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MAPPING CIVIC VALUES IN SRI LANKAN SECONDARY SCHOOL CIVICS TEXTBOOKS (GRADES 6–9): A SYSTEMATIC DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

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Abstract

While textbooks are the most important tool for passing on citizenship values to youth, the civic values included in Sri Lankan secondary school curricula remain under-researched. This systematic document analysis examines four state-published Civics Education textbooks for Grades 6 to 9, issued by the Educational Publications Department, Sri Lanka. The study uses Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) framework of citizenship orientations and Hanna's (1963) concentric circles model to discuss: (a) which civic values are highlighted in each grade, (b) how civic complexity deepens as students move through grades, and (c) what key civic gaps appear at each level. Results show a consistent and sequenced curriculum that begins with the individual and the school in Grade 6, moves to family and culture in Grade 7, then to national democratic institutions in Grade 8, and finally to political systems, local government, and conflict resolution in Grade 9. Civic values such as responsibility, respect, discipline, and ethnic harmony are consistently highlighted, while political knowledge is strengthened in the higher grades. However, the analysis reveals limited emphasis on critical civic agency, gender equality, social justice, and meaningful democratic participation skills across all four grade levels, reflecting a tendency toward compliance-oriented citizenship education found in other Asian postcolonial contexts. These findings have implications for curriculum renewal, teacher development, and civic education policy in Sri Lanka and South Asia.

Keywords

civic values; citizenship education; textbook analysis; document analysis; Sri Lanka; curriculum studies; South Asia; multicultural education

1. INTRODUCTION

Textbooks have a privileged role in the civic formation of students, not only as teaching tools but also as ideological products representing state sanctioned visions of the good citizen (Apple, 1992; Pingel, 2010). As such, civic education textbooks analysis serves as a valuable lens on the political and moral assumptions that are both invisible in the formal teaching of citizenship and legitimate within the institutional structures of citizenship education.

Sri Lanka is a particularly interesting situation to analyses. It is a postcolonial, multiethnic island state, coming out of a long-standing civil war (1983-2009) and faces drastic problems concerning national identity, social cohesion, democratic legitimacy and multicultural citizenship.

These tensions have resulted in continual political contestation, curriculum changes, and scholarly debate concerning civic education (Gallagher, 2016; Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). However, systematic scholarly focus on the Civic Education subject and the textbooks that comprise its key core has been limited in Sri Lanka, which is where the subject is taught as compulsory in all the government schools from Grade 6 to 11.

This paper fills this gap by systematically analyzing four state published Civic Education textbooks (Grades 6-9) from Educational Publications Department of Sri Lanka using the document analysis method. Three interrelated concerns motivate the research.

There is a need first for an empirical report on the civic values being transmitted through the official curriculum as a baseline for the evaluation and reform of the curriculum. Theory is a second line of interest in exploring the ways in which a postcolonial, multicultural society organizes the development of civic knowledge from grade to grade. Third, there is a practical issue, based on the researcher's experience as a government school teacher of Civics Education, relating to the extent to which the present textbooks prepare students with the civic skills required for the modern democratic life.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: What civic values are depicted in the secondary school Civic Education textbooks of Sri Lanka (Grades 6-9)?
- RQ2: What are the changes of civic knowledge, values, and complexity at each of the four grade levels?
- RQ3: What are the gaps and/or limitations in civic values depicted throughout the curriculum?

This study has threefold importance. Empirically, it gives a systematic cross-grade analysis of the Sri Lankan Civics textbooks, which has not been done in the scholarly literature so far. In theory, it makes a contribution to comparative citizenship education scholarship with respect to postcolonial and multicultural Asian contexts. In a pragmatic sense it offers

recommendations for textbooks revision and teacher professional development on the basis of evidence in Sri Lanka.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Textbook Analysis in Civic Education Research

Textbooks systematic analysis in the realm of education research is not a new thing. Content analysis, critical discourse analysis and document analysis have been used to analyses the construction and representation of knowledge, social groups, normalization of ideological stances and the transmission of civic values in textbooks (Pingel, 2010; Vickers & Jones, 2005). More specifically in the field of civic and citizenship education, textbook analyses have been undertaken in various countries and continents (e.g., Ethiopia: Anawoke & Engida 2024; China: Weninger 2018; Malaysia: Tan 2018; Indonesia: Print 2007), and the overall trends are fairly similar: states use textbooks to shape citizen identity.

One theme that emerges from this literature is that in many national settings, civic education textbooks emphasize social conformity, national unity, and obeying authority, rather than critical civic engagement and democratic participation (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Journell, 2011). Such textbooks often perform what Agbaria (2011) calls 'hegemonic citizenship'—citizenship that is based on loyalty, compliance and cultural assimilation but not critical agency and democratic deliberation.

Recent evidence provides further support for this trend and helps to elucidate its mechanisms. The 109 studies reviewed in Jerome et al. (2024) indicate that the nature of the pedagogical activity, in addition to the content of the textbook, is important for shaping civic dispositions, with studies showing that pedagogical approaches that evoke active dispositions are more likely to foster such dispositions. In a postcolonial context very similar to Sri Lanka, Obiagu (2024) discovered that civics teachers in Nigeria, like those in Sri Lanka, tend to have personally responsible and communitarian views on citizenship, and that the justice-oriented conception of citizenship is not prioritized — meaning that the textbook compliance bias is commonly reproduced and not counterbalanced in the classroom enactment of civics.

2.2. Citizenship Orientations: A Theoretical Framework

This work is based on Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) powerful typology of citizenship orientations. Based on empirical research on civic education programmes in the United States, they identify three types of citizenship that can be nurtured through civic education: (1) the personally responsible citizen, who follows rules, pays taxes, and acts honestly; (2) the participatory citizen, who actively engages in the life of the community and civic institutions; and (3) the justice-oriented citizen, who critically examines social structures, challenges

injustice, and advocates for systemic change. These three orientations lie on a spectrum of civic involvement ranging from passive compliance to active efforts of transformation.

This model is especially fruitful for the study of civic education in postcolonial countries, where the traditional focus of civic education has been on values of social harmony and national unity, all of which point towards the concept of the personally responsible citizen, but not on participatory or justice-oriented civic competencies (Kennedy, 2008; Bajaj, 2012). This framework is used here as an analytical lens to examine civil society orientation that can be found in the Sri Lankan Civics textbooks.

2.3. The Concentric Circles Curriculum Model

Often, the structure of civic education curricula is interpreted in the sense of the 'expanding environments' or concentric circles model first proposed by Hanna (1963), which has been widely used in Asian curriculum design. This model suggests that civic education should start with the closest social setting of the student (self and family) and gradually move out to the community, the nation, and the world. The model is based on a developmental rationale: civic ideas that can be related to children's immediate and local experiences are the most meaningful.

The concentric circles model has been very influential, but it has received a good deal of criticism. Children's ability to think abstractly about civic issues is underestimated by the model and their passive attitude toward citizenship – learning about prevailing social structures, not challenging or changing them – is reinforced by the model, according to Brophy and Alleman (2006). This critique is especially relevant in the context of Sri Lankan where the flow from self to school to family to nation evokes the questions as to when the students are given a chance to critically question these environments.

2.4. Civic Education in South and Southeast Asia

Studies on civic education in Asian postcolonial contexts are always marked by the ambivalence between the state's need for social cohesion and national unity, and democratic aspirations for critical citizens and active participation (Kennedy, 2008; Print, 2007). Research in India (Bajaj, 2012), Singapore (Sim & Print, 2009), Indonesia (Wahab, 2010) and Malaysia (Tan, 2018) has also shown that civic education curricula in these countries focus on civic roles and social conformity while civic rights and critical agency are minimized.

Sri Lanka has a unique place in this regional context. Its diverse multiethnic and multireligious population (Sinhalese 74.9%, Tamil 12.6%, Muslim 9.7%, others) and its political context, as a post-conflict state, present specific challenges and opportunities for civic education. Lately, starting after 2009, there is again policy debate about the potential of civic education to serve as a tool for reconciliation and social cohesion (Gallagher, 2016),

but there has been no systematic study of how much or how little of these functions is apparent in the content of the official textbooks.

The gendered aspect of this question has been a focus in recent work. In the context of the present study, the Grade 9 Civic Education textbook has been analyzed and, according to Emerson and Kovinthan Levi (2021), the nation-building syllabus in Pakistan and Sri Lanka generalizes the traditional stereotype of gender in which the protection of the physical boundaries of the state is reserved for men while women are responsible for protecting the moral and cultural integrity of the state. This body of work offers an important basis for juxtaposing the current study's result (in Section 4.4) that gender equality does not appear as an explicit civic value in any of the four textbooks.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The study takes qualitative approach where document analysis is used as the methodological approach (Bowen, 2009). Such a method was judged to be the most suitable and feasible one for the research problem under study because the study aims to analyses the civic values in the official curriculum materials, not the behaviors, attitudes or experiences of human participants.

Qualitative research, in general, is interested in meaning, in how something is created, represented and understood in the specific social and institutional context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenon to be studied in this research is the construction of civic identity in the official textbook content.

The analytical approach is based on critical content analysis in educational research (Krippendorff, 2018; Morgan, 1993). Critical content analysis is more than a count of frequencies or surface description of the content in text, but engages with how ideas are expressed in the text, the underlying assumptions, who is represented, and, importantly, what is missing or absent. This is especially important when looking at the analysis of civic education materials, in which civic values are not necessarily portrayed in a neutral way, but are impacted by state priorities, political contexts, and dominant social ideologies (Pingel, 2010).

The researcher has a unique insider positionality in relation to this study as a practicing government school teacher of Civics Education in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan schooling context, first-hand experiences of the use of these textbooks in classroom teaching and personal experiences with the civic values introduced in the textbooks served as valuable interpretive resources throughout the analysis.

In order to minimize the possibility of preconceptions influencing the interpretation, the researcher kept a reflective journal throughout the analytical process. This reflexivity practice

aligns with the trustworthiness criteria put forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985), who assert that reflexive journalling is a crucial way of improving the credibility of qualitative findings.

3.2. *Data Sources*

The main sources of primary data are four Sri Lankan government secondary school textbooks of Civic Education, which are published by the Educational Publications Department under the authority of the Ministry of Education and are provided free of charge to all the secondary school students in the government schools. Table 1 below gives an overview of the four textbooks analyzed.

Table 1. Overview of Textbooks Analyzed

Grade	Central Theme	Chapters	Pages	Print Year
Grade 6	Self, School, and Local Region	3	102	2019 (6th print)
Grade 7	Family, Society, and Culture	3	122	2019 (5th print)
Grade 8	Democracy, Public Services, and Work	6	150	2019 (4th print)
Grade 9	Governance, Conflict, and Technology	6	172	2019 (3rd print)

Note. All textbooks published by the Educational Publications Department, Government of Sri Lanka.

3.3. *Analytical Procedure*

The analytical process was conducted in three stages: firstly, using a three-phase document analysis framework proposed by Bowen (2009), with additional dimensions taken from principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and critical content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018).

Stage One: Preliminary Skimming and Familiarization

The initial phase was a detailed reading of entire four textbooks. This phase was not started with an initial coding scheme, but rather with an open and exploratory approach that aligned with the inductive approach recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Each textbook was read as an integrated text that was attentive to the propositional content but also to the organization of the textbook, the order of the topics, the use of a storytelling approach, the kind of activities it offers students, the assumptions it makes about learners and citizens as part of its pedagogy. Initial observations were made in a reflective research journal which documented, not only what was in each textbook, but what seemed to be missing.

Stage Two: Development and Application of the Coding Framework

The second stage was the elaboration of a thematic coding system and systematic application of the thematic coding system to all four textbooks. The coding framework has developed using a combination of both deductive and inductive approaches (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

The theoretical codes were used to create deductive codes related to the theoretical frameworks guiding the study, namely citizenship orientations—Westheimer and Kahne (2004), and existing codes from civic education scholarship. Inductive codes were generated from the data in the preliminary reading phase.

After coding, eight thematic categories emerged: civic values and moral formation; rights and responsibilities; democratic knowledge and political literacy; multicultural and intercultural understanding; environmental and sustainability awareness; civic participation and civic agency; world of work and economic citizenship; gaps and silences.

Stage Three: Interpretive Analysis and Cross-Grade Comparison

This third stage was a transition from the coded data to larger interpretive conclusions regarding the patterns, progressions, tensions and absences found across the four textbooks.

All four books were coded, and the resulting data were created in a comparative matrix in which the presence or absence of each civic theme at each grade level could be simultaneously visualized.

The interpretive analysis then drew on the theoretical frameworks to theories the patterns identified, paying special attention to the relationship between what was explicitly present in the textbooks and what was conspicuously missing.

3.4. Trustworthiness and Limitations

The credibility and consistency of the analysis was ensured by coding the framework before the analysis and systematically using it in all four textbooks. Member checking was done through a process of discussing preliminary findings with a Civics Education colleague for verification.

The main drawback of this study is the fact that it is based on the intended curriculum only, represented in the official textbook and that enacted or experienced curriculum is not looked into. Future research is needed to fill this gap by using classroom observation and student interview methods.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Structural Organization and Curricular Progression

The four textbooks show a logical and sequential organization based on the concentric circles model of civic education (Hanna, 1963). The civic perspective progresses from immediate to more distant social contexts from grade to grade as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Civic Scope Progression Across Grades

Grade	Primary Civic Focus	Civic Environment
Grade 6	Self-identity, school community, local administration	Self → School → Village
Grade 7	Family structures, social institutions, cultural identity	Family → Society → Culture
Grade 8	Democratic processes, public services, world of work	State → Nation → Economy
Grade 9	Political systems, local governance, conflict, technology	Polity → Global → Future

One of the more remarkable aspects of structure is the significant rise in the complexity of the curriculum from Grade 8 upwards. The Grade 6 and 7 each have three chapters, the main emphasis being on moral and social values in familiar social settings.

There are now 6 chapters in each grade (8 and 9), twice as many, which cover significantly more complex civic, political and global concepts. The number of pages increases from 102 in grade 6 to 172 in grade 9 (a 68.6% increase) as the amount of content increases.

This structural change implies a developmental sequence in which moral socialization occurs first and then political education is imparted, a sequence that is typical of the worldwide pattern in designing civic curricula (Kerr, 1999), but that also raises some questions: When do students have their first experiences of critical civic agency?

4.2. Civic Values Identified Across Grades

4.2.1. Values Present Across All Four Grade Levels

There are four civic values that are found throughout the grade 6 to 9 curriculum and are prominent:

- Responsibility and duty: There is a lot of material in each textbook about individual responsibilities and duties in each context, always presented as in relation to rights.
- Respect for authority and elders: Narrative examples, role model profiles and explicit instruction on respect for authority and elders are included across all four grade levels.
- Discipline and law-abidingness: Students are constantly encouraged to obey rules and regulations in any social setting and discipline is regarded as a virtue and a civic duty.

– Honesty and moral integrity: Moral values (truthfulness, integrity, and ethical conduct) are always emphasized, with narrative examples, cautionary stories, and explicit character development content.

4.2.2. Values That Deepen and Expand Across Grades

There are several civic values that are taught in earlier grades and continue to grow as the course moves forward:

– Ethnic and religious harmony: Although this topic is introduced in Grade 7, it receives significant attention in Grade 8 – where the term 'multicultural society' is introduced, and there is an analysis of data on ethnic distribution in Sri Lanka, and explicit promotion of 'intercultural respect'; and in Grade 9, when conflict resolution and political pluralism are covered.

– Rights awareness: In Grade 6, students are introduced to the concept of rights within the school context, in Grade 7, their rights are extended to civil and political rights, in Grade 8 they are referred to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in Grade 9, their rights are based on constitutional provisions.

– Democratic values: A few references to democratic values are made in Grade 7, but this is sustained and detailed in Grades 8 and 9, where the concepts of direct and indirect democracy, universal franchise, constitutional governance, the role of opposition and judicial sovereignty are discussed.

4.2.3. Values Introduced Only in Upper Grades

Some more complex civic concepts are only introduced in Grades 8 or 9, marking an intentional sequence in the development of ideas:

– Political literacy: Grade 9 is the only grade in the curriculum to include instruction on the political party systems (single party, bi-party, and multi-party), the role of political parties and the institutions of local government.

– Conflict resolution: Grade 9 has a separate chapter on conflict resolution which includes what constitutes conflict, types of conflict, formal conflict resolution (mediation board, judicial inquiry) and qualities of a constructive conflict resolver.

– Technology and sustainable development: only in grade 9 the question of the impact of technological change on the economy, society and environment is discussed in the context of sustainable development.

Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the presence and depth of civic values across all four grade levels.

Table 3. Civic Values Presence Matrix (Grades 6–9)

Civic Value / Concept	G6	G7	G8	G9
Responsibility and duty	✓	✓	✓	✓
Respect for authority and elders	✓	✓	✓	✓
Discipline and law-abidingness	✓	✓	✓	✓
Honesty and moral integrity	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ethnic and religious harmony	—	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Environmental awareness	Partial	—	✓	✓✓
Rights awareness	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Democratic values	—	Partial	✓✓	✓✓
Political parties and systems	—	—	—	✓✓
Local government and governance	—	—	—	✓✓
Conflict resolution skills	—	—	—	✓✓
Technology and social change	—	—	—	✓✓
UN Child Rights (UNCRC)	—	—	✓	✓
World of work / civic economy	—	—	✓	✓✓
Media literacy	—	✓	✓	✓
Critical civic agency / advocacy	—	—	—	—
Gender equality	—	—	—	—

Note. ✓= present; ✓✓= major focus; — = absent; Partial = incidental mention. Bottom two rows indicate values absent across all grades.

4.3. *Pedagogical Approaches and Role Models*

It is not only that the four textbooks are different in content, but that they also represent a sequential development in the assumptions of how civic learning is to take place.

Grade 6 is the most activity rich, and features over a quarter of the activities that are explicitly identified within the grade level and across the standards and are broadly constructivist in their approach to civic learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Dewey, 1916).

In Grade 7, there are "named fictional student characters" that engage in extended dialogic learning through structured classroom conversations, a pedagogical practice that has been well established in civic education where Gutmann (1987) argues that democratic education must itself be democratic in form.

In grades 8 and 9, this dialogic form is increasingly accompanied by analytical schemes, tables of data, legal references, and examples of other countries which allow for analysis from a Piagetian developmental logic (Piaget, 1972). The key pedagogical features for each grade are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Pedagogical Features and Learning Orientations Across Grades

Feature	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9
Primary pedagogical mode	Activity-based	Dialogic	Analytical-dialogic	Analytical-political
Student tasks	24+ explicit	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Use of dialogue	Minimal	Extensive	Moderate	Moderate
Data tables / frameworks	Absent	Minimal	Present	Extensive
Legal / constitutional refs	Absent	Absent	Present	Extensive
International comparisons	Absent	Minimal	Present	Extensive
Dominant learning orientation	Constructivist	Communicative	Analytical	Political-structural

4.3.2. The Role of Biographical Role Model Narratives

A frequent pedagogical feature in all four textbooks is the heavy reliance on biographical role model narratives, long-form descriptions of inspirational people whose lives exemplify the civic virtues the textbooks aim to instill. This approach is representative of the general Confucian approach to moral education around models or exemplars (Kennedy, 2008; Lickona, 1991; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

What is analytically important is the internationalization of role models at all grade levels over time. All role models in Grade 6 are local civic with only two national figures – C.W.W. Kannangara (Father of Free Education) and Senaka Bibile (pharmacologist).

The first international figure is introduced in Grade 7: Wilma Rudolph, the African-American sprinter, is portrayed as self-confident and resilient. Interestingly, the story is about her personal overcoming of disability, with her experience of living in segregated society being completely absent, thus failing to evoke social justice as a civic theme.

In Grade 9, Abraham Lincoln is introduced as the only role model in the four textbooks whose action is related to the dismantling of a structural injustice (abolition of slavery) and not to individual achievement. The curriculum follows a concentric circles approach, with national heroes being the starting point and moving towards global citizens, and this development is progressive.

4.4. Critical Gaps in Civic Values Representation

Despite its logical and sequential development, the analysis reveals important, enduring omissions in civic values depicted in all four textbooks:

- Lack of critical civic agency: Students in all four grades are seldom depicted as civic agents who are able to question and criticize or challenge a society or political system. The curriculum is always designed to produce citizens who are recipients of civic learning and moral development, a 'personally responsible' approach to citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), and not citizens who are participative or justice-oriented.
- Gender equality: No one of the four textbooks mentions the value of gender equality as a civic value and no one critically considers the roles of men and women in the family, school, or community. In the examples of narratives, women are portrayed mostly in domestic and caring capacities. This is not an incidental, but is structurally similar to how gendered visions of citizenship are encoded in the textbooks of the South Asian region, as detailed in the work of Emerson and Kovinthan Levi (2021). This is notable missing relative to the international civic education frameworks and Sri Lanka's responsibilities under the CEDAW and SDGs.
- Social justice and structural inequality: The concepts of poverty, structural discrimination and social justice are hardly dealt with in all four grades. When the concept of economic hardship is mentioned, it is explored on an individual level, with resilience narratives, rather than as a critique of structure – a pattern that reflects Bajaj's (2012) analysis of civic education in South Asian contexts.
- Active democratic participation: Active democratic participation (community organizing, deliberative dialogue, peaceful protest, civic advocacy) is not so prevalent in the curriculum despite the inclusion of voting as a right in Grades 7 and 9.
- Digital citizenship: Digital citizenship (which includes the rights and responsibilities of the digital citizen, social media civic implications, digital literacy, and cybersafe) is superficially discussed in a stand-alone technology chapter that is not connected to other civic expectations.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that Sri Lankan Civic Education curriculum is structurally coherent, developmentally progressive and effective in delivering a clear set of moral and social civic values.

The progression of concentric circles, from self to school, family, society, nation, to global politics (Grades 6–9) is a logical developmental sequence for civic learning, consistent with internationally accepted principles for curriculum design (Kerr, 1999). The underlying

focus on ethnic and religious harmony, which became more prominent in Grade 8 than in Grade 7, is a positive curricular development in response to the imperative for social cohesion and post-conflict reconciliation that has informed Sri Lankan education policy since the post-2009 period (Gallagher, 2016).

But, using the typology of citizenship orientations by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), the curriculum shows a clear and consistent emphasis on the 'personally responsible citizen' (citizen who has duties, respects rules, maintains social order) and not participatory or justice-oriented citizenship orientations.

This bias is not an incidental one, but a structural one: it is reproduced across the four grade levels, through all pedagogies, and is manifested in the absence of content on critical civic agency, gender equality, social justice and active democratic participation. This is a trend that has been seen in other postcolonial Asian contexts (Anawoke & Engida, 2024; Print, 2007; Tan, 2018), and that supports Kennedy's (2008) argument that civic education in many Asian societies is marked by the continuous struggle between democratic aspirations and statist imperatives. It also supports the result of Obiagu (2024) which revealed that the current postcolonial civics teacher has personally responsible rather than justice-oriented conceptions of citizenship, implying that the bias that was identified here at the textbook level is likely to be reinforced, and not corrected, in classroom practice unless it is consciously addressed through teacher professional development.

This is especially notable with regard to the lack of gender perspectives in all four textbooks. Sri Lanka has committed to achieving gender equality in its national and international frameworks, such as CEDAW and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and this is reflected in its constitution.

Its systematic omission from the Civic Education curriculum is implicitly suggestive of the civic experiences that are seen as central—and that in turn implicitly reinforces gender hierarchies that civic education, at its best, should be challenging (Bajaj, 2012). This discovery is consistent with the comparative study of the nation building curricula of Sri Lanka and Pakistan by Emerson and Kovinthan Levi (2021), who conclude that in both countries, women are symbolically linked to cultural and moral ideas, but not necessarily to civic and political roles.

In addition, the paper points to the gradual introduction of more politically sophisticated material in Grades 8 and 9, such as the nature of direct and indirect democracy, constitutional rights, the structure of political parties, local government and the formal processes for conflict resolution as a real curricular strength.

This content gives students the structural "know" to inform their civic engagement. The problem, however, is that this knowledge is delivered declaratively (that is, as content to be learned) and not as a foundation for reflective civic practice. It is instructive to consider the review conducted by Jerome et al. (2024) which indicates that while the declarative content of the curriculum is a reliable producer of civic knowledge gains, experiential and dialogic

approaches are important for learning outcomes of active citizenship, which are largely absent from the upper grade textbooks in Sri Lanka.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For the first time, this study has systematically analysed the Civic Education textbooks of secondary school level (Grades 6 – 9) in Sri Lanka. The analysis shows that the curriculum builds on a logical concentric circles sequence and the delivery of a system of moral and social civic values, such as responsibility, respect, ethnic harmony and democratic knowledge, is effective across the four grade levels. These are significant accomplishments which demonstrate the thoughtful design of the curriculum and a deep commitment to social cohesion in a diverse, post-conflict society.

