evaluated both online and offline ethnographic methods used in a pilot study conducted at Durham University in 2022. In particular, this paper focused on the researcher's reflections of applying both online and offline methods in studying people's social media use with the aim of offering some references for researchers who are interested in doing ethnography in the digital field.

Living and studying abroad can be both fascinating and challenging (Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016). Chinese students' lived experiences in western society can be significantly different from their previous years of living in China (Hansen, 2015). Social media is usually considered a platform not only for social networking but also for self-presentation and identity construction when people selectively share certain aspects of their lives (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). Against this backdrop, my research question is to understand *how Chinese students studying in UK universities use social media as a self-presentation tool*. This pilot study aims to investigate the ways in which Chinese students portray their lives of studying abroad on social media. Ethnographic fieldwork was used to explore their online and offline practices with a focus on their self-presentation on social media in the process of intercultural adaptation in the UK. In this paper, the research process is first detailed, including the methods used in the study and ethical considerations, followed by a brief report on research findings. More discussion is centred on methodological reflection and finally a conclusion is presented.

Pilot study – Using Ethnography

Ethnography offers an excellent framework to understand cultural practices and complexities in a visceral and sensory way (Markham, 2018). A distinctive feature of doing ethnography, as opposed to other methods, is to study people's behaviours in a natural setting rather than under a condition created by the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Also, the nature of ethnographic research is usually exploratory and is characterised by thick description on the

cultural phenomenon being studied (Geertz, 1973). With the aim of understanding Chinese students' lived experiences in the UK and the localised meanings of their online posts, ethnography is considered the appropriate approach to achieve research goals.

In light of the "embedded, embodied and everyday" internet in people's lives (Hine, 2015), the research field site is no longer restricted to the physical and bounded sites that traditional ethnographers used to attend to. Instead of studying the digital space alone, the online and offline fields are usually viewed as a large blended field (Bluteau, 2021) and the field site can also become a field flow which is organised around tracing relationships and interconnections across different environments (Hine, 2000). Assuming that young people's cultural and social life is a continuous virtual-real experiences (Bennett, 2020; Wilson, 2006) and online materials are often decontextualised (Lane, 2016), the integration of both offline and online methods is considered desirable for a comprehensive understanding of the relations between their online and offline practices.

Convenience and snowball sampling were used for recruiting Chinese students who were doing Postgraduate Taught programs at Durham University at that time. The researcher firstly contacted eight students who she had met before. All of them agreed to participate. Because of the imbalanced gender ratio, the researcher asked one male student to introduce some of his male friends. Finally, three male students and seven female students were recruited for this study.

There are three phases of data collection in this study. First, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were firstly conducted at participants' convenience. Before the interviews, the researcher explained the purpose of their study and made the request of following all of their social media accounts (including Chinese and western platforms). Interview questions revolved around their social media use and lived experience in Durham. Follow-up questions were also asked based on their answers. All interviews lasted between 40 minutes to one hour.

Second, the researcher conducted two-week online observation by tracking participants' online activities across various social media platforms (some only had one account while others used multiple platforms). The researcher read their online posts every day, took screenshots and interacted with them by "liking" and "commenting" which also helped to build rapport. When something they shared online was unclear or confusing, the researcher would message them and ask for more contextual information and clarification. Preliminary data analysis was then

conducted for informing appropriate fieldwork activities (Spradley, 1980; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The third stage involved offline participant observation. Some social events were deliberately chosen which were often shared on their social media as highlights of their life in the UK, such as college formal dinner, outdoor activities and parties with friends. Observing and participating in their social activities brought several opportunities for informal conversations and group discussion. Fieldnotes were written at the end of the day.

Ethics

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including their consent on accessing to their social media profiles and posts. It was made clear to participants that they could withdraw from the study at any point without explanations. Besides, protecting participants' privacy and identities is a key ethical issue in social science research (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001). Compared to offline contexts, ensuring anonymity is more challenging in relation to the publication of online data (Dawson, 2014) as search engines can be very effective in tracing the online content back to its origins (Zimmer, 2010). Therefore, it is particularly important to minimise the searchability of online data, e.g., direct quotations from their online posts should be avoided (Fenton & Parry, 2022). One possible solution is to paraphrase what they have said online without changing the initial intended meanings (Robinson & Schulz, 2011). Nevertheless, most of the textual posts written by the participants in this study were in Chinese, it is thus less problematic if the results are reported in English while making sure their original meanings have been delivered with accuracy.

While removing all personal identifiers in research outputs can ensure external confidentiality, there is a possibility that research subjects can identity each other due to the sampling strategies and small number of samples in this study (Tolich, 2004). Therefore, all data collected has to be held in the strictest confidence and the results should be reported in a general and conclusive way rather than in the format of individual narratives. Furthermore, the researcher has to keep alert when having casual conservations with participants to avoid revealing any personal information.