Yet the analysis also shows that there is a constant and significant disconnect: The curriculum is overwhelmingly focused on personal responsibility and passive citizenship, and critical inquiry, active citizenship, gender-aware citizenship and justice orientation are largely overlooked. This is also a concern for the quality of civic education and in the long term for the health of democratic culture in Sri Lanka.

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that the following activities should be conducted:

– For curriculum developers: Content related to active democratic participation, gender equality as a civic value, social justice, and digital citizenship should be added to the Civics textbooks in the future, with a focus on Grades 6 and 7 where such content is currently not included.

– For teacher educators: teacher training programmes – whether PGDE or in-service – should introduce teachers to the pedagogical skills necessary to complement the content of textbooks with critical inquiry approaches, deliberative discussion and civic action projects led by the students.

– For researchers: More studies are needed to investigate the enacted and experienced curriculum, or how teachers implement these textbooks and how the students are influenced by civic education content. Comparing with other civic education curricula in South Asia would also help to strengthen the evidence base in the region.

Finally, this study offers evidence-based insights based on a postcolonial, multicultural context within Asia – an area that has been underrepresented in comparative civic education scholarship – and thus adds to the international literature on textbook analysis and citizenship education. The results highlight the need to continuously and critically examine official civic education curricula as a prerequisite for developing the type of active democratic citizenship needed by pluralistic societies.

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ARTICLE

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THE NEXUS BETWEEN CULTISM AND ECONOMIC INSTABILITY: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED OGBIA COMMUNITIES IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This research explores the intricate connection between cultism and economic instability within Ogbia communities in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, where cult activities have significantly hindered economic progress and development. Grounded in the Social Learning Theory, which suggests that people learn behaviors and perspectives through observing, imitating, and receiving reinforcement, this research investigates how socioeconomic conditions compel individuals to join cult organizations and the consequent effects of cultism on economic stability. Employing a descriptive survey design along with quantitative methods, this research gathered information from 376 participants across four selected communities. The results indicate that cultism disrupts economic operations, leads to economic instability, and obstructs economic development, with 53.5% of participants agreeing that cultism devastates livelihoods, impedes business functions, and negatively influences agricultural productivity. Moreover, 50.3% of participants cited poverty and unemployment as major socioeconomic factors that drive individuals toward cult membership. The research suggests enforcing stringent law enforcement and punitive actions against cult members and their backers (with 36.2% of participants endorsing this strategy), creating job opportunities and empowerment initiatives for youth (supported by 31.1% of participants), and fostering community involvement and awareness programs. The outcomes of this study hold important implications for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to combat cultism and enhance economic stability in Nigeria. By clarifying the complex interrelation between cultism and economic instability, this study adds to the existing body of knowledge regarding

the socioeconomic effects of cultism in Nigeria and offers useful perspectives for formulating effective methods to counteract its.

Keywords: Cultism, Economic instability, Poverty, Crime.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultism has increasingly become a destructive social issue in Nigeria, severely impacting various aspects of the nation, including its economy. Cultism refers to the practice of joining and operating within a secretive group that involves ritualistic practices for member initiation, with rules and agreements bound by blood ties. In Nigeria, these activities primarily thrive in areas abundant with educational institutions and youth populations. Ajayi (2005 cited Uzoigwe, C. F. & Okoye, O., 2024) asserts that cultism involves ritual participation by individuals or groups whose membership, admission, policies, initiation ceremonies, and activities are conducted in secrecy and are intended to remain concealed, leading to numerous negative outcomes for both the members and the larger community. Originally, cult groups were established for social bonding and cohesion, with rituals and ceremonies kept confidential. The earliest documented activities of cult groups in Nigerian higher education institutions date back to 1952, initiated by an informal cultural organization, with the goal of combating injustice. However, cultism has since transformed into a widespread issue that affects communities across the nation. The emergence of cultism within universities in 1952 marked a significant change, as these groups became more linked to violence and criminal behavior. Currently, the actions of cult groups have debilitating effects on communities, undermining the socioeconomic activities and well-being of the populace (Onoh, 2006 cited in Uzoigwe, C. F. & Okoye, O., 2024).

At present, cultism is closely associated with gangsterism, with members partaking in initiation ceremonies, enacting rules, and engaging in violent confrontations with rival factions. Although the original purpose of cultism was well-meaning, its evolution into a violent issue has wreaked havoc on communities, resulting in property damage, extortion, and loss of lives. Despite attempts to address cultism through legislative measures and law enforcement actions, the problem continues to persist, driven by factors such as peer pressure, insecurity, and societal decay (Nnamdi, 2022). It is also worrisome to note that cultism propels adverse impact on the economy of Nigeria. The dynamic between cultism and economic instability in Nigeria is complex and multidimensional, with cultism contributing to economic instability through brutality, extortion, and disruption of economic activities. According to Uzoigwe and Okoye, (2024), understanding the socioeconomic factors that contribute to cultism and economic instability is vital for developing effective strategies to address these issues and promote sustainable economic growth.

Cultism is often linked to destitution, disparity, and limited opportunities, driving individuals to join cult groups as a means of survival or protection (Adebayo, 2013). Destitution and inadequate guidance are key factors contributing to cultism in Nigeria. The activities of cult groups further exacerbate economic instability by creating fear and uncertainty, deterring investment, and disrupting economic growth.

The menace of cultism is pervasive in Nigeria, affecting most states of the country. Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta is not exclusive. Thus, this study aims to unravel cultism and economic instability in Bayelsa with particular focus on communities in Ogbia Local Government area of the State. It is noteworthy that cultism in Ogbia communities, may be particularly prevalent due to socioeconomic factors like poverty, unemployment, and restricted access to education and employment opportunities. Economic instability in these communities can be attributed to macroeconomic factors like high inflation rates, which erode purchasing power, reduce consumer spending, and lead to economic instability (Blanchard, 2017), and unemployment, which reduces consumer spending and economic growth (Keynes, 1936). Furthermore, political factors, such as corruption, which undermines trust in institutions, hinders economic development, and leads to inefficient allocation of resources (Mauro, 1995), and inadequate regulation, which leads to risky lending practices and speculative bubbles, potentially resulting in economic instability (Stiglitz, 2010), also play a role. Social factors, including income inequality, which leads to financial instability, asset bubbles, and financial market volatility (Piketty, 2014), and poverty, which reduces economic growth and stability, are also significant.

While recent studies provide valuable insights into addressing cultism and economic instability, including research by Sachini et al. (2022), Borlaug and Jungblut (2022), Chen et al. (2023), Shi et al. (2023), and Banal-Estañol et al. (2023), these studies tend to address different and peculiar environment. Thus, this research investigates the intricate connection between cultism and economic instability within Ogbia communities in Nigeria. This is required to understand the specific socioeconomic elements that fuel cultism across various regions in Nigeria. This study intends to enhance existing knowledge by examining how cultism relates to economic instability in Ogbia communities, particularly focusing on factors such as poverty, unemployment, and peer influence. By illuminating the complex interactions of cultism in these communities, this research aims to guide policymakers and stakeholders toward effective approaches for tackling cultism and fostering economic stability. Specifically, the study will:

i. Unravel specific ways in which cultism disrupts economic activities in the selected communities.
ii. Scrutinize how socioeconomic factors like poverty and unemployment intersect with cultism in the communities.
iii. Examine ways cult groups contribute to economic instability in these communities.

iv. Proffer possible interventions or programs that can be implemented to address the root causes of cultism in those communities.

1.1. Literature review

Cultism has undergone significant transformations over the years, evolving from a relatively obscure phenomenon to a pervasive societal issue. Scrutinising the meaning and evolution of cultism reveals a multifaceted phenomenon marked by clandestine behaviour and often violent or extreme propensities. Contemporary scholars, such as Nnamdi (2022) and Agbiboa (2017), posit that cultism embodies a form of organised collective behaviour distinguished by confidentiality, secrecy and exclusionary tendencies. The evolution of cultism has been characterised by a gradual shift from traditional to modern forms, with many contemporary cult groups exhibiting a marked degree of sophistication and organisational complexity. According to Amaka (2021), this shift can be attributed to the increasing influence of globalisation and technological advancements, which have enabled cult groups to expand their reach and operations. Furthermore, the rise of social media has provided cult groups with a platform to recruit new members and disseminate their ideology, thereby contributing to the proliferation of cultism.

In the Nigerian context, cultism has been linked to a range of negative outcomes, including violence, crime and social instability (Omede, 2016). The proliferation of cult groups in educational institutions, in particular, has been a cause for concern, with many scholars arguing that it reflects a broader crisis of values and socialisation (Eze, 2020). Cultism can disrupt the learning environment and create a culture of fear and intimidation, thereby undermining the academic achievement and well-being of students (Ejiofor, 2021). The impact of cultism on individuals and society is multifaceted and far-reaching. Cultism can lead to physical harm, emotional trauma and reputational damage. According to Ejiofor (2021), cult-related violence in Nigerian schools has led to physical injuries, psychological trauma and even death among students. Researchers have probed the myriad factors driving individuals to affiliate with cult groups, including the quest for authority, safeguarding, pecuniary benefits, power, status and protection (Chiamaka, 2022; Okpewho, 2018). These factors are often linked to broader societal issues, such as poverty, inequality and social dislocation (Giddens, 2019). Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may be more susceptible to cult recruitment due to their desire for protection and economic security (Nnenna, 2023). Additionally, the role of peer pressure and socialisation in cult recruitment has been highlighted, with many individuals joining cult groups as a means of gaining acceptance and belonging.

A critical examination of the evolution of cultism highlights the importance of addressing the root causes of this phenomenon. According to Adesina (2020), this can involve implementing policies and programmes aimed at promoting social inclusion, reducing poverty and inequality and fostering a sense of community and social belonging. Educational

institutions can play a crucial role in preventing cultism by promoting a culture of academic excellence and providing students with positive role models and support networks. Ultimately, addressing cultism will require a multifaceted approach that involves policymakers, practitioners and community stakeholders working together to promote a more stable and secure society. Examining the social, economic, and personal factors driving cult involvement reveals a complex interplay of influences that contribute to an individual's decision to join a cult group. Researchers have identified various factors that predispose individuals to cult involvement, including social dislocation, poverty, and inequality (Giddens, 2019). Additionally, personal factors such as low self-esteem, insecurity, and a desire for protection and economic security can also play a significant role (Nnenna, 2023).

The role of peer pressure and socialisation in cult recruitment has been highlighted, with many individuals joining cult groups as a means of gaining acceptance and belonging. According to Chiamaka (2022), peer influence can be a powerful predictor of cult involvement, particularly among young people. Furthermore, family background and socioeconomic status can also shape an individual's propensity to join a cult group (Ugwuanyi, 2022). Economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, can also contribute to cult involvement. Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may be more susceptible to cult recruitment due to their desire for economic security and protection (Okpewho, 2018). Moreover, cult groups often promise their members economic benefits, protection, and a sense of belonging, which can be attractive to individuals who feel marginalized or excluded from mainstream society. Unemployment plays a crucial role in cult involvement. The lack of job opportunities and meaningful work can drive individuals to join cult groups out of frustration and a desire for purpose. Cult groups often provide their members with a sense of identity and financial stability through illegal activities, which can be attractive to individuals struggling with unemployment. As noted by Okpewho (2018), unemployment can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair, making individuals more vulnerable to cult recruitment.

The interplay between poverty, unemployment, and peer influence can create a complex web of factors that contribute to cultism. For instance, an individual struggling with poverty and unemployment may be more susceptible to peer influence and cult recruitment. According to Ejiofor (2021), cultism is often a symptom of deeper societal issues, such as poverty, inequality, and social dislocation. Other personal factors, such as a desire for authority, power, and status, can also drive cult involvement. According to Ejiofor (2021), individuals who join cult groups often do so to gain a sense of power and control over their lives. Additionally, cult groups often provide their members with a sense of identity and purpose, which can be appealing to individuals who feel lost or disconnected from society.

1.2. Conceptual framework

Economic instability refers to a situation where the economy experiences fluctuations that can lead to uncertainty and unpredictability, affecting economic growth, investment, and

employment. According to Łukasz Jannils (2021), economic instability can have detrimental effects on economic growth, investment, inflation, fiscal deficits, public debt, and the functioning of financial markets. This concept is crucial for understanding the challenges faced by economies during periods of crisis. Economic instability can have far-reaching consequences, including increased poverty, inequality, and social unrest. As noted by Ugwuanyi (2022), economic instability can lead to a decline in economic activity, reduced investment, and increased unemployment. Furthermore, economic instability can also lead to a loss of confidence in the economy, making it challenging for policymakers to develop effective strategies for promoting economic growth and stability.

According to Nnenna (2023), economic instability can be caused by a variety of factors, including macroeconomic, political, and external factors. Understanding the causes and consequences of economic instability is essential for policymakers and economists to develop effective strategies for promoting economic growth and stability. Cultism has far-reaching consequences for businesses, investment, and economic growth in Nigeria. The prevalence of cultism in the country has led to a breakdown in law and order, creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation that undermines economic activity. According to Ugwuanyi (2022), cultism has significant effects on the social, political, and economic development of a region, including loss of lives, disruption of academic activities, and destruction of property. This, in turn, can discourage investment and hinder economic growth. Azelama, Alude, and Imhonda (2000) conducted a study on the effect of cultism on social, political, and economic development in Andoni Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria. Their research, underpinned by Social Structure Theory (Robert Merton) and Frustration-Aggression Theory (Ted Gur), revealed that cultism has a significant impact on development, leading to destruction of properties, hindrances to infrastructural development, harassment, and molestation. The study employed survey research methods and recommended addressing social, economic, and educational inadequacies to mitigate the effects of cultism.

The impact of cultism on businesses is multifaceted. For instance, cult groups often engage in violent clashes, extortion, and kidnapping, which can disrupt business operations and deter investors. Moreover, the fear of cult-related violence can lead to a decline in economic activity, particularly in areas where cultism is prevalent. As noted by Ejiofor (2021), cultism can have long-term consequences for individuals and society, including increased violence, crime, and social instability. Cultism also affects investment in Nigeria. The risk of cult-related violence and instability can make investors hesitant to invest in the country, leading to a decline in foreign direct investment. According to Nnenna (2023), corruption and cultism can decrease economic growth by preventing efficient production and innovation.

1.3. *Theoretical Framework*

The Social Learning Theory (SLT) has its roots in the works of psychologist Albert Bandura, who posited that individuals acquire behaviors and attitudes through observation, imitation, and reinforcement (Bandura, 1977). This theoretical framework suggests that people learn from observing others, and this learning is influenced by the consequences of the observed behavior. If the behavior is rewarded or reinforced, it is more likely to be emulated. In the context of exploring the relationship between cultism and economic instability in selected Ogbia communities, SLT can be applied to understand how individuals might be socialized into cult groups through observational learning and reinforcement (Akers, 1998).

The application of SLT to this topic is justified because it can help researchers comprehend the social processes that contribute to cultism in these communities. By examining how individuals learn and adopt cult-related behaviors, researchers can identify potential targets for intervention and prevention (Burgess & Akers, 1966). Furthermore, SLT can help elucidate how economic instability might contribute to the emergence and persistence of cult groups, by highlighting the role of social learning in shaping individual behavior. In communities experiencing economic instability, individuals may be more likely to observe and imitate behaviors that promise financial gain or protection, such as cult-related activities. By understanding the social learning processes that drive cultism, researchers can develop targeted interventions to promote positive behaviors and reduce the appeal of cult groups. The SLT framework can provide valuable insights into the complex relationships between cultism and economic instability in the selected Ogbia communities. By applying this theory, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how individuals learn and adopt cult-related behaviors, and how economic instability might contribute to the emergence and persistence of cult groups. This understanding can ultimately inform strategies to address cultism and promote economic stability in these communities.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey design using quantitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between cultism and economic instability in four selected communities in Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The population of the study comprised residents of the four selected communities, with projected populations of 14,471 in Imirigi, 17,890 in Otuasega, 17,780 in Otuokpoti, and 18,908 in Opume, amounting to a total population of 69,049 from 1991-2024, according to the National Population Commission Yenagoa office (Personal Communication, 2025). A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants from the four communities, taking into consideration certain criteria such as age and duration of stay in the various communities. This enabled the researcher to gather relevant data from participants who had knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under study. The Taro Yamane sampling size calculation formula was adopted to determine the sample size, which yielded 398 participants.

Questionnaires were administered to this sample to collect quantitative data on their economic activities, experiences, and perceptions of cultism in the communities.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants from the four communities, taking into consideration certain criteria such as age and duration of stay in the various communities. The Taro Yamane sampling size calculation formula was adopted to determine the sample size, which yielded 398 participants. Questionnaires were administered to this sample to collect quantitative data on their economic activities, experiences, and perceptions of cultism in the communities. Out of the 398 questionnaires administered, 364 were retrieved, representing a high response rate. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequency distribution and mean. Chi-square was also employed to determine the actual effects in the relationship across variables.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section centers on the presentation and interpretation of findings, entailing the examination and understanding of outcomes derived from respondent data. The responses from the survey are displayed in tabular format, utilizing proportions to enable straightforward analysis. The examination of findings for this investigation is founded on the 376 surveys collected from participants, representing a 94.5% response rate out of the 398 distributed.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents based on the specific ways in which cultism disrupts economic activities in the communities

Details	No of Respondents	Percentage
By creating an environment of fear, leading to reduced investment and economic growth	96	25.5
Cultism has no significant impact on economic activities in communities	11	2.9
By destroying livelihoods, hindering business operations, and affecting agricultural productivity, ultimately contributing to economic instability	201	53.5
Cultism only affects social activities, not economic ones	68	18.1
Total	**376**	**100**

Source: field survey, 2025

Table 1 above shows that 25.5% (96 respondents) are of the opinion that the specific ways are by creating an environment of fear, leading to reduced investment and economic growth, 2.9% (11 respondents) say that cultism has no significant impact on economic activities in communities, 53.5% (201 respondents) are of the view that cultism disrupts economic activities by destroying livelihoods, hindering business operations, and affecting agricultural productivity, ultimately contributing to economic instability, and 18.1% (68 respondents) believe that cultism only affects social activities, not economic ones.

This is an indication that majority of our respondents 53.5% (201 respondents) are of the view that Cultism can disrupt economic activities in several ways. It can lead to the destruction of livelihoods through violence, intimidation, and instability, causing businesses to shut down or relocate, and resulting in loss of income and livelihoods for individuals and families. Additionally, cult-related activities can hinder business operations by creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, making it difficult for businesses to operate effectively. This can lead to reduced investment, decreased economic growth, and lower productivity. Moreover, cultism can affect agricultural productivity, by destroying crops, intimidating farmers, and disrupting supply chains. This can lead to food insecurity, reduced agricultural productivity, and economic instability. Ultimately, the cumulative effect of cultism on economic activities can contribute to economic instability, reduced economic growth, and decreased investor confidence, having far-reaching consequences, including increased poverty, unemployment, and social unrest.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents' views on how socioeconomic factors like poverty and unemployment intersect with cultism in communities.

Details	No of Respondents	Percentage
They drive individuals to join cult groups as a means of survival or to gain power and protection	189	50.3
They have no limit to cultism in communities	11	2.9
Cultism is solely a result of individual failure not socio-economic factors	73	19.4
Poverty and unemployment are outcomes of cultism, not contributing factors	103	27.4
Total	**376**	**100**

Source: field survey, 2025

Table 2 above indicates that 50.3% (189 respondents) believe that these factors drive individuals to join cult groups as a means of survival or to gain power and protection. In contrast, 2.9% (11 respondents) think they have no link to cultism in communities. Meanwhile, 19.4% (73 respondents) attribute cultism solely to individual failures, rather than

socioeconomic factors. Additionally, 27.4% (103 respondents) consider poverty and unemployment to be outcomes of cultism, rather than contributing factors. The above analysis is an indication that the highest of our respondents 50.3% (189 respondents) are of the view that Poverty and unemployment can indeed intersect and drive individuals to join cult groups as a means of survival or to gain power and protection. According to them when people lack access to basic necessities and opportunities, they may become desperate and vulnerable to groups that promise them a sense of belonging, security, or financial stability.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents' views on how cult groups contribute to economic instability in communities.

Details	No of Respondents	Percentage
By promoting entrepreneurship and job creation	-	-
Cult groups have no impact on economic instability in communities	109	28.9
Cult groups contribute to economic instability through violence, intimidation, and extortion, which hinder economic growth and development	194	51.6
Cult groups stabilize economies by providing security services	73	19.5
Total	**376**	**100**

Source: field survey, 2025

Table 3 above indicates that 28.9% (109 respondents) believe cult groups have no impact on economic instability, 51.6% (194 respondents) think cult groups contribute to economic instability through violence, intimidation, and extortion, hindering economic growth and development. In contrast, 19.5% (73 respondents) believe cult groups stabilise economies by providing security services. Majority of our respondents 51.6% (194 respondents) are of the view that cult groups can significantly impact economic stability. They perpetuate violence, disrupting businesses and damaging infrastructure, which creates an atmosphere of fear. Additionally, intimidation is used to force individuals and businesses to comply with their demands, often through extortion or threats. Extortion also occurs, where money or resources are demanded from businesses, individuals, or communities, undermining legitimate economic activity. As a result, investment is reduced, economic growth is decreased, poverty and unemployment increase, and communities are destabilised. This highlights the need for effective strategies to address cult-related activities and promote economic stability.

Table 4. Respondents' views on interventions to address cultism's root causes.

Details	No of Respondents	Percentage
Implementing programs that provide employment opportunities, empowerment and education to youths, as well as community engagement and awareness initiatives to prevent cultism	117	31.1
Implementation of law enforcement and punitive measures against cult members and their sponsors	136	36.2
Focusing solely on individual counselling & therapy for cult members	94	25
Provide financial incentive to individuals who leave cult groups	29	7.7
Total	**376**	**100**

Source: field survey, 2025

Table 4 above indicates 31.1% (117 respondents) suggest programmes providing employment opportunities, empowerment, and education for youths, alongside community engagement and awareness initiatives. Meanwhile, 36.2% (136 respondents) recommend strict law enforcement and punitive measures against cult members and sponsors. Additionally, 25% (94 respondents) propose individual counselling and therapy for cult members, and 7.7% (29 respondents) suggest financial incentives for individuals leaving cult groups. The highest of our respondents of 36.2% (136 respondents) indicated implementing strict law enforcement and punitive measures against cult members and their sponsors as an effective way to curb cult-related activities. This according to them involves holding cult members and sponsors accountable for their actions through thorough investigations and fair trials, imposing significant penalties such as imprisonment or fines to deter others, and confiscating assets obtained through cult-related activities to disrupt their financial networks. Collaboration with local communities is also crucial according to them in other to identify and prevent cult recruitment and activities. By taking a firm stance against cultism, governments and law enforcement agencies can reduce violence, disrupt cult operations, and deter recruitment. Ultimately, they viewed the effective law enforcement and punitive measures can contribute to a safer and more stable environment, promoting economic growth and development.

4. DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

This study canvassed the nexus between cultism and economic instability in four Ogbia communities in Bayelsa State. Cultism has become a major concern for economic stability in various communities across Nigeria, particularly in the Ogbia areas of Bayelsa State. This issue arises from a complicated mix of elements, such as socioeconomic status, peer pressure, and the desire for dominance and safety. This investigation carried out in the four communities within Ogbia has brought to light the connection between cultism and economic unrest, emphasizing the necessity for a comprehensive strategy to tackle this challenge. According to the study's results, cultism interferes with economic activities in the Ogbia region, as a notable portion of respondents (53.5%) linked the devastation of livelihoods, obstruction of business activities, and negative impacts on agricultural output to cultism. This aligns with existing research, indicating that cultism can deeply affect economic development and growth (Nnenna, 2023). The ongoing violence, intimidation, and extortion perpetrated by cult organizations foster a climate of fear, which deters investments and obstructs economic advancement.

Moreover, the study indicates that poverty and unemployment serve as significant catalysts for cultism in Ogbia communities, with 50.3% of respondents pointing to socioeconomic factors as a cause of cultism. This observation supports the Social Learning Theory, which suggests that individuals acquire behaviors and attitudes via observation, imitation, and reinforcement (Bandura, 1977). In relation to cultism, socioeconomic circumstances can cultivate an environment that makes individuals more vulnerable to recruitment by cult organizations. Additionally, the findings of the research emphasize the impact of cultism on economic stability, with 51.6% of participants asserting that cult groups contribute to economic instability through acts of violence, intimidation, and extortion. This is in agreement with existing studies, implying that cultism can compromise economic growth and progress by engendering an environment of unpredictability and instability (Ejiofor, 2021).

In light of these findings, a number of suggestions can be proposed to tackle cultism and enhance economic stability in the Ogbia communities. Policymakers and other stakeholders should implement a holistic strategy to combat cultism, which includes rigorous law enforcement and punitive actions against cult members and their backers. Creating job opportunities, empowerment programs, and educational initiatives for youth can play a crucial role in preventing cultism. Additionally, community involvement and awareness campaigns can aid in thwarting cult recruitment efforts and activities, fostering a safer and more stable environment.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study highlight the necessity for a comprehensive strategy to combat cultism and enhance economic stability in Ogbia communities. By comprehending the intricate relationship between cultism and economic instability, policymakers and

stakeholders can formulate targeted measures to address the fundamental causes of cultism and encourage economic development. It is crucial for all stakeholders including the government, community leaders, and individuals to unite in efforts to establish a safer and more stable environment. Through such collaboration, Ogbia communities can harness their full potential and attain sustainable economic growth and development. Ultimately, tackling cultism necessitates a collective endeavor and a committed focus on fostering peace, stability, and prosperity within Nigerian communities.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Implement strict law enforcement and punitive measures: Governments and law enforcement agencies should take a firm stance against cultism by holding cult members and sponsors accountable for their actions, imposing significant penalties, and confiscating assets obtained through cult-related activities.

ii. Provide employment opportunities and empowerment: Programmes that provide employment opportunities, empowerment, and education for the youth in Ogbia communities can help prevent cultism and promote economic stability. Job opportunities and empowerment schemes, such as vocational training and entrepreneurship initiatives will be helpful. Addressing socioeconomic factors such as poverty and unemployment through economic empowerment programmes, education, and job creation can help reduce the vulnerability of individuals to cult recruitment.

iii. Promote community engagement and awareness: Community engagement and awareness initiatives can help prevent cult recruitment and activities, ultimately contributing to a safer and more stable environment. Community engagement and awareness programs, including outreach initiatives and public awareness campaigns could deter cult recruitment and activities.

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ARTICLE

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EVALUATING THE INFLUENCE OF COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT, ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, AND SELF-REGULATED LEARNING ON THE ADOPTION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE–DRIVEN ADAPTIVE LEARNING SYSTEMS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

Adaptive learning systems (with the role of artificial intelligence, AI) are increasingly becoming a part of higher education to provide personalization of the content, dynamic learning pathways, and timely feedback on student progress. This paper investigates the effect of cognitive engagement, academic performance and self-regulated learning in adopting AI-based adaptive learning systems among students in a Sri Lankan university. The analysis relies on the theory of educational technology adoption and learner-centered theory, the study examines the possibility that the learning behaviors and learning attributes of students influence their adoption and use of AI-enhanced learning conditions. The survey data involving 100 students at a university was used in a quantitative cross-sectional study that was conducted to collect information on the topics of AI-based learning tools exposure and its effect on the students. The analysis of the data was carried out through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression of SPSS. The results indicated that AI adoption had a significant and positive effect on self-regulated learning and academic performance as opposed to cognitive engagement which was found to have a less significant effect on AI adoption in the regression model. The model explains

48.1% of AI adoption, showing that self-directed learning ability and learning orientation influence AI use more than engagement in higher education.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, Academic Performance, Adaptive Learning Systems, Cognitive Engagement, Higher Education Self-Regulated Learning, Technology Adoption

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence is now one of the most effective trends in educational technology since it enables learning platforms to change their response dynamically to student behavior, progress and needs. AI has a growing presence in the field of higher education, where it is being applied to facilitate teaching, promote personalization, and make the process of learning more efficient. Education Reviews available in the open-access reveal that AI-based systems can adapt learning content, streamline the educational movement, and improve student engagement and academic achievement, as well as open the prospects of more personalized training in various disciplines. Simultaneously, researchers remark that the integration of AI into the educational process is also associated with ethical, technological, and implementation issues, which implies that the educational utility of AI heavily relies on the way in which the systems are designed and applied.

Adaptive learning can particularly be significant in university settings where it is clear that the students will vary in terms of their previous background of knowledge, learning rate, motivation as well as study habits. Conventional single-size-fits-all teaching application fails to meet this diversity, but adaptive systems employ data-driven algorithms to change content, feedback and sequencing based on the profiles of individual learners. According to a literature review by Gligorea et al. (2023), AI and machine-learning applications in e-learning are typically applied to personalize instruction, increase engagement, and favor better academic results and a subsequent systematic review by Merino-Campos (2025) established that AI-powered solutions have the potential to revolutionize personalized learning in higher education by enhancing both efficiency and performance. These results prove that AI-based adaptive learning is not a side-service solution but a core mechanism of enhancing quality of digital education.

The primary aim of this research is to examine how cognitive engagement, academic performance, and self-regulated learning influence the adoption of AI-driven adaptive learning systems among university students in Sri Lanka. Cognitive engagement can be described as how many students apply their mental efforts, attention, and strategies in the learning activities. Academic performance shows the quantifiable outcomes of learning, or grades or levels of achievement. Self-regulated learning is a concept in which students have

the capacity to plan and monitor as well as assess their learning. According to recent studies, AI-based adaptive systems can potentially have an impact on all three outcomes through the systemic feedback, individualized route or possibilities of autonomy in a learner. This renders the subject appropriate in a higher education setting wherein student self-reliance is anticipated but distributed in an unbalanced manner in most cases.

Through programs to promote digital literacy, technical innovation, and the integration of emerging technologies into teaching and learning processes, Sri Lanka has recently escalated its efforts to reform a number of sectors, including higher education. To increase access to educational resources and improve learning results, universities are increasingly implementing technology-enhanced teaching methods and digital learning platforms. However, there are still a number of obstacles in the way of implementing cutting-edge technologies like AI-driven adaptive learning systems, such as differences in digital infrastructure, different institutional readiness levels, low AI literacy, and unequal student access to technology resources. Examining the variables influencing students' acceptance of AI-driven adaptive learning systems in the unique setting of Sri Lankan higher education is crucial because of these difficulties.

Even though AI-driven adaptive learning systems are technological advancements, human and societal aspects that affect technology acceptance and use are just as important to their effective adoption as technical capabilities. From a social science standpoint, students' willingness to use educational technologies is greatly influenced by their learning practices, motivations, academic performance, cognitive engagement, and capacity for self-regulated learning. In order to provide a more thorough understanding of AI adoption, this study combines the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) with the idea of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL). SRL emphasizes the learner-centered procedures that impact educational results and technology utilization, whereas TAM discusses how consumers view and absorb technology. By integrating these viewpoints, the study adds to the expanding corpus of social science research on educational technology adoption in higher education by bridging the technical aspect of AI adoption with the social and behavioral aspects of student learning.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Though AIs controlled adaptive learning system are gradually implemented into higher education, not all students are equally adopting and using AI-controlled adaptive learning systems. The literature tends to focus on the technical advantages of AI, i.e. personalization, automation, and efficiency but the aspects linked to learners themselves factors influencing the willingness to use such systems have not been thoroughly studied. Specifically, the notions of cognitive engagement, self-regulated learning, and academic performance could also be significant in defining whether students actually gain AI-aided learning space.

The majority of available research focuses considered the AI in terms of performance, engagement, or self-regulation as the educational outcomes, but the authors did not

consider the way these student traits could affect the adoption of AI, in turn. But at the learner-based point of view, more academically competent, mentally engagements and self-directed, may tend to consider AI tools handy and embrace them in their learning procedures. Thus, the main research question is not whether AI may enhance the learning process, but whether the specific aspects of academic and psychological peculiarities of students or rather the presence of AI-driven adaptive learning systems in university education impact adoption.

1.2. Objectives of the study

- To evaluate the effect of cognitive engagement on the adoption of AI-driven adaptive learning systems among university students.
- To assess the impact of academic performance on the adoption of AI-driven adaptive learning systems among university students.
- To examine the influence of self-regulated learning on the adoption of AI-driven adaptive learning systems among university students.
- To identify the strongest predictor of AI-driven adaptive learning system adoption among university students.

1.3. Research Scope

This research study will focus solely on the participants in higher education in Sri Lanka who are exposed to the adaptive learning systems powered by AI in a formal learning environment. Three outcomes variables are targeted, namely, cognitive engagement, academic performance, and self-regulated learning. The paper does not even seek to address all potential directions of AI in education namely the automated administration, the faculty workload or the institutional management, although these are also valuable directions. Rather it focuses on the learner experience and how adaptive systems can affect the thinking, studying and performance of students. This emphasis aligns with the recent studies that see individual learning trajectories, feedback cycles, and agency among learners as key characteristics of AI-assisted higher education.

1.4. Significant of study

This research is important because it makes a contribution to educational technology as well as educational psychology. In the case of universities, the results can guide them on the decision to adopt AI-driven adaptive learning systems or not and how to adopt them in a manner that enhances learning outcomes and not merely digitizing the learning process. To lecturers and instructional designers, the research can illuminate whether the use of adaptive tools can help them achieve better academic outcomes by enabling the students to be

mentally stimulated and control their learning pattern. Among scholars, the work is a contributor to the emerging evidence base of articles urging researchers to consider that AI in tertiary education may be beneficial but requires situational, application, as well as student in relation factors. Practically, the research can assist higher education institutions in the design of learning environments which encompass personalization along with reflection, feedback, and engagement with students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Artificial Intelligence–Driven Adaptive Learning Systems

Adaptive learning systems based on artificial intelligence are education technologies that analyze learner data and modify it to change content, pacing, and feedback. Instead of presenting all students with the same content, these systems rely on algorithms to generate individualized learning. According to Gligorea et al. (2023), adaptive learning is an approach, which involves the utilization of AI and machine learning that can alter co-teaching dynamically through the performance and engagement of learners. Their summary of the 63 studies concluded that AI/ML tools have registered potential to personalize learning routes, to improve engagement, not to mention academic output. Likewise, Merino-Campos (2025) based the review on 45 studies and came across the conclusion that AIs-based solutions can change the concept of personalized learning in tertiary education by enhancing the effectiveness of learning, personalization of educational material, and academic achievement. These works develop an excellent conceptual base to consider adaptive learning as the system that facilitates individual learning and not the general teaching.

Recent sources also highlight that adaptive learning in post-secondary institutions is also related to learner agency and psychological sustenance. Ouyang (2025) demonstrated that the features of adaptive learning platform under AI are linked to self-regulated learning and engagement with learning activities, and these psychological processes correlate with quality education sequentially. This is significant in that it implies that adaptive systems do not merely enhance the availability of content; they have the capability to influence students in the way they think of learning, keep track of their progress and persevere through the learning experience. Differently put, it means that, AI-based adaptive learning has added value to education in terms of the technical flexibility approached to the content as well as the psychological necessity the software has on the learners.

The literature warns, though, that adaptive learning systems do not necessarily work. AI is premised on quality implementation, ethical design, and necessary digital back-up. The analyses of AI in higher education point to privacy concerns, infrastructure to support AI, and that it should be carefully integrated into pedagogy and learners. Consequently, the idea of AI-based adaptive learning is to be perceived not as a panacean answer but a versatile

educational change that can be effective based on the context, the readiness of students and the assistance of an institution.

2.2 *Academic Performance and AI Adoption*

Among the most common evaluated outcome of adaptive learning research is academic performance due to the fact that it is the most observable outcome of successful education. The indications are typically positive. According to Gligorea et al. (2023), adaptive learning through AI/ML is capable of boosting the performance of students in learning activities by optimizing the learning paths and opposing specific intervention. Similar findings were reached by Merino-Campos (2025) who was convinced that the use of AI applications could promote academic performance and efficiency in higher education. It is proposed in these reviews that, given the presence of individualized achievements and timely response to such achievements, students can possibly learn effectively and perform well.

Further support is in the empirical work. Karunaratne et al. (2025) discovered in their study that engagement and performance are interdependent in the context of LMS-based learning and personalized study plans can achieve a substantial level of positive student performance. Their analysis revealed individual learner types and indicated that individualized recommendations could be used to enhance performance generally but particularly among students who were not already consistently high performing. This is important to adaptive learning since it demonstrates that performance gains are not the sole elements with the most effective learners, the neediest learners may also gain significantly through bespoke paths.

Meanwhile, the literature is not uncritically good. Du Plooy et al. (2024) selected 69 studies and authors discovered that 59% were associated with improved academic performance, and 41% could not find significant academic performance effect. The implication of this mixed evidence is that adaptive learning is best positioned as technology actually is a part of the curriculum, aligned with the subject area, and informed by what students already know and are learning. In such a way, the academic performance cannot be regarded as a predetermined consequence of the AI usage, but the side-effect of the attentive interaction between the technology, the pedagogy, and the behavior of students.

H1: Academic performance has a significant positive impact on the adoption of AI-driven adaptive learning systems among university students.

2.3 *Cognitive Engagement and AI Adoption*

Cognitive engagement is the level to which students put in their mental effort, attention, and the ability to think strategically in the learning activities. Engagement is relevant in the context of higher education since those students with deeper thinking tend to have higher

chances of learning material, concentrating on their studies, and attaining higher grades. Yaseen et al. (2025) discovered that adaptive learning tools, personalized feedback, and interactive AI tools have the potential to enhance student engagement, provided that students are digitally literate enough to use them. Their results reveal that adaptive systems are capable of facilitating engagement through increased interactivity during learning and through decreasing the discrepancy between student needs and the instructional response. Since engagement enhances the excellence of learning endeavor, it is prudent to assume that cognitive engagement would be a positive correlate of academic performance.

Other AI and education psychology literatures confirm this association. Ansari et al. (2025) have observed that AI assists cognitive learning results through the provision of individualized learning routes that scale to student expectations, cognitive degree, assisting in enhancement of engagement and accomplishment. Similarly, Merino-Campos (2025) also highlighted that AI use in universities can enhance student engagement and academic achievement because it can better personalize the content. These findings demonstrate that cognitive engagement is not merely a product of digital learning, but it is a process according to which students process information deeper and translate learning possibilities into performance results. It is on this reason that cognitive engagement is supposed to relate positively with academic performance to a large extent in the current study.

H2: Cognitive engagement has a significant positive impact on the adoption of AI-driven adaptive learning systems among university students.

2.4 Self-Regulated Learning and AI Adoption

Self-regulated learning is one of the important concepts in educational psychology as it involves the process through which students manage, oversee and assess their learning. Self-regulated learning skills are also necessary to university students particularly since university education usually involves more autonomy and less monitoring by teachers as compared to school education. According to Ouyang (2025), the characteristics of an adaptive learning platform based on artificial intelligence strongly correlate with self-regulated learning and that the capabilities of such systems provide the opportunity to support the quality of education with the help of psychological processes that include planning, monitoring, and engagement. The implications of the findings in the study are that the adaptive learning systems can be used as scaffolds that can motivate the students to control their learning in a better way. Self-regulated learning ought to have a positive connection with academic performance because students who make and follow effective study strategies tend to have a better scholar performance.

This argument is reinforced by recent research on the concept of learner autonomy. A meta-analysis conducted by Achuthan et al. (2025) found AI to be an adaptive scaffold that facilitates self-regulatory and self-directed learning in cognitive, motivational, and reflective

mechanisms. The review established AI-based interventions to be especially effective particularly in enhancing forethought, planning, monitoring, and reflective assessment which are key to effective academic performance. In the same manner, Du et al. (2025) stressed the sustenance of self-regulated learning in online and blended learning and demonstrated that learning management systems could be developed in such a way that they would facilitate the process of student regulation. These results indicate that SRL is a preferable learning outcome by itself, as well as being a highly predictive factor in academic performance. Thus, the current research considers self-regulated learning as a significant variable that must have a positive impact on the academic performance.

H3: Self-regulated learning has a significant positive impact on the adoption of AI-driven adaptive learning systems among university students.

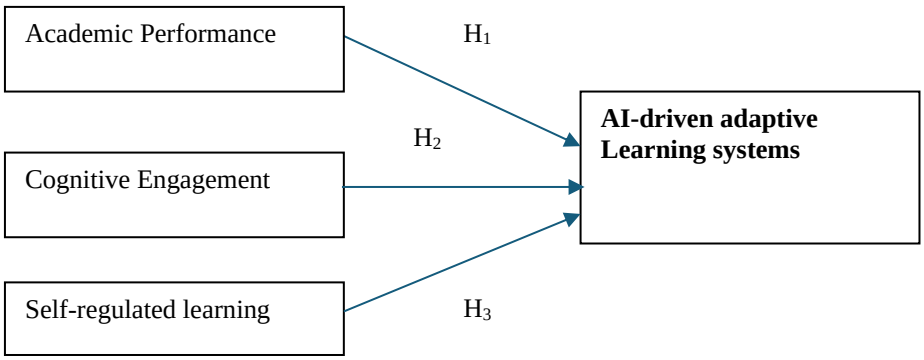
2.5 *Synthesis of the Literature*

The above reviewed literature confirms that a direct model is possible, where AI-driven adaptive learning systems, cognitive engagement, and self-regulated learning have a direct impact on academic performance. Adaptive learning systems delivered in AI have been shown to enhance personalization, feedback, and learning efficiency many times over, so it is not surprising to find that these outcomes will have a positive correlation with academic learning outcomes. Engagement can be achieved through cognitive learning as engaged learners are at a better position to grasp content more and attain excellent outcomes. The significance of self- regulated learning is also relevant as students that are able to design, control and assess their learning regard will achieve higher academic performance. Throughout the evidence available in the open-access, one can observe the uniformity of results: AI is most effective when it helps achieve learner attention, autonomy, and strategy implementation instead of providing content. Whilst mediation and various other routes are arguably discussed by the larger literature, the current analysis dwells exclusively on the direct impact of the three independent variables on academic performance. That is to say that the study model is purposefully small and statistically parallel to the output of the regression that you furnished, whereby AIAS Mean, CE Menu and SRL Menu together are the predictors to AP Mean. This renders the literature review more precise and in line with the actual analysis plan. Because the findings indicate that both of these variables are separately correlated with or better learning outcomes, the direct-effect model is quite reasonable among the university B2B students using AI-based adaptive learning systems.

2.6 *Conceptual Framework*

The idea behind this study is that the perceptions of university students towards and the AI-based adaptive learning systems (AIAS) can be conditioned by significant educational and

psychological variables, specifically, the cognitive engagement (CE), self-regulated learning (SRL), and academic performance (AP). With the ongoing trend of the application of AI-based technologies in the field of higher education, the willingness of students to use adaptive learning systems and their success will also continue to be determined not only by the technical quality of the systems, but also by the intensity of their learning, the degree to which they can independently control their studies, and gender the perceptions of academic performance. A newer study indicates that artificial intelligence-based learning experiences have a higher possibility of acceptance and successful application in situations where they agree with cognitive and behavioral attributes of learners (Gligorea et al., 2023; Ouyang, 2025). On the dependent side, AI-driven adaptive learning systems (AIAS) are used in this research, and they denote the perceptions, acceptance, and experience of students as users of AI-assisted adaptive learning tools. The framework suggests that students who have more cognitive-level engagement, more self-regulation, and students with higher academic performance have a higher chance to record more positive experiences, stronger experiences, with AI-controlled adaptive learning systems. It is this viewpoint that is supported by the emerging body of knowledge on educational technology adoption that has highlighted the fact that technology performance does not depend on system characteristics, but also learner preparedness, involvement and reaction patterns (Merino-Campos, 2025).



Source: Created by authors

Cognitive engagement (CE) is the first predictor over the framework. Cognitive engagement is defined as the level of mental effort, focus, attention, and proactive thinking that the students are putting in their learning activities. When engaging cognitively in an adaptive digital learning environment, cognitively engaged students tend to engage in thoughtful engagement with individually tailored material, reflect on feedback, and engage actively in adaptive suggestions. Yaseen et al. (2025) discovered that adaptive learning tools assisted with AI have the power to enhance the levels of student engagement through more interactive and responsive learning. Nevertheless, the association can be considered in its

opposite direction, i.e. students who are already highly engaged might become more likely to appreciate and practically employed AI-driven learning systems. Thus, the cognitive engagement will play a significant role of positive impact on AIAS.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is the second predictor. Self-regulation learning is one construct that is important to the psychology of education since it has the potential effect on the capability of students with regard to goal setting, time management, tracking of progress and self-assessment of his or her learning strategies. Adaptive learning systems fueled by AI can offer dashboards, progress indicators tailored to each learner specifically, and customized feedback which prove particularly helpful to self-regulated learners. The students possessing good self-regulation skills have a higher chance of utilizing such systems in a strategy and effective manner. Ouyang (2025) discovered that the features of adaptive learning platforms are strongly related to self-regulated learning whereas Achuthan et al. (2025) concluded that the AI tools could be used as a scaffold to learners and support their autonomy and self-management. On this basis, it can be reasoned that SRL would have a positive predictive of how students perceive and use AI-driven adaptive systems of learning.

The third predictor is academic performance (AP). Academic performance is also part of this updated structure as an independent variable since better performing students are likely to appreciate, adopt and rate adaptive learning systems positively. Students with higher academic achievement tend to have better learning strategies, greater academic confidence and improved choices of how to use learning technologies. Simultaneously, the attitudes of the students towards adaptive systems might become more positive when they believe that these systems help them to succeed in their academic performance. According to Gligorea et al. (2023) and Merino-Campos (2025), AI-based learning devices tend to be viewed better when linked with a positive educational outcome. Hence, academic performance will have a positive impact on AIAS. The conceptual framework hence presupposes that cognition involvement, self-controlled learning, and academic achievement are the major predictors of AI-supported adaptive learning systems among university students. The model is also applicable since it enables the study to analyse how learning behaviours and results among the students determine the perception and acceptance of adaptive AI technologies. Although AIAS is viewed solely as a factor that affects the outcomes of academic performance in this framework, other student-specific factors are also identified that can influence the experience and the evaluation of such technologies in practice.

The current study conceptualizes Academic Performance (AP) as a predictor of students' perceptions and acceptance of AI-driven Adaptive Learning Systems (AIAS), despite the fact that academic performance is often studied as an outcome of educational technologies. This positioning is based on the idea that students who perform better academically frequently have higher levels of academic self-efficacy, which is described as confidence in one's capacity to plan and carry out the actions necessary to manage learning tasks (Bandura, 1986). It has been demonstrated that self-efficacy beliefs affect both academic effort and receptivity to new learning resources and techniques. As a result, high-achieving students

might be more inclined to see the benefits of adaptive learning technologies, make active use of their features, and report better experiences with them. However, since adaptive learning technologies can also lead to better academic results, there may be a reciprocal relationship between AIAS and AP. In order to justify treating AP as an antecedent variable within the suggested conceptual framework, the current study focuses primarily on comprehending the learner qualities that influence perceptions and acceptance of AIAS.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research premise is made on the positivist research philosophy, which calls on the emphasis on objectivity, measurement, and testing of hypotheses. Positivism is an appropriate research technique in this study since the researcher intends to test the statistical correlations amid quantifiable attributes AI-driven adaptive learning systems, cognitive engagement, self-regulated learning, and academic performance. The study involves the application of numerical data and, as there are direct links between variables studied with the help of correlation and regression, it is better to discuss a positivist underlying philosophy.

This would be in line with the quantitative educational research, the aim of which is to determine whether one variable is significantly predicted purely by one other. The study complied with accepted social science research ethics guidelines. The study adhered to basic ethical procedures even though formal Institutional Review Board permission was not requested because the survey instrument was anonymous and non-invasive. Respondents were made aware of the study's purpose before filling out the questionnaire, and participation was completely optional. All participants gave their informed consent after being reassured that their answers would be kept private and anonymous. Additionally, participants were made aware of their freedom to leave the study at any time without facing any repercussions. Throughout the research process, the survey's data was securely stored and used only for academic purposes.

3.1 Research approach and Design

The research has a deductive type of study. The hypotheses were based on the available literature and were therefore tested with data received via a survey. The research method suitable in this case is deductive research since there is already evidence in literature that adaptive learning systems, engagement, and self-regulation can affect academic performance. It has a cross-sectional design, as the data was collected at a single point in time with respect to the respondents. Studying relationships among variables in university research and this design is best applicable when relations need to be established on survey research based learning research. Even though the studies cannot provide causality in its strongest sense, cross-sectional studies prove to be useful when establishing statistically significant relationships between constructs. The research is also quantitative as far as the

measures of the variables were taken as Likert-scale items and processed in SPSS. Quantitative design enables a researcher to calculate, determine the reliability and correlations besides determining the predictive preventive power of the independent variables within the dependent variable. The regression equation used in this research specifies AIAS Mean as the dependent variable, while CE Mean, SRL Mean, and AP Mean are treated as independent predictors. This structure is a correspondence to a currently produced statistical output and retained the analysis within the conceptual framework.

3.1 Population and sampling

The study population will include students of universities in Sri Lanka having developed experience with AI-driven adaptive learning systems in their academic activities. Students who have taken force in digital learning platforms, AI-enhanced study tools, or adaptive learning systems in formal learning should be considered the respondents. The sample size of 100 is sufficient to conduct a focused multiple regression study of this kind, which is aimed at analysis.

An adequate sampling technique (that employs non-probability sampling methodology) is a purposive or convenient sampling, as the research will need the target group members to have a direct experience working with AI-based learning tools. This will make the respondents able to give relevant responses about the measured constructs. In analogous cases of AI-mediated learning and adaptive systems, alternative studies have used samples of university students based on academic environments of importance and this justifies the nature of the measured samples of student sample.

To invigorate an energetic search of the literature, Yaseen et al. (2025), Ouyang (2025), and numerous others examined adaptive learning platform features as applied in an educational setting, as well as their relationship with the level of engagement rate between students and adaptive learning technologies.