Researcher's access to online data depends on their participants' privacy settings on social media platforms. When one decides to publish something, very often they are able to choose who can view this particular post (e.g., sharing with everyone or selected contacts). While researchers would like to have access to all of their participants' online activities, it is important

to respect their participants' privacy and their choices of whom they want to share their online content with. It is likely that the researcher can only access to part of their participants' online presentation. It is also possible that people craft their online presentation because of the presence of the researcher. Building rapport and trust with participants is thus essential for gaining rich and trustworthy data. Participants in this study were told that they were expected to let the researcher access everything they have shared on social media but they did not have to if they had any concerns. All participants in this study indicated that they were happy to share everything with the researcher. However, this can be a challenge for researchers who are not familiar with any of their participants and thus need much more time to develop relationships and mutual trust.

Results

Data for this study consisted of interview transcripts, participants' online posts and the researcher's fieldnotes. While reporting research results is not the focus of this paper, some key themes were identified and will be outlined here.

1) Temporality

The temporary mode of living plays an important role in Chinese students' choices of online posts. One participant posted on her social media every day since she came to the UK aiming to keep a record of all key moments of her life abroad. Another participant was a vlogger (video content producer) and she mentioned that she did not take videos in her own place in China due to privacy concerns but now in Durham she did not worry that too much as her accommodation was a "temporary home".

2) Food, independency, and connections

"Cooking and food" is one distinct theme of people's online posts. Many participants shared photos of either cooking Chinese food or eating out in restaurants. For Chinese students who had not known how to cook before they came to the UK, cooking is a new skill they have learned and an important symbol of independence. In addition, getting together to have Chinese meals is usually seen as important social occasions for Chinese students, particularly at Chinese traditional festivals.

3) Embracing local landscape and cultural activities

Students often share natural and cultural landscape such as sunset, churches, museums and castles in the UK or other places when they travel around. Photos of them attending local

cultural activities are also commonly seen on their social media as a representation of their cultural experiences in the UK such as going to college formals, Bonfire events, and Christmas parties.

4) Richness and superiority: "upper-class" lifestyle

Despite their varied level of engagement with social media, a majority of their online posts have represented and reflected a "positive" and "colourful" life. One participant talked about the stereotype of "Chinese students studying abroad"- who are often rich, have lots of freedom and travel a lot. Sharing a "positive image" of their lived experience abroad is also a presentation or proof to their parents that it is worth the money that they have invested in them. Some people felt delighted when receiving comments such as "upper class", "posh", and "sophisticated" from their friends back home. Compared to their peers, these students in the UK have the privilege to experience the so-called "superior" and "upper-class" lifestyles in the western society in many Chinese people's view. Thus, some students also expressed their concern that their frequent "showing-off" would annoy other people on their social media.

Methodological reflection

Compared to other methods especially those featuring standardised data collection procedures, ethnography is distinctive for its emphasis on researchers' "being there" and immersing themselves in the setting, which enables them to hear their participants' voices and understand their culture and ways of living through their own perspectives (Hine, 2015). Therefore, instead of attempting to produce objective accounts, the researcher's participation and interpretation of the context is an essential element of ethnographic studies. A more "objective" method that tries to minimise the effect of researchers in the study is probably able to provide a broad overview of Chinese students' online presentations through categorisation and computational analysis. However, this kind of approach is unlikely to gain contextualised and in-depth knowledge of their interactive engagement with digital platforms and the logic of choice of their online sharing. Ethnography has thus been adopted in this study with the aim of understanding this group of students in a visceral and sensory way (Markham, 2017). Nevertheless, applying both online and offline methods does not mean that researchers are able to trace every aspect of their participants' behaviours and digital engagement. In order to obtain a more nuanced understanding of individual feelings and experiences in digital social contexts, Markham (2017) proposed an alternative approach - to train her participants to become autoethnographers. Although it helps obtain rich data which may not be accessible by other

methods, it requires a high level of commitment from participants as well as much more time and dedication from researchers, which may not be practical for pilot or short-term studies.

Ethnography is usually viewed as an adaptive approach which means the ethnographer is required to adjust their research strategies based on their emerging understandings of the context (Atkinson, 2007; Hine, 2015). Originally, I planned to do another round of interviews after online and offline observations, but later I found that I did not have the time to do that and alternatively I could just ask questions during the fieldwork. Also, I went grocery shopping with one of my participants in an attempt to observe his daily activities, but it turned out that the walking interview I did on the way was more useful than observing how he shopped in a grocery store. It is therefore important and necessary for ethnographers to be flexible and adjust their plans accordingly.