3.2 *Construct measurement, Indictors, and Sources*

Each of the constructs in the study is measured on a five-point Likert scale on a scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree/Strongly disagrees to 5 = Strongly Agree/Strongly agrees. The application of a Likert scale would be suitable as the question means that the respondents can reveal how much they agree with the statements of each variable, as well as have the responses in a quantitative format.

3.3 *Adaptive Learning Systems that are AI driven (DV)*

The AI-based adaptive learning systems (AIAS) is the dependent variable that is assessed on the basis of items concerned with the student perceptions regarding the personalization,

system responsiveness, real-time feedback, adaptive pacing, and learning support. Such indicators are aligned with how AI based adaptive systems are conceptualized on the basis of the educational technology literature. As stated by Gligorea et al. (2023), the personalization, flexibility, and automatic guidance of the learning setting are common to AI-assisted learning environments. Equally, according to Merino-Campos (2025), AI tools used in higher learning are adaptive and thus, they are developed to enhance learning experiences based on the needs and development of the learners.

Independent Variable: Cognitive Engagement

The cognitive engagement (CE) is assessed through such factors as attention, concentration, deep thinking, active mental effort and meaningful participation in academic activities. These articles indicate how much students are psychologically engaged in education. Yaseen et al. (2025) indicate that students with a higher level of cognitive engagement have a higher chance of engaging with adaptive educational technologies meaning CE is a significant predictor of AIAS.

Independent Variable: Self-Regulated Learning.

The indicators that are used to measure self-regulated learning (SRL) are goal setting, planning, monitoring progress, self-discipline and reflective learning. SRL audience is the extent to which the students take charge over their learning processes. Both Ouyang (2025) and Achuthan et al. (2025) note the close association between adaptive digital learning environment and self-regulatory behaviors, which is why SRL is a predictor that can be included in the current research.

Independent Variable: Academic Performance

Academic performance (AP) is assessed with the help of self-reported measures including good performance in tasks, academic advancement, regularity of academic work and subjective academic achievement. Academic performance in educational research is sometimes considered to be on a subjective scale when the research researcher is dealing with perceptions of students and adoption of technology instead of grade score records. This research involves AP as a independent variable since, students who have a higher academic achievement would have an advantage to respond positively and utilize AI-based adaptive systems.

3.4 Research instrument

A structured questionnaire is considered the primary data collection tool. The questionnaire will be in two major sections. The former section will provide demographic data, such as age,

study year, and frequency of using AI-based learning tools. Scale items that measure four constructs (AIAS, CE, SRL, and AP) are included in the second section. The questionnaire will be developed in a manner that will allow it to be clear, simple and be relevant to the context of university students. This specific study will respond well to a structured questionnaire due to the standardized responses, and the researcher will be in a position to get the same responses out of all the respondents. It is also able to perform statistical analysis and also to ensure consistency in the sample measurement. The questionnaire can also be pilot tested before its ultimate administration to verify that the wording of the items is clear and that they are good to the target respondents. Technology related studies should be pilot tested particularly since it is easy to have misunderstandings regarding the definitions of these terms to include adaptive learning, AI feedback or learning personalization and so on unless the statements are well worded.

3.5 *Data Collection and Analysis*

The data is collected through an approximate questionnaire that is given to the students of the university who fits the criteria of the study. The questionnaire can be conducted on the internet, in person or by the mixed approach based on accessibility and the convenience. Because the target group is made up of university students in Sri Lanka, which is already accustomed to the digital platforms a practical and efficient distribution means would be online distribution. Once the responses are collected they are analyzed in SPSS. The process of analysis of the data is divided into a few steps. The demographic factors of the respondents and the central tendencies of the variables in the study are summarized by the first by using descriptive statistics.

They encompass the average standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values of the age variables, the year of study and the weekly AI use. Second, Cronbachs alpha is employed as a measure of reliability analysis of the measurement scales. The alpha value of Cronbach over 0.70 is usually acceptable and it means that the scale items used measure the same construct. Third, Pearson correlation analysis is considered to study the direction and the strengths of relations between the variables.

This will assist in investigating the relation of thought involvement, autonomy in learning, and school accomplishment with AI-based adaptive educational apparatuses. Lastly, to determine the joint and the independent factors of the independent variables on the dependent variable, a multiple regression analysis is conducted. The updated model would be represented as shown below with AIAS Mean as the dependent variable, and the independent variables being CE Mean, SRL Mean and AP Mean. The given analysis will enable the researcher to distinguish which predictors have a significant effect that leads to the variation in the perceptions and the use of AI-driven adaptive learning systems among students.

4. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1. Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category / Statistic	Frequency / Value	Percent (%)
Sample Size	Total Respondents	100	100.0
Age	Minimum	18	—
	Maximum	25	—
	Mean	20.77	—
	Standard Deviation	2.145	—
Year of Study	Minimum	1	—
	Maximum	4	—
	Mean	2.20	—
	Standard Deviation	1.064	—
Weekly AI Usage Hours	Minimum	0.8	—
	Maximum	7.0	—
	Mean	4.166	—
	Standard Deviation	1.4521	—

Source: Created by authors based on data analysis

Descriptive statistics were conducted to identify the demographic profile of the respondents in order to have a rough idea of the sample character. This research was done on 100 undergraduate students where demographic data were obtained concerning age, study year, and the number of hours of AI tools usage on a weekly basis. Based on the results of the descriptive, the respondents were most likely undergraduate students who were mostly young with a mean age of 20.77 years (SD = 2.145) that ranged between 18 to 25 years. This implies that the sample is, in great measure, the students who are from the standard age group in the university. The mean years of study were 2.20 (SD 1.064), indicating that the focus of the sample was on the students studying the second year of their academic programs, although all undergraduate years also participated in the study. Concerning using artificial intelligence tools, respondents indicated that they were spending an average of 4.166 hours every week (SD = 1.4521), with a range of 0.8 hours to 7.0 hours weekly. It means that students are already making a moderate use of AI tools, which confirms that AI-based educational support is topical and well-known in the existing environment of higher education. The demographic profile hence validates that sample is suitable in exploring how the classroom engagement, self-regulated learning and academic performance have an impact on the adoption of AI or AI academic support among university students.

A reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha for all 19 measurement items across the four constructs: AIAS, CE, SRL, and AP.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
All Variables	0.922	19

Source: Created by authors based on data analysis

Cronbach's Alpha which is the reliability percentage of the full scale = 0.922, revealed an excellent internal consistency. As per widely replicated rules, the alpha scale of above 0.70 can be viewed as an intervention, above 0.80 can be termed as good, and above 0.9 could be taken as very high (Taber, 2018). Hence, it is observed that alpha collected in the current research indicates the consistency of the questionnaire items that measured the intended latent factors.

This great reliability means that the respondents responded to questions in the questionnaire in a consistent and stable pattern such that individual item scores can be combined into composite scores to be further analyzed. Since the scale reliability was excellent, the statistically justified use of these composite mean variables was based on correlation and regression analysis.

Table 3. Univariate Analysis

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	100	18	25	20.77	2.145
Year of Study	100	1	4	2.20	1.064
Weekly AI Hours	100	0.8	7.0	4.166	1.4521

Source: Created by authors based on data analysis

Univariate analysis was conducted to explain the center of tendency and variability of the variables under study. Such step gives the conceptual background of how the respondents perceived each construct and a broad outline of the general direction of responses before considering relationships among variables.

The descriptive statistics will indicate that the represented sample is not very diverse academically and is active users of AI tools. Its mean is 20.77 years of age which indicates a normal population of an undergraduate student and the average year of study, 2.20 indicates that the sample is comprised of mostly students enrolled in the initial and middle phase of their studies.

The average hourly AI utilization numbering at 4.166 hours each week is quite notable. This implies that not only is the respondents cognizant of the AI tools but is using them in a frequency that is regular. This level of exposure is relevant in the current research since it shows that students are quite ability and can create meaningful perceptions when it comes to the usefulness and value of AI in academic processes. This will follow with the current body of research in the education field who believe that students are quickly engaging AI in their

education practices to enable information searching, idea generation and feedback, and studying benefits.

In spite of the fact that the results, presented in this case, do not have any means of composite constructs, but just demographic descriptives, the results do aid in bringing the context to the sample. The respondents seem ready to be active in their academic lives, digitally exposed and in an academic setting of higher education, where AI-driven-learning processes are gaining wider exposure. The presence of such a context would be suitable to the investigation of whether classroom engagement, self-regulated learning and academic performance can be considered determinants of perception and consumption of AI academic support by students.

Table 4. Bivariate analysis

Variables	AIAS_Mean	CE_Mean	SRL_Mean	AP_Mean
AIAS_Mean	1	.504**	.404**	.490**
CE_Mean	.504**	1	.551**	.449**
SRL_Mean	.404**	.551**	1	.646**
AP_Mean	.490**	.449**	.646**	1

Source: Created by authors based on data analysis

The study performed bivariate analysis through the Pearson correlation coefficients in order to establish the strength and direction of the relationships between the key variables of the study. The analysis of correlation is applicable in ascertaining whether two or more variables are connected with each other and then on to regression analysis. The correlation analysis shows that the major variables are significantly related and positively to each other at the level of 0.01. Above all, there were statistically significant positive correlations between the dependent variable AIAS Mean and all three independent variables. To begin with, Classroom Engagement (CE Mean) was moderately positively correlated with AIAS_Mean ($r = .504$, $p < .01$). This suggests that the more involved the students are in their activities in the classroom learning, the more they are likely to report high utilization or perception of AI as a learning aid. This connection could also indicate the notion that active learners have more chances to access additional learning tools, such as AI-driven tools, to enhance the level of understanding, involvement, and task accomplishment.

Second, Self-Regulated Learning (SRL_Mean) also positively related to AIAS_Mean ($r = .404$, $p < .01$). This relationship is not as strong as that of classroom engagement, but it nevertheless suggests the existence of a meaningful relationship. In terms of academic output, it seems those students who are more adept with planning; monitoring and controlling their own learning are more likely to use AI. This is in line with emerging findings that AI tools tend to be effective in the context of goal setting, monitoring, feedback seeking and reflective learning when used strategically by students.

Third, the Academic Performance (AP_Mean) had a moderate positive correlation with AIAS_Mean (r =.490, p <. 01). This promotes the idea that the students having better academic performance are more prone to report greater AI academic support or AI adoption. The reason here could be that high-achieving students might be more active when it comes to finding out the tools, which could help them to become more efficient, understand better, and complete the assignments.

The correlation table also indicates that there are important interrelationships amongst the independent variables as well. CE_Mean and SRL_Mean, were positively interrelated (r =.551, p <.01), which means that engaged students are also more inclined to having self-regulation of their learning behavior. The same applies to SRL_Mean and AP_Mean, which had the highest level of inter-correlation between the independent variables (r =.646, p = <.01), implying that more self-regulated students also perform better academically. This result is congruent with a substantial body of scholarly work which puts self-regulation as a powerful predictor of academic achievement. On the whole, the bivariate analysis presents good preliminary evidence of relationships to be proposed in the research. The fact that all the three predicted significantly as compared to AIAS_Mean meant that it was correct to go one step higher to multiple regression analysis and determine predictive effect of these three factors together and separately.

Table 5. Multivariate analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.693	.481	.464	.50323

Source: Created by authors based on data analysis

A multiple linear regression was used to test the combined and distinct effects of Classroom Engagement (CE_Mean), Self-Regulated Learning (SRL_Mean) and Academic Performance (AP_Mean) on AI Academic Support / Adoption (AIAS_Mean). According to the model summary, all the independent variables together show a medium strong relationship with the dependent variable. Multiple correlation coefficient (R =.693) indicates that the interaction of classroom engagement, self-regulated learning, and academic performance is significantly related to AIAS_Mean.

Coefficient of determination (R2 =.481) implies that the three predictors used in the model account 48.1 percent of the variance of AIAS mean. In the learning studies in education and behavioural learning this is a significant ratio since the learning outcomes of human beings are usually determined by many interconnected factors. Adjusted R 2 =.464 indicates that the model still has very high explanatory power even after taking into consideration the number of predictors. In real life, this would imply that now almost fifty percent of AI academic support/ adoptions among students can be attributed to variance in class room and classroom engagement, self-regulated learning and academic performance.

Table 6. ANOVA Analysis

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	22.495	3	7.498	29.610	.000
Residual	24.311	96	.253		
Total	46.807	99			

Source: Created by authors based on data analysis

The results of the ANOVA suggest that the regression model is statistically significant, F(3, 96) = 29.610, p =.001. This implies that the combination of the independent variables is an important predictor of AIAS Mean. That is, the overall model is superior to a model having no predictors. This observation proves that CE, SRL, and AP are collectively relevant in the explanation of the AI-related academic behaviour or perception of students.

Table 7.

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.430	0.294	—	1.464	.147
AP_Mean	0.267	0.088	0.264	3.054	.003
CE_Mean	0.030	0.102	0.028	0.292	.771
SRL_Mean	0.539	0.092	0.524	5.858	.000

Source: Created by authors based on data analysis

Self-Regulated Learning (SRL mean) was the best predictor of AIAS mean with a standardized beta coefficient of .524 (t = 5.858, p =.001). This fact suggests that learners that are more knowledgeable about arranging, supervising, and managing their own learning have a much higher chance of utilizing or appreciating AI as an academic aids support. The fact that this coefficient is huge and meaningful indicates that self-regulated learners have an ideal opportunity to incorporate AI into their learning approach. It is highly consistent with existing research indicating that AI tools can be most effectively employed in education when the student operates in a designed process of self-regulation including planning, feedback applications, revision, and self-monitoring.

Academic Performance (AP_Mean) was also discovered to be a great positive predictor of AIAS_Mean, where 0264 =.264 (t = 3.054, p =.003). This implies that learners that have higher academic performance are also more inclined to affirm that they have stronger AI academic assistance or AI application. One of the likely explanations is that the students with high academic performance can prove to be more strategic and resourceful in recognizing and using the tools that make the learning process effective and productive.

On the contrary, there was no statistically significant influence of Classroom Engagement (CE_Mean) on AIAS_Mean in the presence when the other variables were held constant (Beta =.028, t = 0.292, p =.771). However, the predictive value of CE in the regression

model lost the significance of the earlier bivariate correlation significantly despite the fact that the correlation coefficient was significantly positive because the correlation scored high in the bivariate analysis. This implies that the connection between classroom engagement and AIAS can be answered indirectly by a more powerful variable like self-regulated learning as well as academic performance. That is, classroom activity does not appear to be a purely predictive factor in case the independent learning habits and performance level of the students are considered regarding the possibility of academic support through AI.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of the current research are meaningful in relation to the factors that impact on AI Adoption in Studies (AIAS) among undergraduate students. According to the regression model that considered Academic Performance (AP), Cognitive Engagement (CE) and Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) as predictors of AIAS, these results show that there is no single factor to predict how students use AI in academic settings, but rather it is a combination of academic behaviour, learning autonomy, and performance orientation.

One of the results of the team is that Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) is the most and most statistically significant positive predictor of AI adoption. The learner-centered standardized coefficient of SRL ($\beta = 0.524$, $p < .001$) indicates that more able students to plan, monitor and control their learning are much more inclined to embrace AI technological resources in their studies. Such an outcome is theoretically coincidental with the perception that AI tools are best appropriated by proactive, reflective, and self-reliant academic tasks among learners. Having a high level of self-regulation, students can utilize AI not only as something convenient to help them on their way, but as a strategy in token production, clarification of the thought, development of ideas, summary, and formulating self-tests. This concurs with the previous educational technology texts that postulate that the independent learner might be more inclined to engage digital tools in a meaningful way into his/her learning model.

The research also discovered that Academic Performance (AP) influences the AI adoption in a positive and statistically significant manner ($\beta = 0.264$, $p = .003$). It means that there will be an increased likelihood that students who believe themselves to be doing better in their academics will also make use of the AI tools in their learning. A potential reason is that students with better performance would find AI as a way to make one more work product. They can rely on AI to enhance knowledge, minimize time, and achieve quality output. This result contradicts the popular belief of the existence of AI being applied primarily to weaker students. Alternatively, the findings indicate that the students of higher academic proficiency are perhaps one of the most prolific adopters of AI, presumably due to being more inclined to maximize learning and ensure performance.

Cognitive Engagement (CE) in contrast was clearly found to influence adoption of AI in a positive but statistically insignificant manner ($\beta = 0.028$, $p = .771$). Whereas at the bivariate level CE and AIAS correlated moderately positively ($r = .504$, $p < .01$), the specific contribution

ceased to exist in the multiple regression analysis equation when SP with SRL were involved. This poses a possibility that greater collaboration among students might involve more AI use, but Cognitive interaction is not the reason why individuals will adopt AI, even after accounting for self-regulation and academic performance. It is possible again that the application of AI in learning institutions is more heavily supported by individual learning tactics than peer-to-peer or group educational interaction. Put differently, students can mostly apply AI as an individual academic helper but not as a team-based tool.

In general, the model accounts 48.1% of the variance in AI adoption (R 2 =.481) that shows that its explanatory power is moderately strong. This implies that a combination of AP, CE, and SRL is significant to explain almost half of the differences in the behavior of students regarding AI adoption. Although this is quite substantial, it also indicates that other factors that are not covered in the model (such as digital literacy, perceived usefulness, ethical perceptions, institutional support, accessibility or attitudes towards AI) can also be extremely important. Thus, the current results provide a solid yet not comprehensive explanation of the adoption of AI in higher education.

6. CONCLUSION

The research investigated the relationship between Academic Performance (AP), Cognitive Engagement (CE), and Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) and AI Adoption in Studies (AIAS) among students of universities. The results tacitly show that the use of AI in the academic setting has a strong positive relationship with internal learning and academic orientation of students. Self-Regulated Learning was found to be the strongest among the three predictors as compared to Academic Performance. This means that the more self-motivated and academically oriented students will be willing to use AI tools as learning tools. By comparison, Cognitive Engagement exhibited no statistically significant independent effect, indicating that the adopted usage of AI is more significantly associated with individual academic behavior, as opposed to Cognitive academic involvement. The research hence postulates that there is no random or even consistent adoption of AI tools by students. Instead, their initiation seems to go in the manner that the students are motivated by the learning discipline, academic desire, and capacity to maintain their studies under their own machineries. The implications of these outcomes are also significant, as it emphasizes that AI in the educational setting proves useful on the example of students who are capable of approaching AI with critical, responsible, and meaningful interactions.

Resting on the results, some effective recommendations can be offered. Firstly, educational institutions endeavoring in provision of higher education must focus more on the aspect of teaching students to regulate learning all by themselves. The areas addressed in workshops, academic support, and orientation should revolve around time management, goal setting, reflective learning, and independent study approaches because they seem to

highly promote effective borrowing of AI. Second, the AI literacy should be included in the academic development training in universities. Given that academically better-equipped students likely appear to be profitable AI factors, the institutions must make sure that educators possess the skills to guide all learners, in particular, those with poor achievements, on how to use AI tools in an ethical, critical, and a productive approach to learning and not dependency.

Third, in spite of the fact, that Cognitive engagement was not a substantial predictor in the regression model, the application of AI to facilitate group learning and peer collaboration should be explored further by the institutions because the latter is a less advanced field. AI used in a structured classroom activity, involving both a discussion and teamwork as well as Cognitive problem solving, can help expand its educational utility. Last but not least, further inquiries of the adopted digital competence, attitudes toward AI, ethical awareness, perceived usefulness, and institutional support as other variables need to be tackled in future research to make the student AI adoption model more comprehensive. This kind of research would assist the universities to develop more useful policies and support systems of learning with AI-enhanced learning. To conclude, the use of AI in research should not be viewed as a technology problem, but a behavioral learning problem. Universities interested in supporting the meaningful and accountable use of AI should, consequently, not be limited to gaining admission of technology, but also ameliorating the academic and self-directional competencies of the students.

Convenience sampling was used in this study, which is useful for exploratory research of this kind but restricts the findings' applicability outside of the sampled institutions. The sample might not accurately reflect students in every field, kind of institution (private vs. state) or area of Sri Lanka. To improve the external validity of results, future studies should use stratified random sampling or probability-based sampling techniques in addition to more institutional representation. This study's cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer a causal relationship between the predictor variables and the adoption of AIAS. Although Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy paradigm serves as the theoretical foundation for AP, a bidirectional relationship between AP and AIAS cannot be ruled out (Zimmerman, 2002), and further longitudinal study is advised to elucidate this relationship.

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PERSONA CONSTRUCTION IN TINUBU'S TWEETS TO WORLD LEADERS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Political communication on social media now functions not only as a channel for information dissemination but also as a site for identity and persona construction. In Nigeria, however, existing studies on political discourse have largely focused on campaign speeches, domestic policy statements, and official addresses, with limited attention to how political actors construct personas in digital spaces. This study addressed this gap by examining how Nigeria's President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, implicitly constructs his political persona through tweets directed at or concerning world leaders. Adopting a Critical Discourse Analysis approach, the study analysed ten purposively selected tweets covering diplomatic congratulations, condolences, regional security statements, bilateral engagements, and foreign policy announcements. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, the analysis explored textual features, discursive practices, and broader socio-ideological implications within the context of digital diplomacy. Findings revealed that Tinubu projected a multifaceted persona characterised by authority and resolve in matters of democratic governance and regional stability, empathy in moments of shared grief, diplomatic courtesy in bilateral relations, and visionary leadership in advancing foreign policy agenda. These identities are constructed through strategies such as institutional self-positioning, affective personalisation, positive evaluation of international counterparts, symbolic representation of Nigeria and Africa, and policy branding. Ideologically, the discourse aligns with liberal democratic values, constitutionalism, pan-African solidarity, and developmental cooperation, thereby legitimising Nigeria's leadership role in West Africa. Power asymmetries are mitigated through inclusive and reciprocal language, positioning Nigeria as a responsible regional leader and credible global partner. The study

contributes to scholarship on digital diplomacy, political persona construction, and African political discourse in online spaces.

Keywords
tweets 1; political persona 2; discursive strategies 3; ideological positioning 4; power relations 5; digital diplomacy 6; pan-African solidarity 7

1. INTRODUCTION

Political communication has increasingly shifted from traditional diplomatic channels to digital platforms, particularly social media. Heads of State and government now routinely use platforms such as X, formerly Twitter, to address both domestic and international audiences. These short messages function not only as information-sharing tools but also as strategic sites for identity construction. Scholars have noted that social media enables political actors to manage impressions, cultivate legitimacy, and personalise power through carefully crafted discourse (Enli, 2017; KhosraviNik, 2017). Within this broader digital turn in political communication, the notion of political persona has gained prominence. Political persona refers to the public identity constructed through repeated discursive choices, including tone, address forms, evaluative language, and representations of self and others (Corner & Pels, 2003). On social media, persona construction is intensified by brevity, immediacy, and global visibility. Tweets directed at world leaders, in particular, serve a dual purpose: they perform diplomacy while simultaneously projecting an international image to a mass audience.

Against this backdrop of digitally mediated political interaction, the use of Twitter by African political leaders warrants closer scholarly attention. In the Nigerian context, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has made consistent use of Twitter to congratulate, console, and engage with global political figures. These messages are not neutral diplomatic courtesies. They are ideological texts that reflect power relations, foreign policy orientation, and self-positioning within the global political order. To study these dimensions effectively, an analytical framework that foregrounds language as a site of power is required. Critical Discourse Analysis provides such a framework, as it explicitly examines the relationship between discourse, ideology, and social power (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008).

Despite the relevance of this perspective, existing studies on Nigerian political discourse have largely concentrated on campaign speeches, domestic policy statements, or election-related communication. While these studies have offered valuable insights into ideology, persuasion, and power, they tend to overlook international-facing discourse on social media. Similarly, research on political communication on Twitter often focuses on Western political actors, leaving African political leadership underrepresented in global scholarship (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). This gap is particularly evident in the study of persona construction. Although Tinubu's tweets to world leaders are publicly accessible and discursively rich, they are often treated as routine diplomatic gestures rather than as

strategic texts that construct identity and authority. The absence of systematic Critical Discourse Analysis of these tweets means that the ideological meanings, power relations, and self-representations embedded in them remain underexplored. Without such analysis, understanding of Nigeria's digital diplomacy and the linguistic construction of presidential persona at the international level remains incomplete.

It is this scholarly gap that the present study seeks to address. The study aims to achieve two objectives. The first is to identify and analyse the discursive strategies used by Tinubu in tweets addressed to world leaders in order to construct his political persona, and the second is to examine how ideological positioning and power relations are linguistically encoded in the purposively selected tweets within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis.

The pursuit of these objectives is justified on both scholarly and contextual grounds. From an academic perspective, the study responds to calls for more discourse-analytic research on non-Western political actors in global digital spaces. By focusing on international-facing tweets, it extends political discourse analysis beyond domestic concerns to include digital diplomacy and global self-representation. Contextually, social media has become a key arena for shaping international perceptions of political leadership. Understanding how a Nigerian president constructs political persona in this space has implications for studies of foreign policy communication, national image-building, and power negotiation in global politics. The study is therefore relevant to scholars in linguistics, political communication, media studies, and international relations.