In all social science studies, especially ethnography where lots of interaction between researchers and participants take place, the researchers' role and positionality should be critically examined in terms of how it would potentially affect the knowledge production process (Davies, 2007). In this study, my identity as a member of the research group has both brought advantages and challenges. Firstly, participants recruitment was not difficult as I had already known some Chinese students and I could also ask them to recommend their friends. Also, sharing the same identity as Chinese students to a large extent has brought us closer naturally. Therefore, gaining access to the field, which is often seen as a challenge for many ethnographic studies (Gobo, 2008), turned out to be relatively easy for the researcher. However, as an "insider", it is necessary to reflect on to what extent my assumptions and preconceived notions have potentially shaped the approach to my research, including how the interviewing questions are structured and which is perceived as "significant" to be written down in my fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2001). One key ethnographic challenges is to balance potential insider positioning and the stranger perspective (Dyck, 2000; Miller & Glassner, 2004). While being an "insider" has helped me develop empathetic relationships with my participants and reconstruct their accounts from their point of view (Baszanger & Dodier, 2004), it is likely that I may have taken some phenomena or useful insights for granted as I was working in a familiar territory. In addition, being a female researcher has also affected my relationships with participants. It was quite evident that female students were more open to me and accepted me as an observer of part of their lives while males seemed reluctant or hesitated to share very personal feelings. I also found it awkward when a guy asked me if I was going to enter his room to "observe him". Alternative interpretations could be expected if the study is

conducted by a non-Chinese or male researcher, yet I would argue that it would not make my interpretations less valuable by acknowledging my own positionality and limitations.

As a novice researcher, I was very excited about going to the "field", interacting with my participants and staying in the setting for as long as possible to collect as much data, which leads to the 'it's all happening elsewhere' syndrome (Atkinson, 2007). Consequently, there was not much time left for me to reflect on what I have done and the implications for next steps. While being engaged in their lives is important for obtaining rich data, it is equally important to leave time for reflections and initial data analysis for further adjustments. In addition, the timing of data collection can also affect the kind of data one is able to collect (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). When I started data collection, the Epiphany Term at Durham University had ended, and students were having their Easter break. As a result, I did not have the opportunity to follow their daily routines, i.e., going to their classes, workshops or campus events etc. A nine-month ethnographic study from September/October when most of the Chinese students arrive in the UK until the summertime of the next year when they finish their studies would be preferable. Additionally, knowledge is co-produced by the researcher and their participants in ethnography and more creative collaboration could be explored in the digital research process (Pink et al., 2016). One of my participants was a vlogger but she went travelling during my study. Otherwise, I would be very interested in observing the process of her video production and even co-produce media content with her to gain in-depth understanding of their digital engagement.

A final note is related to the researcher's privacy. I have followed all my participants' social media accounts to trace their online activities as part of my data collection, which also made myself "exposed" to them as I used my personal social media accounts. To protect the researcher's privacy, creating a new research account instead of using personal accounts could be a strategic solution (Robinson & Schulz, 2009). Besides that, one of my participants shared a group photo of us (including me and his friends) on his social media without asking me for permission although it was not shared in the "public space" and only visible to his friends. Nevertheless, I should have expected this to be happening as I purposely chose to participate in these "fun activities". As for most ethnographic studies, it is important to build long-term researcher-participant relationships and researchers may always have to negotiate these issues with their participants in the process of interaction.

Conclusion

Ethnography is distinctive in that it is able to offer an excellent framework to understand a complex cultural phenomenon (Markham, 2017). Before conducting the study, I had been "observing" this phenomenon for over one year since I was a master's student in the UK. Yet, observing their online activities as a "researcher" is different from my previous "observation" in mundane lives in that it involves a more systematic approach for the purpose of answering the research question (Atkinson, 2007). It has been a challenge for me to shift my role from a social media user to a researcher and critically analyse the subsequent data. The purpose of my study is not to detail individual narratives only but to study a broader class of phenomena of Chinese students studying abroad and their characteristics (Williams, 2000) based on the assumption that this group of people share collective consciousness (Baszanger & Dodier, 2004). Although Dodier and Motlow (1995) argued that individuals may not behave in ways according to a common cultural framework in digitalised society, the results of this study have demonstrated some collective self-presentation on social media platforms.

The value of ethnography is not limited to making sense of the social world, but reflected in its implications (Atkinson, 2007; Markham, 2017), which in my case can be providing useful insights for Chinese students who plan to pursue studies abroad as well as international offices in UK universities. While doing ethnography can be a very time-consuming process, both the researcher and their participants are able to benefit from the study. For me, the experience and reflection of doing fieldwork I gained from this study is very helpful for developing methodology for my own PhD research. Also, some participants mentioned that their participation was therapeutic by having the opportunities to talk, share and reflect. Although my research focused on Chinese students' online presentations, their personal narratives have also revealed some other interesting aspects such as their perspectives on social networking and relationships, the advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad, their attitudes towards western culture. These can not only facilitate my understanding of their online self-presentation but can potentially provide suggestions for future research.

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