Within this context, the study contributes to knowledge in several ways. First, it expands the application of Critical Discourse Analysis to international political communication on social media within an African context, an area that remains under-researched. Second, it provides empirical insights into how political persona is discursively constructed through short-form digital texts directed at global actors. Third, the study enriches existing literature on political discourse by demonstrating how ideology and power operate subtly within ostensibly polite and ceremonial diplomatic messages. In doing so, it positions social media diplomacy as a significant site for ideological analysis rather than a peripheral communicative practice.

2. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

This section reviews the key concepts that underpin the study, namely persona construction, mediated authenticity, digital diplomacy, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and demonstrates how their intersection provides a suitable framework for examining President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's tweets addressed to world leaders.

Political persona refers to the publicly projected identity that political actors construct through strategic communicative practices. Rather than being a fixed or natural representation of the self, persona is discursively produced through repeated linguistic and

symbolic choices, including tone, forms of address, evaluative expressions, imagery, narratives, and intertextual references. According to Corner and Pels (2003), political persona emerges at the intersection of politics, media, and performance, where political authority is increasingly shaped by visibility, representation, and audience engagement. In contemporary politics, public leaders are not only expected to govern but also to cultivate recognisable identities that resonate with diverse audiences. Social media platforms have intensified this process by enabling politicians to communicate directly with citizens and international stakeholders without relying exclusively on traditional media gatekeepers.

Closely connected to persona construction is the concept of mediated authenticity. Enli (2017) argues that authenticity in digital political communication is not merely an inherent personal quality but a communicative performance strategically enacted through media practices. In the context of social media, political actors seek to appear sincere, relatable, transparent, and accessible while simultaneously maintaining authority and control over their public image. This phenomenon, which Enli terms mediated authenticity, reflects the paradoxical nature of contemporary political communication, where carefully curated messages are designed to create impressions of spontaneity and genuineness.

According to Enli (2017), social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) encourage perceptions of authenticity because they facilitate direct and seemingly unmediated interactions between political leaders and audiences. Through personalised language, emotional expressions, informal greetings, and timely responses to events, political actors can project a sense of proximity that reduces the symbolic distance between leaders and followers. However, these performances are often highly strategic and professionally managed. What appears to be a spontaneous or personal expression may therefore serve broader political objectives, including reputation management, image repair, legitimacy building, and audience mobilisation. Enli's work is particularly relevant to the present study because presidential tweets addressed to world leaders often blend formal diplomatic conventions with personalised expressions of goodwill, congratulations, solidarity, or empathy. Such messages contribute not only to diplomatic engagement but also to the construction of an international political persona that appears both authoritative and approachable.

The construction of political persona through mediated authenticity is inseparable from the transformation of diplomatic communication in the digital age. This transformation is captured within the literature on digital diplomacy and Twitter diplomacy, which emphasises that social media platforms are not merely channels for information dissemination but important sites for the performance of foreign policy. Digital diplomacy refers to the use of digital technologies and social media platforms by state actors to achieve diplomatic objectives, manage international relations, and influence foreign publics. Bjola and Jiang (2015) observe that digital platforms have reconfigured diplomatic practice by increasing the speed, visibility, and interactivity of political communication. Through these platforms, political leaders can communicate directly with foreign

governments, international organisations, domestic audiences, and global publics simultaneously.

The rise of digital diplomacy has also altered the nature of diplomatic texts. Tweets addressed to world leaders function as hybrid communicative acts that combine the formal characteristics of diplomacy with the personalised and public nature of social media discourse. Such messages often perform multiple functions simultaneously: they express diplomatic courtesy, signal ideological alignment, strengthen bilateral relations, project national interests, and construct favourable public images of political leadership. Consequently, diplomatic communication on social media should be understood not merely as information exchange but as a performative practice through which political identities and international relationships are continually negotiated.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides the analytical framework necessary to examine how persona construction, mediated authenticity, and digital diplomacy are realised linguistically in these texts. CDA is concerned with the ways discourse reflects, sustains, and challenges power relations and ideological structures within society. Fairclough (1995) argues that discourse constitutes a form of social practice through which social realities are produced and reproduced. By examining lexical choices, grammatical structures, rhetorical strategies, and patterns of representation, CDA reveals how language contributes to the construction of identities, relationships, and systems of power.

Recent developments in CDA have extended its analytical tools to digital communication environments, recognising that social media discourse possesses distinctive characteristics shaped by platform affordances, interactivity, visibility, and audience participation. Digital texts therefore require analyses that account for both their linguistic features and their broader socio-technological contexts. Applied to Tinubu's tweets addressed to world leaders, CDA facilitates a critical examination of how diplomatic language is strategically employed to construct political persona, perform authenticity, communicate ideological positions, and project Nigeria's role within the global political order.

The concepts of political persona, mediated authenticity, digital diplomacy, and CDA are therefore mutually reinforcing. Political persona provides the object of analysis, mediated authenticity explains the communicative strategies through which that persona is rendered credible and relatable, digital diplomacy situates these practices within contemporary international communication, and CDA offers the methodological tools for uncovering the ideological and power dimensions embedded in the discourse. Together, these concepts provide a coherent framework for analysing how President Bola Ahmed Tinubu constructs and performs his international political persona through tweets addressed to world leaders.

3. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Empirical studies on political communication have demonstrated the analytical value of examining persona construction on Twitter, particularly in relation to high-profile political leaders. Research on Donald Trump, for instance, shows how unconventional tone, direct address, and provocative framing can disrupt mainstream media agendas and generate a highly recognisable political persona that blends celebrity, grievance, and dominance (Ruffa, 2019). Comparative research on other executive leaders, notably Narendra Modi, reveals a contrasting mode of persona construction. Rather than provocation, these studies highlight strategic brand-building, curated visual imagery, and the instrumental deployment of emotional appeals to project a disciplined, modernising, and development-oriented persona. Such findings suggest that persona construction on Twitter is shaped not only by individual leadership style but also by party ideology, campaign strategy, and the broader national media ecosystem in which communication occurs (Pal & Vydiswaran, 2016).

The role of Twitter in moments of crisis further underscores the performative dimensions of persona construction. During the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders' social media activity intensified, and scholars documented how Twitter was used to assert competence, reassure publics, and frame policy responses. These crisis-oriented studies demonstrate how short-form political messaging functions as a site for legitimacy-building, where persona is reinforced through performances of control, empathy, and responsibility (Haman, 2020).

Methodologically, these empirical studies have increasingly adopted mixed approaches that combine Critical Discourse Analysis with corpus-assisted techniques, discourse-historical methods, and multimodal analysis. Such combinations enable scholars to manage large volumes of tweets while maintaining sensitivity to micro-level rhetorical strategies. In this regard, KhosraviNik and others advocate a Social Media Critical Discourse Studies approach that explicitly accounts for platform affordances such as hashtags, retweets, mentions, and embedded media. This methodological development positions CDA as particularly well suited for analysing persona construction on platforms where textual form and circulation are technologically shaped.

Within the Nigerian context, empirical research indicates a strong uptake of Twitter as a tool for political campaigning, agenda-setting, and image management. Recent studies, including Joe (2023), Olabanjo et al. (2023), Ibanga et al. (2023), and Kwakwye (2024), examine Twitter use during the 2023 general elections, focusing on party communication strategies, audience engagement, and presidential messaging related to governance and security. Earlier research on President Muhammadu Buhari's Twitter account provides a proximate precedent, illustrating how presidential tweets function performatively to project authority and manages public perception in Nigeria.

More recent empirical works and postgraduate theses have begun to examine Bola Ahmed Tinubu's use of Twitter during the 2023 election campaign and the immediate post-election period. However, these studies largely prioritise campaign strategy, sentiment

analysis, or engagement metrics, rather than close linguistic and ideological analysis. As a result, tweets addressed specifically to world leaders are often excluded or treated as peripheral diplomatic gestures. Collectively, while these studies establish Twitter as a significant arena for Nigerian political communication, they leave a notable gap in scholarship on the discursive construction of international political persona by African leaders. This gap necessitates a Critical Discourse Analysis of Tinubu's international-facing tweets in order to uncover how ideology, power relations, and persona are linguistically produced in digital diplomacy.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a framework that provides a systematic means of examining the relationship between language, power, and social practice. CDA, as conceptualised by Fairclough, is concerned with how discourse both reflects and constitutes social realities, particularly in contexts where power relations and ideology are at play. Given the focus of this paper on persona construction in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's tweets addressed to world leaders, Fairclough's model offers an appropriate and robust analytical lens for interrogating how linguistic choices function within broader socio-political processes.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model conceptualises discourse as a simultaneously textual, discursive, and social phenomenon. The model comprises three interrelated dimensions: the textual level, the level of discursive practice, and the level of social practice. These dimensions enable the analyst to move beyond surface-level linguistic description to a critical interpretation of how texts are produced, circulated, and embedded within wider structures of power and ideology.

At the first dimension, discourse is analysed as text. This level involves a close examination of the formal properties of language, including vocabulary, grammar, transitivity patterns, modality, pronoun usage, and rhetorical strategies. In the context of Tinubu's tweets to world leaders, textual analysis focuses on how specific lexical choices, evaluative language, and syntactic structures are deployed to project particular personal and political attributes. Features such as self-referential pronouns, expressions of authority or solidarity, and strategic politeness are examined to uncover how persona is linguistically constructed within the constrained and highly visible space of social media discourse.

The second dimension concerns discursive practice, which relates to the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. At this level, the study examines how Tinubu's tweets are shaped by the conventions of diplomatic communication and the affordances of the social media platform formerly known as Twitter (now X). This includes attention to intertextuality, that is, how the tweets draw upon, echo, or recontextualise existing diplomatic norms, political narratives, and global discourses of leadership. Discursive practice analysis also considers the intended audiences, both the explicitly addressed world leaders and the broader international public, and how these audiences

influence the construction of a credible, authoritative, and globally oriented presidential persona.

The third dimension, social practice, situates the discourse within its wider socio-political and ideological context. This level of analysis explores how Tinubu's tweets are connected to broader structures of power, international relations, and Nigeria's positioning within the global political order. Persona construction is interpreted here as a strategic social practice through which presidential authority, legitimacy, and ideological alignment are negotiated on the international stage. The analysis takes into account the historical context of Nigeria's diplomatic engagements, contemporary global political dynamics, and dominant ideologies surrounding leadership, sovereignty, and cooperation.

By integrating these three dimensions, Fairclough's model allows for a comprehensive analysis of persona construction that links micro-level linguistic choices to macro-level social processes. The framework is particularly suited to the study of political communication on social media, where discourse operates simultaneously as text, interaction, and social action. In applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this study demonstrates how Tinubu's tweets to world leaders function not merely as communicative acts, but as ideologically loaded discourses that actively shape and project presidential persona within the global political arena.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is particularly suitable for this because it foregrounds the relationship between language, power, ideology, and social context, all of which are central to political communication in digital spaces. The study is interpretive in orientation, aiming not to quantify linguistic features but to critically explain how discursive choices contribute to the construction of presidential persona within international diplomatic discourse.

The data for this study consist of ten (10) purposively selected tweets drawn from a total of thirty (30) tweets posted by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on his verified X (formerly Twitter) account, @officialABAT, between mid-2023 and mid-2025. The selected tweets are explicitly addressed to world leaders and were produced during the first half of his tenure as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This temporal delimitation ensures that the data reflect his official institutional role and strengthens the interpretive validity of the analysis by situating the discourse within a diplomatic context.

The tweets were selected based on the following criteria: direct mention or tagging of foreign heads of state or government, references to bilateral or multilateral relations, and relevance to international diplomatic engagements. Furthermore, the selected tweets contain clear instances of self-representation and persona construction, making them particularly suitable for addressing the objectives of the study.

The analysis follows Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. At the textual level, the tweets are examined for salient linguistic features such as lexical choices, evaluative

expressions, and rhetorical strategies. These features are analysed to identify how authority, solidarity, leadership, and international alignment are linguistically encoded in the construction of presidential persona. At the level of discursive practice, the study examines processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. Attention is paid to intertextuality and interdiscursivity, particularly how the tweets draw on established conventions of diplomatic discourse, political rhetoric, and social media communication. The analysis also considers the multiple audiences of the tweets, including the explicitly addressed world leaders and the wider global public, and how audience design influences persona construction. At the level of social practice, the findings from the textual and discursive analyses are interpreted within broader socio-political and ideological contexts.

The study relies exclusively on publicly available data gathered from President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's official and verified X account, @officialABAT. As such, no issues of informed consent or participant anonymity arise. Nevertheless, the analysis is conducted with scholarly responsibility, avoiding misrepresentation and ensuring that interpretations remain faithful to the textual and contextual evidence.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

Each tweet is analysed below as a text:

Text 1



Source:@officialABAT

This text was tweeted in response to the military coup that ousted the democratically elected government of Niger that time. In it, President Tinubu constructs a firm and authoritative political persona through language that blends institutional legitimacy, moral certainty, and regional leadership. The opening reference to his role as Chairperson of ECOWAS foregrounds institutional power, while expressions such as "without equivocation" and the strong modal "shall not waver or flinch" encode resolve and close down alternative positions. Nigeria is personified, in the text, as a unified moral actor through the declarative "Nigeria stands with the elected government in Niger," suppressing internal dissent and projecting national coherence.

This text draws on diplomatic, security, and democratic governance discourses, particularly through the ideologically loaded statement "defend and preserve constitutional order," which aligns President Tinubu with globally legitimised norms against military rule. The language used naturalises Nigeria's hegemonic role within West Africa by presenting

intervention as a moral obligation rather than a political choice, thereby reinforcing asymmetrical power relations between Nigeria and Niger while framing ECOWAS authority as both legitimate and non-negotiable.

Text 2

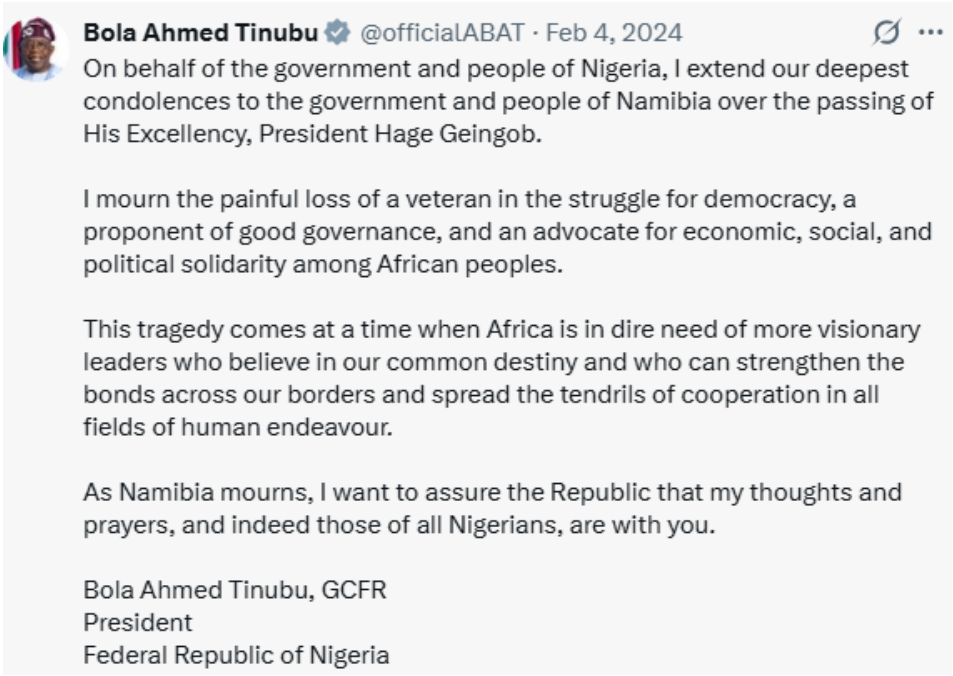


Source:@officialABAT

This text constructs a diplomatic and aspirational political persona anchored in legitimacy, representational authority, and strategic global engagement. At the textual level, expressions such as "deep appreciation" and "for hosting" employ positive evaluative language that conveys diplomatic courtesy and positions Tinubu as a respectful and cooperative participant in global governance. His self-identification as "the President of the most populous black nation on earth" functions as a discursive strategy of symbolic representation, projecting Nigeria as a demographic and geopolitical heavyweight while implicitly claiming a representative voice for Africa within international forums. The forward-looking verb phrases "look forward to meeting" and "forging strong alliances" encode agency, intentionality, and optimism, presenting leadership as proactive, collaborative, and future-oriented rather than reactive.

At the ideological level, references to a "brighter future" and the articulation of the "renewed 4D foreign policy objectives" draw upon dominant discourses of development, democracy, and international cooperation, thereby aligning Nigeria with globally valued norms and aspirations. The formulation of the 4Ds also serves as a strategic branding device, simplifying complex foreign policy goals into a coherent and memorable leadership vision. At the level of social practice, the text reproduces prevailing global power structures by acknowledging the G20 as a legitimate centre of international influence. Simultaneously, however, it seeks to negotiate Nigeria's status within this order by positioning both Nigeria and Africa as indispensable partners in global affairs. Through inclusive and future-oriented language, the tweet projects soft power and reinforce claims to continental leadership without resorting to overt assertions of dominance or coercion.

Text 3



Bola Ahmed Tinubu @officialABAT · Feb 4, 2024

On behalf of the government and people of Nigeria, I extend our deepest condolences to the government and people of Namibia over the passing of His Excellency, President Hage Geingob.

I mourn the painful loss of a veteran in the struggle for democracy, a proponent of good governance, and an advocate for economic, social, and political solidarity among African peoples.

This tragedy comes at a time when Africa is in dire need of more visionary leaders who believe in our common destiny and who can strengthen the bonds across our borders and spread the tendrils of cooperation in all fields of human endeavour.

As Namibia mourns, I want to assure the Republic that my thoughts and prayers, and indeed those of all Nigerians, are with you.

Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR
President
Federal Republic of Nigeria

Source:@officialABAT

In this text, Tinubu constructs a compassionate yet authoritative political persona through ritualised diplomatic language, collective representation, and the invocation of pan-African ideals. At the textual level, the opening formula, "On behalf of the government and people of Nigeria," establishes institutional legitimacy and a collective voice, positioning Tinubu as the embodiment of national sentiment rather than a private individual. The repeated lexical pairing, "government and people" in reference to both Nigeria and Namibia foregrounds reciprocity, solidarity, and mutual respect between the two nations. Similarly, evaluative expressions such as "veteran in the struggle for democracy," "proponent of good governance," and "advocate for economic, social, and political solidarity" draw upon democratic and developmental discourses to construct the deceased as a moral and political exemplar.

The text intertwines condolence discourse with political idealisation, transforming an expression of mourning into an opportunity to reaffirm shared African values and leadership ideals. Ideological positioning is most evident in references to "our common destiny" and "the bonds across our borders," which invoke pan-Africanism and a collective continental identity. These expressions subtly de-emphasise national boundaries in favour of a broader vision of African unity and interconnectedness. Power relations are softened rather than eliminated, as Nigeria's regional influence is exercised through moral authority, symbolic inclusion, and diplomatic reassurance rather than through directive or coercive language. Consequently, the text enables Tinubu to project leadership through empathy, shared loss,

and a commitment to continued continental cooperation, thereby reinforcing both his statesmanlike image and Nigeria's role as a key actor in African affairs.

Text 4



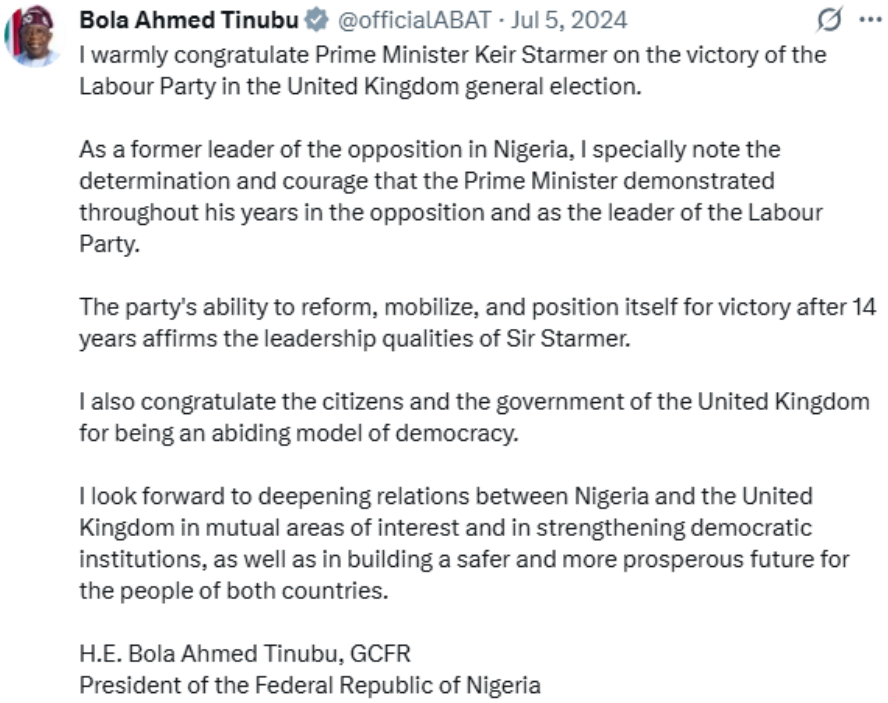
Source:@officialABAT

Bola Tinubu, in this text, constructs a courteous and statesmanlike political persona through diplomatic politeness, institutional respect, and regional partnership discourse. At the textual dimension, the formal address, "Dear President Ramaphosa," and the repeated use of the verb "congratulate" enact recognition and legitimacy, while the positive evaluation of the election as "peaceful and successful" aligns him with democratic norms and electoral integrity.

The message draws on the genre of congratulatory diplomacy, where praise of the electoral process functions not only as an expression of goodwill but also as an ideological endorsement of constitutional democracy. The declarative statement, "I call for the strengthening of bilateral ties," encodes agency and leadership without coercion, presenting cooperation as mutually beneficial rather than hierarchical. Ideological positioning is further evident in the construction of Nigeria and South Africa as "strategic partners in Africa," which symbolically elevates both states as key actors on the continent, while the aspiration for "the overall advancement of the continent" invokes pan-African solidarity and collective progress.

At the level of social practice, power relations are negotiated through balanced and inclusive language, projecting Nigeria's regional influence through partnership and shared democratic values rather than dominance or directive authority. Consequently, the text constructs a leadership identity that derives legitimacy from diplomacy, cooperation, and a commitment to continental development.

Text 5



Source:@officialABAT

In this text, President Tinubu constructs a reflective and democratically grounded political persona through personal alignment, institutional respect, and normative endorsement of liberal democracy. At the textual level, the repeated use of "congratulate" performs diplomatic recognition, while the evaluative lexis "determination," "courage," and "leadership qualities" attributes moral and political competence to Prime Minister Starmer. The self-referential clause "As a former leader of the opposition in Nigeria" is a key discursive strategy of identification, allowing him to build experiential solidarity and credibility by drawing parallels between political trajectories across national contexts.

The text blends congratulatory diplomacy with autobiographical legitimation, subtly repositioning President Tinubu as an insider to democratic struggle rather than a distant observer. Ideological positioning is reinforced through the description of the United Kingdom as "an abiding model of democracy," which aligns him with established democratic norms and elevates the UK as a benchmark to be emulated. Power relations are encoded through soft diplomacy, as the call to "deepen relations" and "strengthen democratic institutions" frames Nigeria–UK relations as cooperative and mutually beneficial, while implicitly acknowledging asymmetrical democratic capital by invoking the UK's institutional authority without challenging it, thereby asserting Nigeria's agency through shared values rather than overt power.

Text 6



Source:@officialABAT

In the text above, President Tinubu constructs a warm yet authoritative political persona through personalised diplomacy, symbolic recognition, and narratives of mutual respect. At the textual level, the direct address "my dear friend" humanises interstate relations and projects Tinubu as personable and confident, while expressions such as "profound honour" and "distinguished Indian delegation" employ elevated evaluative language that reinforces diplomatic courtesy.

The text blends ceremonial state discourse with relational diplomacy, particularly through the act of conferring the GCON, which functions as a symbolic exercise of sovereign power while framing it as friendship rather than hierarchy. Ideologically, the repeated references to "shared history," "democratic values," and "common aspirations" align both nations within liberal democratic and developmental discourses, and present cooperation as natural and value-driven. The praise of India's "transformative leadership" and success in managing "a complex democracy" simultaneously legitimises India's global standing and reflects aspirational identification. Power relations are linguistically softened through reciprocity and mutuality, yet Nigeria's authority is subtly asserted through the bestowal of a national honour and the framing of partnership as "enduring," allowing leadership to be enacted through symbolic capital, shared values, and ceremonial affirmation rather than overt political dominance.

Text 7

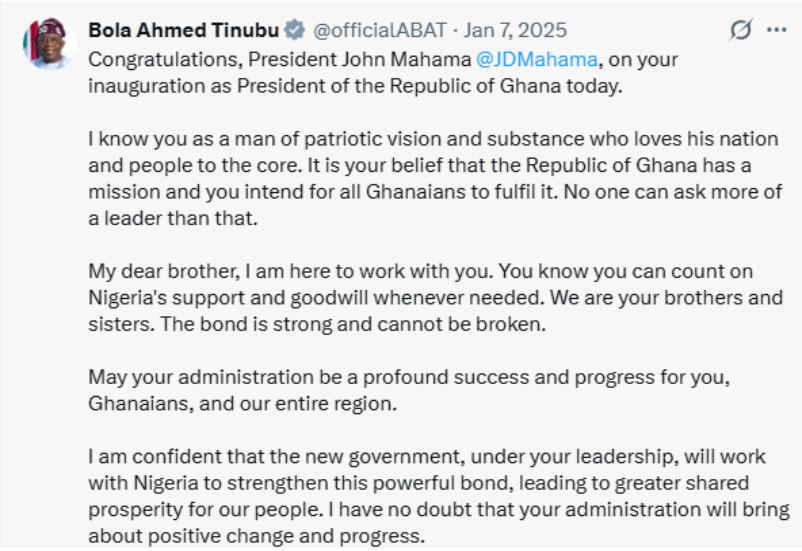


Source:@officialABAT

In this text, there is a construction of a cordial and forward-looking political persona through personalised diplomacy, cooperative framing, and soft power alignment. At the textual level, expressions such as "heartfelt gratitude," "my friend," and "gracious welcome" employ affective and relational lexis that humanises interstate relations and presents President Tinubu as approachable yet confident within elite diplomatic circles.

The tweet draws on the genre of courtesy diplomacy typical of state visits, where appreciation and anticipation of dialogue function to signal goodwill and readiness for cooperation rather than negotiation or contestation. Ideological positioning is encoded through the reference to a "rich history of collaboration," which naturalises bilateral relations as stable and mutually beneficial, while the forward-looking clause "explore new avenues for partnership" aligns with development and strategic cooperation discourses. Power relations are managed through balanced language that avoids hierarchy, framing Nigeria and France as equal partners whose engagement is driven by shared interests and reciprocal benefit, thereby projecting leadership through consensus-building and diplomatic civility rather than assertion or coercion.

Text 8



Source:@officialABAT

President Tinubu builds a fraternal and reassuring political persona through affective language, moral evaluation, and regional solidarity discourse in this tweet. The repeated congratulatory and affirming expressions such as "patriotic vision and substance," "loves his nation and people," and "profound success" positively evaluate the Ghanaian leader's character, while the inclusive pronouns "we," "our," and "us" used dissolve rigid national boundaries in favour of collective identity.

The tweet blends inauguration congratulatory discourse with kinship rhetoric, most clearly in the address "my dear brother" and the assertion "we are your brothers and sisters," which reframes international relations as familial rather than purely diplomatic. The ideological stance in the text is strongly pan-African, foregrounding shared destiny, mutual support, and regional integration as natural and desirable norms. Power relations are linguistically encoded through assurances of support and goodwill rather than directives, yet Nigeria's regional influence is implicitly affirmed by positioning it as a dependable partner whose backing is readily available. Leadership is thus enacted through moral endorsement, emotional proximity, and the promise of cooperative action, presenting regional authority as relational and consensual rather than hierarchical.

Text 9



Source:@officialABAT

President Tinubu constructs a compassionate and responsible political persona through empathetic language, collective representation, and solidarity discourse in this text. At the textual level, affective expressions such as "deeply saddened," "heartfelt condolences," and "profound loss" foreground emotional alignment, while the adverbial "On behalf of Nigeria" positions President Tinubu as the authorised voice of the nation. The commendation of "courageous efforts" and "selfless work" draws on valorising humanitarian lexis, reinforcing moral authority and respect for civic duty.

The tweet follows the genre of international condolence diplomacy, where expressions of grief function to maintain and strengthen diplomatic bonds during moments of crisis. Ideological positioning in the text is encoded in the emphasis on unity, resilience, and hope,

particularly through the declarative "Nigeria stands in solidarity with the United States," which aligns both nations within a shared moral community that transcends borders. Power relations are managed through equality and reciprocity rather than hierarchy, as Nigeria's global presence is asserted not through political leverage but through moral support and symbolic alignment, projecting leadership through empathy, shared humanity, and international responsibility.

Text 10



Bola Ahmed Tinubu @officialABAT · May 30, 2025

Two years ago, I pledged to champion a foreign policy prioritising our people, our prosperity, and our place in the world.

Today, I am proud to announce the West Africa Economic Summit (WAES) 2025, which will be held in Abuja on June 20–21, with the theme "Unlocking Trade and Investment Opportunities in the Region."

This summit is not just an event. It is a bold step toward a prosperous, integrated West Africa powered by trade, innovation, and our most valuable asset: our people.

WAES 2025 will bring together Heads of State, CEOs, investors, entrepreneurs, youth innovators, and development partners to craft real solutions and unlock real opportunities.

From the Presidential Roundtable to the Deal Room, from youth empowerment showcases to regional project partnerships — this is where vision meets action.

I invite the world to join us in Abuja as we build a stronger, more unified, and globally competitive West Africa.

waes2025.org

~ PBAT

Source:@officialABAT

The President constructs a visionary and proactive political persona in this text through assertive agency, regional leadership framing, and developmental discourse. At the textual level, declaratives such as "I pledged to champion," "I am proud to announce," and "this is where vision meets action" foreground personal and institutional agency, projecting Tinubu as a decisive and committed leader. Also, President Tinubu uses evaluative and promotional language, such as "bold step," "prosperous, integrated West Africa," "real solutions and unlock real opportunities" to frame the initiative as transformative and morally and economically necessary.

In the text, President Tinubu blends policy announcement, promotional rhetoric, and diplomatic invitation, thereby positioning the summit as both a domestic achievement and an avenue for global engagement. Ideological stance is encoded through narratives of regional integration, trade, innovation, and youth empowerment, which align Nigeria and West Africa with modernisation, development, and global competitiveness discourses. Power relations are linguistically asserted through leadership over the region and agenda-

setting authority, yet framed inclusively via invitations to "the world" and emphasis on partnerships, thereby constructing Nigeria as a central actor whose influence is exercised through facilitation, collaboration, and vision rather than coercion.

7. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined ten purposively selected tweets by Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu addressed to world leaders through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It explored how language constructs political persona, ideological positioning, and power relations. Findings reveal consistent linguistic patterns through which President Tinubu projects a multifaceted identity within global digital diplomacy. The analysis integrates Fairclough's textual, discursive, and social practice dimensions in addressing the two research objectives.

For the first objective, which focused on discursive strategies in persona construction, the analysis shows that Tinubu constructs an identity that is simultaneously authoritative, compassionate, visionary, and relational. The first strategy used is institutional self-positioning. He foregrounds roles such as "Chairperson of ECOWAS" (Text 1), "President of the most populous black nation" (Text 2), and "former leader of the opposition" (Text 5). These references merge personal biography with institutional authority, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of his voice. Declarative expressions such as "I state without equivocation" (Text 1) and "I am proud to announce" (Text 10) further reinforce this blend of personal agency and state authority.

The second strategy involves affective and relational diplomacy. Expressions such as "my dear friend" (Text 6), "my dear brother" (Text 8), and "heartfelt gratitude" (Text 7) personalise diplomatic interactions and create relational proximity. Positive appraisals of counterparts, such as "determination and courage" for Keir Starmer (Text 5) and "transformative leadership" for Narendra Modi (Text 6), construct solidarity through association. In condolence-oriented tweets (Texts 3 and 9), lexis such as "deeply saddened" and "profound loss" projects empathy while reinforcing moral authority.

Forward-looking rhetoric also strengthens his persona through formulations such as "look forward to meeting" (Text 2), "explore new avenues" (Text 7), and "vision meets action" (Text 10). The "4D Foreign Policy objectives" (Democracy, Development, Demography, Diaspora; Text 2) operate as a branding mechanism, compressing policy direction into a memorable framework that links institutional governance to personal leadership identity. Collectively, these strategies construct a hybrid persona that is firm in democratic defence, empathetic in solidarity, and visionary in international partnership.

For the second objective, which examined ideological positioning and power relations, the findings indicate that ideology and power are embedded in alignments with both global and regional norms. President Tinubu repeatedly invokes democratic governance and pan-African solidarity, framing political actions as moral and collective imperatives. Statements such as "…defend and preserve constitutional order" (Text 1) and references to "peaceful and successful" elections (Text 4) position Nigeria as a defender of democratic stability

within the region. Pan-African ideology is expressed through phrases such as "our common destiny" (Text 3), "strategic partners in Africa" (Text 4), and "a stronger, more united West Africa" (Text 10), reinforcing continental integration and shared identity.

Power relations are constructed through softened hierarchies and rhetorical reciprocity. In engagements with global powers such as the United Kingdom (Text 5) and France (Text 7), President Tinubu acknowledges established democratic traditions while emphasising "deepening relations" and "shared prosperity," thereby framing diplomacy as mutually beneficial rather than hierarchical. In interactions with African counterparts (Texts 3, 4, and 8), solidarity-oriented language positions Nigeria as both a peer and a supportive regional actor. This inclusive rhetoric simultaneously masks asymmetries while subtly reproducing leadership hierarchies.

At the level of social practice, these discursive choices reflect Nigeria's negotiation of its position within a multipolar global order. References to "global competitiveness" (Text 10) and "mutual respect" (Text 6) align with broader development narratives that frame African states as emerging actors in global governance. While pan-African elements foreground continental agency, the projection of national coherence may also marginalise internal plurality, revealing tensions inherent in digital diplomacy between state authority and democratic diversity. Nigeria's regional influence is grounded in its economic capacity, demographic weight, and historical role within ECOWAS stability efforts, although this position is constrained by domestic challenges and shifting geopolitical interests.

Mediated authenticity (Enli, 2017) offers a useful interpretive lens for these findings. Authenticity in digital political communication is performative, as leaders curate sincerity, immediacy, and relatability within institutional constraints. Tinubu's tweets reflect this through decisive authoritative positioning, expressions of national pride articulated in personal voice, emotionalised diplomatic engagement, interpersonal closeness through relational address forms, narratives of shared destiny, and strategic self-branding via the 4D framework and summit-oriented announcements (Texts 2 and 10). Together, these features construct a leader persona that is simultaneously resolute, empathetic, relational, and forward-looking.

8. CONCLUSION

This study applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to ten purposively selected international tweets by Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to examine how language constructs political persona, ideological positioning, and power relations within the context of digital diplomacy. The analysis demonstrates that Tinubu deploys a range of discursive strategies, including institutional self-positioning, affective and relational language, forward-looking rhetoric, and policy branding, particularly through the "4D" foreign policy framework of Democracy, Development, Demography, and Diaspora, to project a hybrid persona that is authoritative, empathetic, visionary, and relationally engaged. Through these strategies, the president personalises statecraft while simultaneously aligning Nigeria

with democratic norms, regional cooperation, and global engagement. The branding of the 4D framework is especially significant because it functions as a bridge between institutional foreign policy objectives and Tinubu's personal political identity, allowing complex diplomatic agendas to be communicated through a recognisable and personalised narrative that enhances his public appeal and leadership image.

At the ideological level, the tweets embed power relations within ostensibly egalitarian and reciprocal language. References to "common destiny", "shared prosperity", and mutual respect soften hierarchical distinctions with global powers while symbolically positioning Nigeria as a benevolent regional leader. Such constructions reproduce neoliberal development discourses and pan-African ideals, even as they obscure structural asymmetries and marginalise alternative perspectives. Drawing on Enli's (2017) concept of mediated authenticity, the study further demonstrates how these tweets cultivate an illusion of immediacy and direct access to the president's vision, emotions, and decision-making. Through carefully crafted expressions of empathy, optimism, gratitude, and resolve, Tinubu's digital communication presents institutional policy positions as extensions of personal conviction, thereby narrowing the perceived distance between political leadership and public audiences.

This research contributes to CDA scholarship by extending its application to African digital diplomacy, a relatively underexplored area of inquiry. While much existing research on political discourse focuses on Western leaders or traditional media environments, this study highlights the distinctive ways in which African heads of state utilise global digital platforms to negotiate identity, legitimacy, and influence. The findings demonstrate how mediated authenticity operates within postcolonial and multipolar contexts, where political leaders must simultaneously assert national and regional agency, conform to international liberal norms, and cultivate compelling personal brands. By integrating Fairclough's textual, discursive practice, and social practice dimensions of CDA, the analysis reveals the micro-linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms through which digital diplomacy both challenges and reproduces existing global power structures, particularly the tension between pan-African solidarity and neoliberal globalisation.

The study also advances understanding of how social media increasingly collapses the distinction between personal and institutional voice in African presidential communication. Through this convergence, leaders are able to perform authenticity, strengthen relational bonds with audiences, and simultaneously advance strategic foreign policy objectives. Practically, the findings offer insights for scholars of political communication, diplomatic practitioners, media literacy educators, and strategic communication professionals by illustrating the persuasive and legitimising functions of language in contemporary digital statecraft.

The conclusions drawn from this study are not intended to be generalisable to all African or global leaders' social media practices. Rather, they illuminate distinctive patterns within Tinubu's international digital discourse. Future research may build on these findings

through comparative studies of African political leaders, longitudinal analyses of evolving diplomatic rhetoric, multimodal investigations incorporating images and videos, and audience reception studies that examine how such curated messages are interpreted by domestic, regional, and international publics.

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APPENDICES

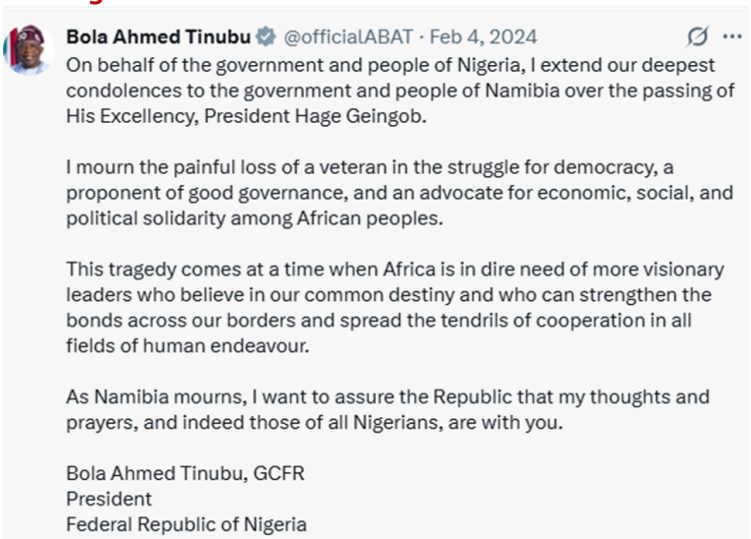
Text 11



Text 12



Text 13



Text 14



Bola Ahmed Tinubu @officialABAT · Jun 15, 2024

Dear President Ramaphosa,

I extend my warm congratulations to you on your re-election as President of South Africa.

I also congratulate the people of South Africa on the peaceful and successful conduct of the general election.

I wish you a successful term in office and call for the strengthening of bilateral ties between Nigeria and South Africa as strategic partners in Africa for the overall advancement of the continent.

@CyrilRamaphosa @NGRPresident

Text 15



Bola Ahmed Tinubu @officialABAT · Jul 5, 2024

I warmly congratulate Prime Minister Keir Starmer on the victory of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom general election.

As a former leader of the opposition in Nigeria, I specially note the determination and courage that the Prime Minister demonstrated throughout his years in the opposition and as the leader of the Labour Party.

The party's ability to reform, mobilize, and position itself for victory after 14 years affirms the leadership qualities of Sir Starmer.

I also congratulate the citizens and the government of the United Kingdom for being an abiding model of democracy.

I look forward to deepening relations between Nigeria and the United Kingdom in mutual areas of interest and in strengthening democratic institutions, as well as in building a safer and more prosperous future for the people of both countries.

H.E. Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR
President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Text 16



Bola Ahmed Tinubu @officialABAT · Nov 17, 2024

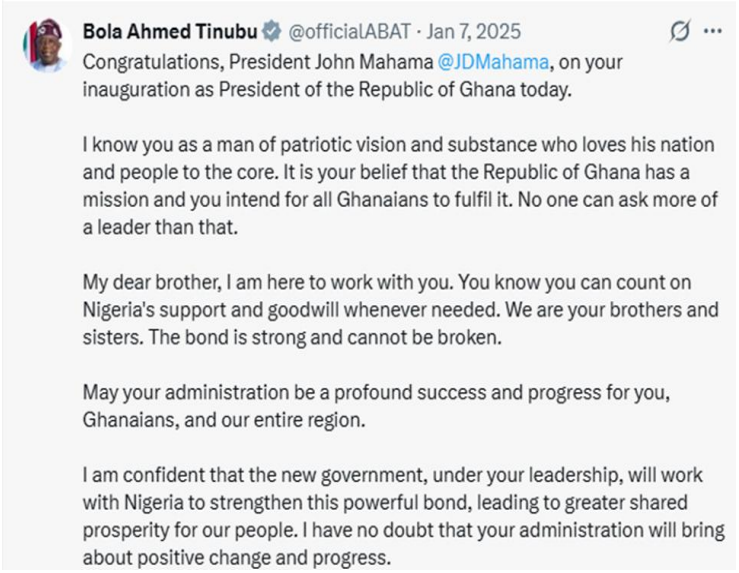
My dear friend, Prime Minister @narendramodi , it was indeed a profound honour to welcome you and the distinguished Indian delegation to Abuja. Your visit marks a continuation of the shared history, democratic values and common aspirations that unite Nigeria and India. The respect we hold for your transformative leadership, your economic reforms, and your success in steering a complex democracy to new heights is immense and deeply mutual.

Today, I was proud to confer upon you Nigeria's national honour, the Grand Commander of the Order of Niger (GCON), as a testament to our friendship and the enduring partnership between our nations. For decades, India has stood with Nigeria across various fronts. Our collaboration, enriched by shared history and diversity, signifies more than just diplomatic ties—it represents a powerful union of mutual respect and shared commitment to progress.

Text 17



Text 18



Text 19



Text 20



Bola Ahmed Tinubu @officialABAT · May 30, 2025

Two years ago, I pledged to champion a foreign policy prioritising our people, our prosperity, and our place in the world.

Today, I am proud to announce the West Africa Economic Summit (WAES) 2025, which will be held in Abuja on June 20–21, with the theme "Unlocking Trade and Investment Opportunities in the Region."

This summit is not just an event. It is a bold step toward a prosperous, integrated West Africa powered by trade, innovation, and our most valuable asset: our people.

WAES 2025 will bring together Heads of State, CEOs, investors, entrepreneurs, youth innovators, and development partners to craft real solutions and unlock real opportunities.

From the Presidential Roundtable to the Deal Room, from youth empowerment showcases to regional project partnerships — this is where vision meets action.

I invite the world to join us in Abuja as we build a stronger, more unified, and globally competitive West Africa.

waes2025.org

~ PBAT

ARTICLE

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THE GARUDA PURANA[1], ANGST, AND RITUALS: THE MODES OF MATERIAL BENEFIT THROUGH RELIGIOUS HEGEMONY AND POWER

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Abstract

This article examines the *Garuda Purana*, a 4th-century religious text believed to have originated in ancient *India*, which presents dialogue between the god Vishnu[2] and Garuda[3], the king of the birds. The second section of the *Garuda Purana* addresses death, funeral rites, and the metaphysics of reincarnation, focusing on how these elements function as religious tools. Widely regarded as a funeral liturgy by religious leaders and followers and practiced still in Nepal and India, the *Garuda Purana* is used to motivate adherents to make material offerings in hopes of securing a favorable passage to the afterlife through Sradha[4]. The article explores the relationship between *dharma* (social duty) and *moksha* (spiritual liberation), emphasizing how social duties to religious leaders are believed to initiate liberation. Through an analysis of the text's rituals, cosmological teachings, and social hierarchies, the article argues that the *Garuda Purana* serves as a means of religious dominance, addressing existential anxieties while facilitating material gain to Brahmins[5]. It demonstrates how the

[1] One of 18 Mahapuranas, a collection of Hindu sacred writings that include myths, legends, and other traditional stories, in Hinduism
[2] Vishnu is a one among three major deities in Hinduism, revered as the Preserver and Sustainer of the universe.
[3] Garuda is a bird-like creature in Hindu and Buddhist mythology, often depicted as a hybrid of an eagle and a human. He is the vehicle of the god Vishnu representing strength, power, and the ability to overcome challenges.
[4] Ritual performed for deceased ancestors
[5] Brahmins are a prominent caste within the Hindu varna system, traditionally considered the highest social class known for their role as spiritual leaders, priests, and intellectuals, responsible for maintaining sacred knowledge and performing religious rituals.

text employs both ideological and ritualistic practices to solidify the power of religious institutions, thereby maintaining a cultural order that shapes societal values and individual behavior.

Keywords
Garuda Purana; dharma; moksha; ritual; cultural hegemony

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Garuda Purana*, one of the eighteen Mahapuranas in Hinduism, is a rich and complex text that intertwines cosmological narratives, divine teachings, and religious rituals. While it claims to serve as a spiritual guide offering insights into the afterlife, karma, and the journey of the soul, it also plays a significant role in shaping the religious and social fabric of Hindu society. Prem (2023) claims that, "the supreme objective of *Puranas* is to tell man how to grow and expand in ethical, devotional, spiritual, and intellectual quality of life" (p.1). Through its portrayal of rituals, divine interventions, and the concept of the soul's liberation, The *Garuda Purana* in a subtle way addresses deep existential anxieties, particularly the fear of death and the unknown world. By analyzing the text's portrayal of superstitious divine intervention, ancestral rituals, and social hierarchy, this study argues that *The Garuda Purana* reinforces the power of religious institutions, using ideological cosmological teachings, and ritualistic practices to secure spiritual salvation contributing to the strengthening of both religious authority and material gain, making it a powerful tool of religious hegemony in Hindu society. This results in benefits for a few while generating amoral fear and placing significant obligations upon practitioners.

The *Garuda Purana* is a functional religious system of power, cliaming that the teachings are used to guide the practices of persons and socities that leads to liberation. Tooted at its center are death and afterlife rituals, whereby worships to Brahmin priests and observance of some rites are asserted to release the deceased soul and pave a way to heaven. These rituals, though claimed to be of religious significance, are attached to material interest since they justify the power and prestige of religious leaders who prescribe these religious practices. The *Garuda Purana* uses its theological framework to generate a socio-religious order that satisfies the believer's spiritual and material desires. This article examines how religious institutions have historically used the *The Garuda Purana* to mantein their hegemony, legitimize social hierarchies, and generate a hegemonic cultural order through accumulation of worldly materials.

The *Garuda Purana* explores the metaphysics of death, reincarnation, karma, and liberation (*moksha*). "The sage Vedavyasa is credited with writing the Garuda Purana ... Garuda is its name, derived from the name of the sacred bird that mount Lord Vishnu" (HinduOnline, n.d.).

Time is embedded and disseminated in the Garuda Purana, as its cycles of death, reincarnation, and ritual cannot be fully understood without considering the temporal and cosmological framework the text provides (Tamrakar, 2025). It is believed to provide insights into the rebirth and liberation processes by explaining how the soul moves through several realms. "*The Garuḍa Puraṇa* describes what happens to a person after he dies, how he goes to paradise or hell depending on his deeds, what is in heaven and hell, and how long the soul lives there until it's reincarnated into a new body" (Bhat & Surendaran, 2022, p. 1). The purana is a vivid description of a journey of a diseased soul from the earth to *brahma* (liberation) and the ways to achieve salvation after death.

The *Garuda Purana* occupies a distinctive place in Hindu religious literature. It is part of sacred texts that combine mythological narratives with prescriptive guidelines for worship, cosmology, and social behavior. Believed to have been compiled between the 4th and 11th centuries CE-with textual layers emerging at different times-*The Garuda Purana* is attributed to a dialogue between Vishnu and his vehicle Garuda[6]. While the first half of the text deals with *Vaishnava* theology, cosmological myths, and ethical duties, it is the second half-focused on death rituals, the afterlife, and punishment in *Naraka* (hell)-that has had the most profound impact on Hindu funeral practices and continues to shape socio-religious attitudes toward death and spiritual liberation.

The second section, often referred to as the *Pretakalpa*, is recited during the mourning period following a person's death. In Hindu tradition, the death of a family member brings with it not only grief but also a set of highly codified responsibilities for the living, particularly the male kin of the deceased. The *Garuda Purana* lays out the metaphysical consequences of failing to fulfill these duties, painting graphic descriptions of suffering in the afterlife, which can only be alleviated through sradha, daana, upabaas[7], and pujan[8]. The Brahmin priest acts as both the ritual authority mediator, who guides the family through these practices, receiving material and monetary gifts in exchange for superstitious spiritual intercession on behalf of the departed soul.

The *Garuda Purana* has historically been used as a funerary text, read aloud to the relatives of the deceased during the mourning period for 13 days. Hindu Brahminic death rituals create a liminal and sacred space that enables both the deceased and the living to move from a state of uncertainty and disorder toward spiritual and social reintegration (Tripathi, 2022). At its core, the *Garuda Purana* offers a vivid and often unsettling portrayal of the soul's journey through Yama Loka (the realm of the god of death) and outlines the sufferings one may endure in the afterlife journey to the liberation of the soul from the hell unless specific rites are performed and offerings made to the Brahmins by the offspring

[7] fasting, which is a religious and spiritual practice involving abstaining from food and/or water. It is a way to connect with the divine and to experience spiritual growth

[8] worship or adoration, encompassing various rituals and practices to honor deities, spirits, or sacred objects honoring or showing respect to individuals or objects.

(especially sons) and closeknit relatives of the deceased. "The projection of Hell's suffering was a controlling mechanism to ensure that rules are followed in society, and that violation of these norms has painful consequences" (Hull & Bold, 1994, p. 6). While its stated purpose is to guide the soul toward liberation, the text serves a more complex sociocultural function forced by hegemony derived out of fear of the unknown. It provides a religious structure that not only addresses the existential anxiety of death but also consolidates the material and symbolic power of religious elites, the Brahmins.

Contemporary sociology of religion increasingly views religion as a dynamic social institution whose forms and functions are continually contested and renegotiated (Beyer, 2020). Rather than treating religious texts solely as repositories of theological doctrines, scholars have emphasized their role in shaping social relationships, cultural practices, and institutional authority. Viewed from this perspective, the *Garuda Purana* can be examined not only as a guide to death and the afterlife but also as a text that participates in the organization of social and religious life.

This essay explores how the Garuda Purana, in its multifaceted cosmology and procedural directions, is religious hegemony designed for material benefit as it associates spiritual liberation with social duty (dharma) and material gift (daana[9]). Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's theory of "Cultural Hegemony" from *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Max Weber's *sociology of religion*, and interpretation of Hinduism's dual emphasis on renunciation and duty, this article argues that the *Garuda Purana* institutionalizes the rituals in which fear, faith, and social hierarchy combine for the benefit of socio-religious elites. Here, religious leaders become spiritual middlemen who function as mediators between this and the other world and economic gainers through "Dakshina[10]". The *Garuda Purana* is not a religious text by itself but a socio-political document that is being utilized to strengthen cultural hegemony and redistribute wealth in the name of godly duty. The *Garuda Purana* actively shapes social values, influences economic behavior, and reinforces a hegemonic cultural order rooted in religious authority, ultimately benefiting Brahmins by subtly coercing the public into participating in rituals and offerings.

2. METHODOLOGY

To investigate how religious discourse serves as a tool for material exchange and ideological control, this study uses a qualitative interpretive, and textual analysis of the *Garuda Purana* with a focus on its Pretakalpa section which addresses death rituals, postmortem journeys, ancestral obligation, and prescribed offerings. The analysis is based on close reading of

[9] any form of giving, not just financial donations

[10] a customary offering of gifts or money given to Brahmins, priests, or gurus in Hindu traditions as a form of gratitude and acknowledgment of their knowledge, blessings, or services. It is a way of repaying for spiritual guidance, ritual performance, or teaching.

passages that explicitly discuss (1) funeral rites (*Sradha*), (2) donations (*dana*), (3) the role of Brahmins as ritual mediators, and (4) descriptions of postmortem rewards and punishments.

The study carefully examines important passages selected through purposive sampling as they directly connect ritual practice with spiritual outcomes and material offerings. The analysis about death rites, afterlife stories, and prescribed offerings combines hermeneutic interpretation with rhetorical criticism placing them within larger sociocultural practices in Nepal and India to examine how narrative descriptions, ritual prescriptions, and moral exhortations construct relationships among authority, obligation, and salvation.

The study does not claim to provide ethnographic evidence regarding contemporary practitioners. The references to contemporary funeral practices in Nepal and India are used only as contextual illustrations drawn from secondary scholarship. The primary object of analysis remains the text itself. Broader sociocultural implications are presented as interpretive possibilities grounded in textual evidence rather than empirically verified social outcomes. The study's interdisciplinary approach makes it possible to link textual recommendations with social behavior, emphasizing the ways in which ritual obligation, economic transactions, and existential anxiety interact to uphold hegemonic structures and maintain Brahminical authority.

Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony and Weber's sociology of religion serve as analytical frameworks which enables an investigation of the ways in which religious authority is created, absorbed, and perpetuated through ritualistic practices. These theoretical perspectives are not merely descriptive references, but they guide the examination of how religious authority becomes normalized through ritual practices and how spiritual obligations intersect with material exchange.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL ANGUISH AND THEORETICAL TEACHINGS

At a surface level, the *Garuda Purana* offers theological teachings on karma[11], dharma[12], and moksha. "The goal of life in Nyāya, as in Hindu Vedic teaching, is moksha, or liberation for the cycles of birth and death" (Poudel, 2023, p. 177). These teachings are embedded within a framework of social obligations. "The most elementary forms of religiously or magically motivated action are oriented to this world" (Weber, 1963, A.1.b). The emphasis on ritual acts such as *shraddha* (ancestral offerings), *pinda daana* (ritual food offerings), and the donation of valuable items like cows, beds, gold, and umbrellas creates an economy of religious transactions. These acts are seen not only as duties but as necessities to protect the soul and ensure its safe passage through the cosmic bureaucracies of *Yama's* realm. ""For Hindus, death is nobly referred to as mahaaprasthaana, 'the great journey'" (Dokras, 2020, p. 1). The

[11] an action, work, or deed, and its effect or consequences.
[12] living in accordance with the natural order of things, aligning one's actions with ethical principles, and ultimately striving for liberation from suffering.

journey afterlife faces multiple spaces of vulnerability, and the deceased have to go through rivers of blood, rains of stone, lands of poisonous animals and many more (Garudapurana). The souls, therefore, according to *Garuda Purana* need protection through karma and dharma for moksha.

It is within this transactional spiritual economy that the *Garuda Purana* reveals its complex social and religious functions. On one hand, the text seeks to alleviate the psychological anguish associated with death by providing metaphysical explanations for suffering, rebirth, and the fate of the soul. Recent scholarship has similarly emphasized the psychological dimensions of the *Garuda Purana*. Adhikary (2025) argues that the death rituals prescribed in the text help bereaved families cope with grief, reduce existential anxiety, maintain emotional stability, and foster communal support during periods of mourning. From this perspective, the ritual system serves not only religious and social functions but also important psychological ones. The detailed prescriptions surrounding sradha, pinda dana, and other funerary rites offer mourners a structured framework through which loss can be understood and managed.

These rituals are also embedded within a hierarchical religious structure that assigns Brahmins "to be the mediator between "this" physical world and "that" spiritual world" (Tripathi, 2022, 509). The *Garuda Purana* repeatedly presents priestly mediation as essential for ensuring the successful passage of the deceased soul through the afterlife. By linking spiritual well-being to ritual performance and material offerings, the text situates religious authority within a broader system of social obligation and exchange. Brahmins are represented as uniquely qualified to perform these sacred functions as "the spirit endows them with its distinctive power" (Weber, 1963, A.1.e). As Paudel (2023) notes, in a varna-based social order one's duties and social position are often understood through inherited roles and responsibilities. Similarly, Hacker and Davis (2006) observe that a central aspect of Brahmin *dharma* involves learning, teaching, and performing religious services for others. While the present study acknowledges the psychological and communal benefits of these rituals, it focuses on how the text simultaneously contributes to the normalization of religious authority, material exchange, and hegemonic social structures.

Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony provides more than vocabulary for describing religious authority; it offers an explanation of how authority becomes normalized, "... in which the ideas, symbols, and categories of the powerful gain a universal currency, and are unknowingly by willingly adopted to the powerless, against whose interests they work" (Dubois, 2005, p. 114) Gramsci argued that dominant groups maintain power not merely through coercion but through the "spontaneous consent" of the governed, secured through cultural institutions, moral leadership, and ideological saturation. Rather than relying upon coercion, the *Garuda Purana* presents ritual obligations as moral necessities. Through repeated narratives of postmortem suffering and salvation, the text encourages individuals to internalize these obligations as expressions of virtue. In Gramscian terms, religious authority is reproduced through consent generated by cultural and moral leadership rather

than through direct force. "In practice, this problem is the correspondence "spontaneously and freely accepted" … which society set itself as necessary … and is spontaneous and free (more strictly ethical) in those zones in which "coercion" is not state affair but is affected by public opinion, moral climate, etc." (Gramsci,1971, pp. 195-96). The *Garuda Purana* plays precisely this role: it embeds its rituals and cosmologies deeply into the fabric of social life that obedience appears not only necessary but virtuous. The fear of post-mortem suffering is internalized, not only through prescriptions in *puranas* but also by oral traditions of storytelling, by believers. The acts of donation and ritual are a voluntary expression of moral duty, under whatever circumstances-even though they serve to concentrate power and wealth within religious institutions.

Through these ritual prescriptions, the text connects spiritual obligations with institutional authority. Its ritual prescriptions and cultural observance serve as instruments of what Gramsci calls "ethical coercion"-moral imperatives presented as spiritual truths that reinforce social conformity and hierarchical authority. By institutionalizing the notion that spiritual liberation is contingent upon material offerings and priestly mediation, the *Garuda Purana* establishes a template for how religion mediates between the sacred and the socio-economic. As Max Weber observed in his *Sociology of Religion*, religious traditions develop complex mechanisms to reconcile the spiritual and the material. "… belief in spirits, like all certain persons possessing charismatic "magical" powers that were held by those with special qualifications" (Weber, 1963, p. 3).

Thus, the *Garuda Purana* emerges as both a theological document and a manual of religious governance. Its emphasis on moral duty, cosmic justice, and ritual precision establishes a framework in which religious leaders wield control with "the promise of such a salvation to their participants then meets with the most extensive utilitarian expectations, which we are accustomed to call "salvation"" (Weber, 1963, G.2). This framework becomes self-reinforcing: the more people engage with its rituals, the more embedded the text becomes in daily life, further entrenching the hegemonic authority of the religious elite.

One of the most powerful functions of the Garuda Purana lies in its ability to evoke and manage existential angst-particularly the "… fear of death and what lies beyond which indicates that intrinsically religious individuals are associated with a strong belief in an afterlife" (Falkenhain & Handal, 2003, p. 73). It addresses this fear not only with comforting narratives of cosmic order and divine justice but also through a detailed account of terrifying punishments meted out in the afterlife. The Pretakalpa section includes elaborate descriptions of what happens to the soul after death: its disorientation, its suffering in Yama Loka, and the trials it faces on the way to Pitrloka (the world of ancestors) or Swarga (heaven). "We find doctrines on the fate of the soul after death, karman, rebirth and release from birth, on desire as the cause of samsara, on omens of death, the path of Yama, the fate of the pretas ……., the torments of the hells, and the pretas as causing evil omens and dreams" (Hazra, p. 70). In the thirteenth stanza of the first Chapter of the *Garuda Purana*, the blessed lord says, "… I will describe the way of Yama, terrible even to hear about, by which

those who are sinful go in hell" (Naunidhirāma et al., 1974, p. 3), These vivid hypothetical distresses are not merely symbolic; they function as emotional devices that compel the bereaved to act-through ritual, donation, and submission to religious authority. Those bereaved face the loss of the family and the burden of rituals: an intensive ritual obligation for substantial clinch through existential angst.

4. ECONOMY OF FEAR

The text often directs the listener, the relatives of the deceased, to imagine that their own ancestors, or even themselves, could be caught in this state of suffering unless appropriate rituals are performed, and gifts are offered. This emotional manipulation—rooted in the belief that a soul can remain earthbound, restless, or tormented if proper rites are not conducted—forms what can be called an "*economy of fear"*. The "economy of fear" strategically use fear to influence economic and political outcomes. The *Garuda Purana* mobilizes fear as a rhetorical resource to gain profit to the Brahmins. "Emotional manipulation is the capability of individuals to manipulate the emotions of others within a self-serving framework" (Grieve & Mahar, 2010, p. 945). Through the recitation, religious anxieties are manipulated to get into the religious action of Danas of material goods.

Weber's sociology of religion helps explain how ritual obligations become embedded within broader systems of social action. Rather than treating donations merely as acts of piety, Weber's framework reveals how religious ideas shape economic behavior by assigning spiritual significance to material exchange. Religious leaders, as Weber postulates, often institutionalize fear-especially fear of spiritual consequences-to encourage compliance and promote specific behaviors. He critiques the quote, "After the development of notions of the soul, the body had to be removed or restrained in the grave… or its goodwill had to be secured in other ways if the survivors were to live in peace" (Weber, 1963, p. 105). This critique should be echoed in the *Garuda Purana*, where securing the goodwill of the deceased soul becomes the family's primary responsibility-one that can be fulfilled through ritual offerings to Brahmins. Within the *Garuda Purana*, offerings are represented as religiously meaningful acts whose effectiveness depends upon priestly mediation. This arrangement illustrates how religious authority can become institutionalized through recurring ritual transactions. In the 12th verse of seventh chapter, the *Garuda Purana* explicates that the sinful deceased "with the help of sons, grandsons, and great grandsons he goes from the worlds and obtain heaven" (Naunidhirāma et al., 1974, p. 53). Here starts the manipulation of the relatives to act with the thought that it is their duty to help travel the deceased through all the odds on his way to heaven. If the "sons, grandsons, brothers, kinsmen, and friends who do not make gifts on behalf of a dying man are without doubt slayers of Brahman" (p. 75). In the Hindu religion the greatest sin is "Brahmahatya", the slaying of Brahmin. Moral, ethical, psychological, religious, and emotional fear is at once ingrained in the listener with the verses like these. In the 14th stanza The *Garuda Purana* explains that "they alone, by making Sraddha-gifts are the

means of their fathers' attaining heaven" (p. 53). For thirteen days, the bereaved are encouraged through detailed descriptions of postmortem suffering to participate in ritual practices and offerings intended to benefit the deceased. The bereaved are occupied in rituals, making them unable to involve into their daily chore: loss of income and loss of savings (burden of loan for those economically fragile) as dana.

Common offerings prescribed in the text include cows (considered sacred and associated with salvation), gold coins, land, beds and beddings, umbrellas, and even intricately crafted miniature boats meant to symbolically ferry the soul across the *Vaitarani*[13] river of death. These offerings are made to Brahmins, who serve as both interpreters of the sacred and executors of ritual efficacy. The belief is that these material goods assist the soul in its journey, helping it avoid hellish realms and reach moksha. A complex relationship between the spiritual and material realms is formalized as a spiritual salvation through material donation.

Although these rituals are not legally mandated, they are socially reinforced through cultural expectations and religious traditions, making participation appear both voluntary and morally necessary. Gramsci emphasizes that domination is most effective when it appears natural—when individuals believe they are acting freely even as they participate in systems of control (Gramsci, 1971, p. 196). In Gramscian terms, this is the triumph of "spontaneous consent" (p. 197)—a form of ideological dominance that operates not through force but through internalized beliefs and communal norms.

Families grieving the death of a loved one presumes the state of vulnerability. "Grief and vulnerability are potentially transformative, contemplative states that reconnect us with human and nonhuman others, and with our own painful history of losses and failures" (Sideris, 2020, p. 2020). The *Garuda Purana* intensifies this vulnerability by presenting the soul's afterlife journey as perilous and uncertain. "Fear of death may motivate one's basic religious commitment" (Kahoe, p. 379). Furthermore, the fear of possibility of similar horrifying journey of self in defiance of dharma after life inculcates fear in kins.

This dual function—managing existential angst while institutionalizing material exchange—is central to the hegemonic role of the *Garuda Purana*. It ensures that religious institutions are not only revered but materially sustained. By linking the fate of the soul to physical acts of giving, the text creates a system where salvation is effectively monetized and religious authority is continuously reproduced.

Hindu philosophical and religious thought emphasizes two key concepts: *dharma* (duty, righteousness, social obligation) and *moksha* (liberation from the cycle of birth and death). The *Garuda Purana* demands the performance of *dharma*, particularly in the form of post-death rituals and donations, essential for attaining *moksha*. The *Garuda Purana* does not

[13] The Vaitarani (also spelled Baitarani) is a river that souls must cross after death to reach Yama's kingdom (the afterlife). It is described as a river of blood, pus, urine, and filth, and it represents the trials and tribulations of the afterlife.

simply advocate ethical living; it defines ethical living in ways that channel power and material wealth toward religious elites, especially the Brahmin priesthood. David R. Kinsley's assertion in *Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective* that Hinduism is defined by the tension between world-affirmation and world-renunciation. While ascetic practices and detachment are celebrated paths to liberation, the *Garuda Purana* focuses instead on a deeply rooted form of world-affirmation—where fulfilling one's social and familial responsibilities is seen as equally essential to spiritual progress. Rituals associated with death, therefore, are not simply acts of grief or remembrance; they are spiritual transactions in the name of dharma, performed in full recognition of their material and metaphysical consequences.

5. SHRADDHA RITES FOR THE DECEASED

These responsibilities manifest in ritual acts. Sons and male heirs are expected to perform *shraddha* rites and make significant material offerings to Brahmins on behalf of the deceased. A feminist reading finds it gendered, as the contribution of female members recedes in such a religious performance. Even, to date, it is customary in Brahmin families that female members do not interrupt men's actions, and such gendered behavior is unlikely to be deprogrammed from the consciousness of people (Sherma, 2025) as the Garuda Purana endorses patriarchal descendance. According to the *Garuda Purana*, these acts are vital in guaranteeing the soul's proceeding through the afterlife. "Beliefs about the unknown fate of the dead illustrate the function of myth… projecting ritual procedure to the plane of the ideal situation" (Fiske, 1969, p. 249). The text repeats the verses like, "If you have made the gift of a cow, then the boat will come to you, otherwise not", (Naunidhirāma et al., 1974, p. 18) in verse 66-7, "That great man, in a resplendent body, with shining garments and garlands, possessed of gold and diamond, by virtue of gifts attains heaven, and is honored by the holy ones" (p. 82). Verses resembling similar demands are scattered every next sentence in the text. The only solution to all the torments of life, is to carry out the rites of sradha offering multiple gifts on every Saradha. These rituals are performed every day till the 13th day and then every month till the end of first year followed by recurring *pinda*[14] *dana* every year on the date of deceased. Failure to perform them not only jeopardizes the deceased's journey but casts a moral shadow over the family, suggesting a failure in one's fundamental social duty. Dharma continues as an intergenerational contract where moral action is linked with economic exchange. One does not simply act ethically; one *gives* ethically. As Weber (1963) explains, the ethical imperatives embedded in religious systems often serve to legitimize and organize economic practices. "… religious or magical action or thinking must not be set apart from the range of everyday purposive action, particularly since the elementary ends of the

[14] Sanctified food balls (typically rice, wheat flour) offered to the souls of deceased in the Pinda Daan (sradha) ritual.

religious and magical actions are predominantly economic" (Weber, 1963, p. 111). In the case of the *Garuda Purana*, the religious obligation to perform rituals for the dead—rituals that are both time-consuming and expensive—becomes a culturally sanctioned chance for the accumulation of wealth toward religious functionaries. This turns out to be misery for many while a time of abundance for some.

These transactions are not optional; they are morally mandated, culturally reinforced, and spiritually loaded contributing to the perpetuation of a hierarchical religious order in which Brahmins maintain authority over both the metaphysical and material realms. Gramsci (1971) postulates that "every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields" (p. 5). This submission appears voluntary, yet it is deeply structured by the ideological systems that frame it as necessary for salvation. The donation of wealth to religious leaders is not seen as swindling and payments but as duty with "optimistic beliefs that the afterlife entails union with God, reunion with family, or eternal reward" (Flannelly et al., 2012, p. 654). This dynamic is particularly visible in the symbolism of the offerings prescribed by the *Garuda Purana*. Objects like cows, beds, gold ornaments, and symbolic boats are not just ritual goods—they are representations of worldly wealth being transformed into spiritual currency. The act of giving these items is meant to liberate the karmic burden of the deceased and ensure a smooth crossing of the afterlife. While doing so, they materially enrich the recipients: the priests, whose participation in the ritual legitimates the efficacy of the rituals. These are both religious offerings and social payments, symbols of religiousness and instruments of wealth accumulation. The *Garuda Purana* frames this materialization of religious duty as divinely ordained. The rituals are believed to be suggested by the god, Bishnu. The Brahmin priest becomes not just a facilitator but a stand-in for divine forces, elevating his social role as the only legitimate mediator between the earthly and the eternal.

By spreading the belief that moksha is only achievable through dharma—and that *dharma* includes material giving—the *Garuda Purana* creates a contentious system of control: fear of spiritual failure leads to ritual performance; ritual performance leads to donation; donation fortifies the authority of the Brahmins; and the authority of the Brahmins ensure continued faith in the offerings. Thus, the *Garuda Purana* is a prescription, an outline, for religious hegemony through the illusion of *dharma* and *moksha*. It presents religious liberation as a socially mediated and economically structured process that propagates hierarchical power. Thus, the text is a guidebook for the preservation of institutional control under the pretense of divine duty than the medium for the liberation of the deceased soul. In Gramscian terms, they function as vehicles of "consensual coercion" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12) deeply embedded in culture as consensus which is indistinguishable from reality. People become subjects of hegemonic society when they accept that Brahminic authority is inborn

and the offerings are essential for salvation, failure to perform the rites prescribed by them will doom their loved ones.

Religious ideas shape and stabilize social systems and help us read these narratives not merely as theological myths, but as mechanisms of control. Weber observes how religious institutions often "rationalize" suffering and inequality by projecting them into a divine order. In the Garuda Purana, the fear of divine punishment serves to rationalize both social stratification and the economic burdens of ritual obligation. As Gramsci (1971) notes, hegemonic systems are most successful when they reproduce themselves invisibly, through custom, tradition, and everyday belief. "In practice, this problem is the correspondence "spontaneously and freely accepted" ... as necessary -a correspondence which is coercive in the sphere of positive law technically understood, and is spontaneous and free (more strictly ethical) in those zones in which "coercion" is not a state affair but is affected by public opinion, moral climate, etc. The *Garuda Purana* achieves this invisible coercion by embedding its ideology into rituals. Birth, marriage, and especially death become stages where religious ideology is performed and reinforced. Salvation is not abstract or egalitarian-it is administered, monitored, and gatekept by those believed to be equipped with ritual knowledge. The sacred becomes political, and the religious becomes ideological. Brahmins present themselves as the "*intellectual class"*—those who produce and maintain hegemonic narratives. In Gramscian narrative, religious elites function not only as spiritual leaders but also as intellectual agents who shape social consciousness. Civil societies "operate without sanctions or compulsory obligations but nevertheless exerts a collective pressure and obtains objective results in the form of an evolution of customs, ways of thinking and acting, morally, etc." (Gramsci, 1971, p. 242). The Brahmins who perform these rituals are more than ritual specialists—they are custodians of metaphysical knowledge and moral gatekeepers. They interpret the text, direct the ceremonies, and even determine and demand the appropriate offerings. Their authority is maintained not through visible coercion, but through deeply ingrained belief in their indispensability. This ideological control is most efficiently performed under the appearance of religious duty. Families often feel not just obligated but honored to perform costly rituals validating the Brahminic intellectuality. Its authority is reaffirmed every time a family invites a priest to recite the *Garuda Purana*, offers him gifts, and places the fate of a loved one's soul in his hands.

6. THE CONCEPT OF THEODICIES

Weber (1963) also emphasized the idea that religion often creates "theodicies of suffering"—narratives that make suffering meaningfully created and spread over humans and therefore tolerable. The *Garuda Purana* does this with terrifying strictness. The suffering of the soul after death, the horrors of hell, the punishments imposed by Yama-all are rendered morally coherent through the idea that proper rituals can mitigate or even erase these consequences.

But these rituals require wealth, and that wealth must be transferred to religious agents. Thus, theodicy becomes a means of both spiritual and economic management. The economic burden of funerary rites is often heavy, especially for lower-income families, yet the expenditure is justified by the perceived value of the soul's liberation. The Brahmins, in turn, receive not only material goods but also spiritual and social prestige giving them the titles "Guru", "Guruba" and "Baaje" meaning the teacher, teacher father, and grandfather.

Max Weber's discussion of authority, especially traditional authority, is instructive here. Weber categorized traditional authority as power that derives its legitimacy from longstanding customs and inherited beliefs. Even more strongly ethical is the Hindu impersonal power (rita) of the fixed order of religious ceremonial, of the cosmos, and hence of human activity in general (Weber, 1963). In the context of the *Garuda Purana*, the authority of Brahmins is traditional in precisely this sense. It is not enforced by the state, nor necessarily by economic might, but by the cultural expectation that Brahmins possess sacred knowledge passed down from antiquity. The legitimacy of this knowledge is rarely questioned, because it is enveloped in the moral and emotional fabric of family, duty, and death.

Furthermore, the economics of ritual do not end with the individual. The *Garuda Purana*'s insistence on intergenerational responsibility-where the actions of children affect the fate of their parents' souls-ensures that this system is reproduced across generations. "… Sradha are performed either regularly (e.g., each month) or on auspicious occasions, such as births or weddings, when ancestors should be worshiped" (Ondračka, 2022, p. 407). Sons are expected to perform these rites not only out of love or grief, but because their family's spiritual status depends on it maintaining hegemonic order over time through repetitions.

The *Garuda Purana* is also complicit in what Pierre Bourdieu calls symbolic violence—the imposition of a cultural arbitrarily misrecognized as natural or sacred. When a family makes offerings of cows and gold to a Brahmin, they do not see this as exploitation, but as fulfillment of dharma. The economic transaction is overdetermined in a sacred sense. This false recognition is the essence of symbolic power: it hides domination in the guise of virtue. Religious ceremonies are therefore not just ceremonies; they are ideological buttressing exercises.

Another form of cultural reproduction occurs through language and recitation. "Language can certainly communicate emotions, but growing research suggests that language also helps constitute emotion by cohering sensations into specific perceptions of "anger," "disgust," "fear," and other emotion categories" (Lindquist et.al., 2015, p. 99). The *Garuda Purana* is recited aloud, often changing tones and tempos that sensationalize during the mourning period. These recitations said to be recited are not just for the deceased—they are also tutorials for the living. Stories of Yama's judgment, the torments of hell, and the virtues of ritual duty are fearfully narrated especially at evenings at sunset. These stories, rich in moral instruction, shape collective memory and inform future behavior, inculcating fear generated by text, tone, and the time of narration. The act of listening becomes an act of learning, belief is continually renewed, and the fear spontaneously ingrained. The

performance of rituals reinforces belief in their necessity. The belief in their necessity compels their repetition. And their repetition, in turn, reinforces the authority of those who prescribe them. Religious hegemony sustains as the "spontaneous consent" of the involved. The communal nature of mourning turns private loss into public ritual, and personal fear into shared affirmation of belief. Through collective listening, the emotional authority of the text is amplified. Belief is not only felt-it is witnessed and reaffirmed through social participation. Power is exercised through emotional manipulation.

Rather than operating through a single mechanism, the *Garuda Purana* links fear, obligation, ritual performance, and social authority into a mutually reinforcing structure. Descriptions of postmortem suffering create concern regarding the fate of the deceased, ritual prescriptions provide solutions to that concern, and priestly mediation offers the institutional means through which those solutions are enacted. Through this process, existential anxiety is transformed into ritual action, while ritual action simultaneously reinforces religious authority and social hierarchy. Salvation, hence, becomes commodified—a commodity that religious leaders dispense in exchange for economic resources. Even for lower castes, salvation is afar, mediated in terms of expenditure on rituals using economic resources to which they may not have ready access. As such, the text reinforces the structure where the attainment of salvation becomes easier through individuals who hold economic resources at their disposal and so reinforces an equation where religious merit and economics go together.

6. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is restricted because it only looks at the textual analysis of the *Garuda Purana*; it doesn't use any ethnographic or empirical data from current practitioners. The references to funeral practices in Nepal and India only provide context – we can't use them as proof of what's happening today. Also, the study uses theories from Gramsci and Weber, which focus on authority, ideology, and material exchange.

For future research, someone could look at how modern Hindu communities actually interpret and perform the rituals in the *Garuda Purana* through fieldwork. Furthermore, comparing other Hindu funerary texts and researching how castes, classes, and genders affect death rituals would help us understand more about how religion ties into authority and social practices.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the *Garuda Purana* as a religious text that operates at the intersection of belief, ritual, authority, and material exchange. Through the analytical lenses of Gramsci's cultural hegemony and Weber's sociology of religion, the study argues that the

text links spiritual liberation (*moksha*) to ritual obligation (*dharma*), priestly mediation, and material offerings. While the *Garuda Purana* provides psychological comfort and a framework for coping with grief and death, it also reinforces religious authority by presenting ritual practices and donations as necessary for the soul's well-being. In doing so, the text transforms existential anxiety into ritual action and embeds religious authority within everyday social life. Rather than viewing the *Garuda Purana* solely as a sacred guide or an instrument of domination, this study highlights its dual role in addressing human concerns about mortality while simultaneously sustaining systems of belief, authority, and social hierarchy.

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ARTICLE

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FEMALE HEAD TEACHERS IN RURAL ZAMBIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: LIVED EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, AND COPING STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Despite national gender policies, female head teachers remain grossly underrepresented in rural Zambian primary schools, with only 11 out of 74 schools in Kalabo District led by women. This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences and challenges of female head teachers in six primary schools in Kalabo District, Zambia. Drawing on Eagly's social role theory and role congruity theory, the research investigates how gender stereotypes and institutional barriers shape female leadership. Data were collected through semi structured questionnaires, in depth interviews, and focus group discussions with 61 participants, including head teachers, teachers, and district education officers. Thematic analysis revealed that female head teachers' experiences are dichotomous: positive when supported by communities and staff, negative when facing cultural resistance and institutional neglect. Key challenges include socio cultural rejection of female authority, male teacher insubordination, political intimidation, lack of support from district offices, and the dual burden of work and family. Coping strategies such as delegation, professional development, community engagement, and record keeping demonstrate resilience. The findings confirm role incongruity, as leadership is stereotypically perceived as masculine, creating prejudice against female leaders. The study concludes that sustainable gender transformation in rural school leadership requires multi-level interventions: gender sensitization, formal mentorship, district level policy reforms, and protection mechanisms against political retaliation. Recommendations are provided for policy makers and practitioners.

Keywords
Female head teachers; primary school management; gender challenges; rural education; Zambia; phenomenological study; social role theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership remains a persistent challenge despite decades of advocacy for gender equality. According to UNESCO (2022), women constitute the majority of teachers in primary education worldwide often exceeding 70% in many countries yet they hold fewer than 30% of headship positions. This phenomenon, often termed the "glass ceiling" or "leadership gap," reflects deep-rooted gender ideologies that associate leadership with masculine traits (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In sub-Saharan Africa, the gap is even more pronounced, with cultural norms and patriarchal structures frequently relegating women to subordinate roles (Mahlase, 1997; Odejide, 2007). Zambia, the focus of this study, is no exception. Despite the introduction of the National Gender Policy in 2014, which aims to increase women's representation in decision-making positions, female head teachers remain a minority in primary schools, especially in rural districts (MoGE, 2014; Chonya, 2006).

Globally, scholarship on gender and leadership has increasingly recognized that the barriers women face are not merely individual biases but are embedded in broader social structures and institutional norms. Research from across the Global South illuminates how patriarchal systems, compounded by colonial legacies and cultural traditions, systematically constrain women's access to leadership in both public and educational sectors (Rao & Kelleher, 2005). In South Asia, for instance, women in higher education leadership continue to navigate deeply entrenched gender hierarchies despite formal policy commitments to equity (Biswakarma, 2024; Mathew & Nair, 2022). These comparative perspectives are instructive for understanding the Zambian context, as they reveal that the challenges facing female head teachers in Kalabo District are not unique but reflect a shared global pattern of role incongruity reinforced by local cultural logics.

Kalabo District, located in Western Province, exemplifies this disparity. The district is characterized by geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and strong adherence to traditional Lozi customs, where gender roles are rigidly defined. Out of 74 primary schools, only 11 are headed by women a statistic that raises critical questions about the barriers female educators face and the nature of their experiences when they do assume leadership. While previous studies in Zambia have examined the effectiveness of female head teachers in urban settings (Muchelemba, 2001; Chonya, 2006), little is known about the subjective, lived experiences of their rural counterparts. The voices of these women, navigating complex cultural landscapes while managing schools, have remained largely unheard.

The quality of school leadership is widely recognized as a key determinant of school effectiveness and student outcomes (Pont et al., 2008). In rural contexts, where resources are scarce and communities often rely heavily on the school as a social hub, the role of the head teacher is particularly demanding. When women occupy this role, they often confront not only the routine challenges of school management but also gender-based prejudice, isolation, and resistance from staff, parents, and even higher education authorities (Celikten, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1989). Understanding these experiences is essential for designing policies that genuinely support gender equity in education leadership.

This study is guided by Eagly's social role theory (1987) and its extension, role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Social role theory posits that gender stereotypes arise from the division of labor and cultural expectations; women are associated with communal traits (e.g., nurturing, helpfulness) and men with agentic traits (e.g., assertiveness, dominance). Role congruity theory argues that prejudice against female leaders emerges because leadership is stereotypically perceived as requiring agentic qualities, creating a perceived incongruity between the female gender role and the leader role. This theoretical lens is particularly apt for examining the experiences of female head teachers in Kalabo, where traditional gender norms are strong.

The study addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the experiences of female head teachers in managing primary schools in Kalabo District? (2) What challenges do they encounter? (3) How do they cope with these challenges? By answering these questions, the research aims to provide evidence-based insights for policy makers, district education officials, and practitioners seeking to promote gender equity in rural school leadership. The findings are intended to inform interventions that address both the overt and subtle barriers that limit women's participation and success in headship roles.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological research design, a qualitative approach that seeks to understand the essence of lived experiences of individuals regarding a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 2018). Phenomenology is well suited for exploring how female head teachers make meaning of their leadership roles, as it prioritizes subjective perceptions, feelings, and interpretations over objective measurements. By setting aside the researcher's preconceptions (bracketing), the design allows the participants' voices to emerge authentically. This approach aligns with the study's aim to capture the nuanced, context bound experiences of women managing primary schools in a rural Zambian district.

2.2. Study Area and Participants

The research was conducted in Kalabo District, Western Province, Zambia. Kalabo is one of the most remote districts in the country, with limited road networks, unreliable electricity, and poor mobile phone coverage. The population is predominantly Lozi speaking, and traditional governance structures, including village headmen and the Mbwanjikana (chieftains), hold significant influence. The district has 74 primary schools, of which 11 are headed by women. This study focused on six of these female headed schools, selected purposively to represent variations in location (remote vs. peri urban), school size, and years of headship experience. The selection of six schools (out of eleven female-headed schools in the district) was guided by the principle of purposive maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2015), which seeks to capture the widest range of experiences within a bounded case. Schools were selected to vary across three key dimensions: (a) proximity to the district administrative center (three remote schools located more than 30 km from Kalabo BOMA, and three peri-urban schools within 10 km); (b) school size (small schools with fewer than 300 pupils and larger schools with more than 500 pupils); and (c) the head teacher's years of experience in the post (ranging from less than one year to more than five years). This deliberate variation enabled the researchers to explore whether and how context shapes the nature of female head teachers' experiences, thereby strengthening the transferability of the findings.

Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to identify all female head teachers in the selected schools and teachers in management positions. Snowball sampling was employed to recruit district education officers, starting with the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) who then referred the researcher to other relevant officers. The final sample comprised 61 participants: 6 female head teachers, 30 female teachers in primary school management (e.g., deputy heads, senior teachers), 20 class teachers (10 males, 10 female), and 5 district educational officers (including the DEBS, two Education Standards Officers, and two planning officers). This diverse sample enabled a multi perspective understanding of the phenomenon.

2.3. Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using three main instruments to ensure triangulation and richness (Creswell, 2013). First, semi structured questionnaires were administered to all 61 participants. These questionnaires contained both closed ended items (to gather demographic and frequency data) and open ended questions (to elicit detailed narratives). Second, in depth interviews were conducted with the 5 district educational officers and 3 of the female head teachers. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were guided by an interview protocol that explored experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and perceptions of gender and leadership. Third, focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with teachers from each school (total 6 FGDs, each with 6 8 participants). FGDs provided a forum

for collective reflection on the challenges and strengths of female leadership. Additionally, document analysis of school logbooks, inspection reports, and district gender records supplemented the primary data.

All instruments were developed in English, the official language of education in Zambia, and were piloted with a group of teachers from a neighbouring district to refine clarity and cultural appropriateness. During FGDs and interviews, participants were allowed to use local languages (Lozi or Silozi) when they felt more comfortable, and the researcher, a native speaker, translated responses during transcription.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved six phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Transcripts were read and re read, and initial codes were manually applied to segments of text. These codes were then grouped into potential themes, which were reviewed against the data set and refined. Final themes were defined and named, ensuring they captured the essence of the participants' experiences. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize closed ended responses, presented in tables to support the qualitative findings.

NVivo software was used to assist with coding and organization. To ensure analytical rigor, the thematic coding process was conducted in two independent rounds. In the first round, the lead researcher coded all transcripts manually, generating 187 initial codes across the data set. In the second round, a second researcher independently coded a 30% random subsample of transcripts, and the two sets of codes were compared. Inter-rater reliability was established through discussion and consensus, with a final agreement rate of 89% after reconciliation.

Candidate themes were then reviewed in two stages: first, against the coded data extracts to confirm internal coherence; and second, against the full data set to confirm that each theme adequately represented the breadth of relevant data. Theme validation was further supported through member checking, in which a thematic summary was shared with three head teachers and two district officers, who confirmed that the themes accurately reflected their experiences. The three major themes that emerged were subsequently peer-debriefed with a colleague experienced in qualitative educational research, providing an additional layer of confirmability.

2.5. Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation of data sources (head teachers, teachers, officers), methods (questionnaires, interviews, FGDs), and investigators (two researchers cross checked coding). Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with three head teachers and two officers to confirm accuracy. Prolonged engagement (three months in the field) and reflexivity (maintaining a researcher journal) further strengthened validity.

Ethical approval was obtained from Kwame Nkrumah University's Research Ethics Committee. Permission was granted by the Kalabo District Education Board and the heads of the participating schools. All participants gave written informed consent, after being assured of confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any time. Pseudonyms (e.g., School A, School B; participants coded as HT1, HT2, etc.) were used to protect identities. Data were stored securely, and only the research team had access. The University Research Ethics Committee approval constitutes the institutional equivalent of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, fulfilling the internationally recognized requirements for ethical oversight of human subjects research (Israel & Hay, 2006). The approval reference number was KNU/REC/2019. The committee reviewed the research protocol, participant information sheets, and consent forms prior to data collection, thereby satisfying the institutional requirement that ethical clearance precede participant engagement.

3. FINDINGS

The findings are presented under three main themes, each with sub-themes, that emerged from the data analysis: (1) Experiences of female head teachers: a tale of two realities; (2) Multifaceted challenges: from cultural rejection to political intimidation; (3) Coping strategies: resilience through agency and support.

3.1 Experiences of Female Head Teachers: A Tale of Two Realities

The six female head teachers described their experiences in starkly different terms, reflecting the influence of context and support structures. As shown in Table 1, three (50%) rated their experience as "good," two (33%) as "bad," and one (17%) as "not sure."

Table 1. Female head teachers' experiences in managing primary schools

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Good	3	50%
Bad	2	33%
Not sure	1	17%

Total	**N=6**	**100%**

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

3.1.1. Positive experiences: Support and recognition

For head teachers who reported positive experiences, the common thread was the presence of supportive stakeholders. HT3, head of School B, explained:

> *"As long as the female head teacher is supported and as long as the people are willing to accept female heads despite their gender, then it's much possible to be efficient. This makes all the experience good and exciting."*

HT4 (School D) echoed this sentiment, noting that her staff had "embraced" her leadership, and the community had become active partners through the PTA. She remarked, *"Being in management is one of my best career experiences; it means a lot to my career growth."* Similarly, HT1 (School C) said, *"It's a good experience to be in management of primary school; it is purely motivation to encourage further hard work."*

These positive experiences were often linked to proximity to the district center, better infrastructure, and a history of female leadership in the school. In Schools B and D, which were located within 10 km of Kalabo BOMA (the district administrative center), the heads reported that the community was more accustomed to women in authority roles, and the district office provided timely support.

3.1.2 Negative experiences: Isolation and resistance

In contrast, head teachers in more remote schools faced a different reality. HT2 (School E) and HT5 (School F) described their experiences as "bad," citing constant questioning of their authority and lack of respect. HT2 stated:

> *"Men underrate us and they think we are less capable to lead. The community consider women to be kitchen assets and not school administrators. Therefore, without this full support my experience is bad in managing a primary school which is even in a remote area."*

HT5 recounted an incident where a male teacher openly challenged her authority during a staff meeting, shouting that he "would not take orders from a woman." She noted that the district office was slow to respond when she reported the behavior, leaving her feeling unsupported and vulnerable. For these head teachers, the experience was characterized by constant battles for legitimacy, fear of sabotage, and a sense of isolation.

3.1.3 Uncertainty and initial adjustment

One head teacher (HT6, School A) had been in post for only four months and described her experience as "50/50." She explained,

"I do not really care what men think of me, am not just sure yet because I have less than 6 months' experience. I can't really judge because everything seems 50/50." Her uncertainty highlights the early-career challenges that female heads face, where they are still navigating relationships and establishing their authority.

When all participants (n=61) were asked whether there is a relationship between sex and effective headship, the majority stated that leadership has nothing to do with gender, reflecting a belief in gender-neutral leadership. However, another group insisted that leadership is "for men," citing physical strength and authority as masculine domains. Four were unsure.

3.2 *Multifaceted Challenges: From Cultural Rejection to Political Intimidation*

The vast majority of participants agreed that female head teachers face significant challenges. Table 2 presents the challenges most frequently cited.

Table 2. Challenges encountered by female head teachers

Responses
Not accepted by some quarters of society
Males do not consider them capable
Teacher truancy
Lack of support from higher offices
Unknown factors

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

3.2.1 Socio-cultural rejection and gender stereotypes

The most prevalent challenge was lack of acceptance by some sections of society. This was not merely a matter of passive disrespect but manifested in concrete actions: parents refusing to attend meetings called by female heads, PTA executives bypassing the head to communicate directly with the DEBS, and community members referring to female heads as "girls" regardless of their age. A teacher in an FGD (School F) stated: *"When a woman is head, some parents think they can walk in anytime and demand things. With male heads, they would not dare."*

The perception that leadership is inherently male was deeply embedded. A female teacher participant noted, *"In our culture, a woman is supposed to be behind, not in front. When you see a woman leading, people say her husband is not taking care of her, or she has failed as a wife."* This cultural framing creates a constant need for female heads to prove themselves, often at great psychological cost.

3.2.2 Male insubordination and resistance

Closely related was the challenge of male teachers not considering female heads capable. Participants described a pattern of passive-aggressive behavior: male teachers arriving late, leaving early, failing to follow instructions, and sometimes openly mocking the head. HT2 (School E) reported:

> *"Men are rude towards the female head teachers. They do not like contributing to anything and they do what they want and not what they are told. I have one teacher who comes to school drunk and uses abusive language. When I tried to write a report, the DEBS did nothing."*

In extreme cases, male teachers used threats. HT5 (School F) shared:

> *"A teacher threatened the head that if she continues reporting him for not coming for work she will lose her job or be sent to the remotest areas of the district as the teacher has political connection and backup."*

This insubordination is not merely a matter of individual misconduct; it reflects a gendered power dynamic where male teachers, accustomed to male authority, resist female leadership.

3.2.3 Lack of institutional support

Lack of support from higher offices emerged as a critical challenge. Female heads reported that when they sought intervention from the district education office regarding disruptive staff or community issues, they were often met with inaction or were told to "handle it themselves." HT4 (School D) explained:

> *"The ministry of general education officials at the district level are too passive and in most cases do not even help when issues are raised from school. I remember reporting*

> *some of my male teachers who never reported for work for the whole term (4 months) but the administrators gave false promises that they will call them which never happened. It is so discouraging."*

This lack of support is compounded by the fact that the district office itself is male-dominated; during the time of the study, only one of the five district officers was female. Female heads perceived that male officers were less empathetic to their challenges and sometimes shared in the same stereotypes.

3.2.4 Political intimidation and interference

Several participants described political intimidation as a growing challenge, particularly when local politics intersect with school governance. HT1 (School C) recounted:

> *"I was threatened that I will be expelled by the carders because one of the carders' wife is my teacher and she reported me to the husband simply for telling her to be time conscious when reporting for work. Everything was interpreted that I hate my fellow teachers and that I deserve to be suspended or retired on national interest as my caution for time management made them alien me to be in the opposition party."*

Such incidents reveal the vulnerability of female heads to politically motivated attacks, where their authority is undermined not through educational channels but through political pressure. In a context where political loyalty often dictates appointments and transfers, female heads feel compelled to tread carefully, sometimes at the expense of enforcing discipline.

3.2.5 Dual responsibilities and psychological burden

The dual burden of work and family was raised by many participants, though it was not as frequently cited as socio-cultural factors. One head teacher, a mother of three young children, explained:

> *"I leave home at 6 a.m. and return after 5 p.m. I still have to cook, help with homework, and be a wife. My husband complains that the school takes all my time. Sometimes I cry at night, but in the morning I must be strong for the school."*

This balancing act is exacerbated by the fact that many female heads in Kalabo are posted far from their families, as few choose to relocate due to limited housing and facilities. The

psychological toll is significant: anxiety about safety, fear of failure, and the loneliness of being a female leader in a male-dominated environment.

3.2.6 Other limiting factors

When asked to identify factors that limit their effectiveness, female head teachers cited cultural beliefs, poor funding, workload, intimidation and level of education (Figure 1). Teachers' perspectives (Figure 2) added poor leadership skills (at one school), lack of support from fellow teachers, poor accommodation, and lack of electricity. These variations by school highlight the importance of local context.

3.3 *Coping Strategies: Resilience Through Agency and Support*

Despite the formidable challenges, female head teachers employed a range of strategies to cope and maintain effectiveness. Table 3 summarizes the strategies reported.

Table 3. Strategies employed to cope with challenges

Responses
Delegation of duties
Upgrading/attending leadership seminars
Community involvement (PTA)
Working with learners/sharing vision
Record keeping
Work plans and teaching roles

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

3.3.1 Delegation of duties

Delegation was the most frequently mentioned strategy. By distributing responsibilities among trusted staff members, female heads reduced their workload and built a sense of shared ownership. HT1 explained:

> *"I have a strong senior teacher and a head of department who handle many routine matters. I focus on planning and representing the school outside. This way, I am not overwhelmed, and the team feels empowered."*

A district officer confirmed the importance of delegation: "*Heads manage running primary schools by identifying able, talented, specialized teachers and share responsibilities with them.*"

3.3.2 Professional development and upgrading

Nineteen percent of participants emphasized the importance of further studies and attending leadership seminars such as the Headteacher Leadership and Management Programme (HEADLAMP) and Educational Leadership and Management (ELM) courses. HT3 noted:

> "*The training I got through HEADLAMP taught me how to manage conflict and handle difficult teachers. It gave me confidence that I have the skills, even if some people doubt me because I am a woman.*"

Upgrading qualifications also serves to counter the stereotype that women lack competence. By earning diplomas and degrees, female heads arm themselves with formal credentials that command respect.

3.3.3 Community involvement and PTA engagement

Engaging the community, particularly through the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), was a key strategy. HT4 described how she transformed the PTA from a critical body into a supportive one:

> "*I invited them to see our challenges, involved them in decision-making, and asked for their advice. Now they see me as a partner, not an outsider. They even helped build a staff house.*"

When community members feel included, they are more likely to accept female leadership and defend the head against detractors.

3.3.4 Working with learners and sharing the school vision

Sixteen percent of participants mentioned the importance of connecting with learners. HT5 stated: "*The learners look up to me. I talk to them about my vision for the school, that we will have good grades, a clean environment, and be a model school. They remind me why I am here.*"

Sharing the vision creates a sense of common purpose and mobilizes the entire school community around goals that transcend gender politics.

3.3.5 Record keeping and organizational tools

Record keeping and work plans were cited as practical tools that help female heads maintain control and accountability. HT2 noted: *"I keep a diary of everything attendance, incidents, meeting minutes. When someone complains, I have evidence. It protects me and shows that I am professional."* In contexts where their word might be doubted, documentation provides objective proof of their diligence.

3.3.6 Mentorship and peer support

Although not captured in the frequency table, many participants highlighted the importance of informal mentorship from retired female heads or supportive male colleagues. One head teacher recalled: "*When I was appointed, an experienced retired head teacher (a woman) visited me and told me to be strong, to delegate, and to not let them see me cry. Her words carried me through the first months."* Such peer networks are vital but are currently informal and fragile.

3.4 Summary of Findings

The findings paint a complex picture: female head teachers in rural Kalabo navigate a landscape where their leadership is simultaneously celebrated and contested. Positive experiences are contingent on support from staff, community, and district offices, while negative experiences are shaped by deep-seated gender stereotypes, institutional neglect, and political interference. The challenges are multifaceted cultural, institutional, psychological, and political and require equally multifaceted coping strategies. These findings set the stage for a discussion that links them to theoretical frameworks and existing literature.

4. DISCUSSION

The discussion interprets the findings through the lens of Eagly's social role theory and role congruity theory, while also engaging with related literature on gender and educational leadership in African contexts. The central argument is that the experiences and challenges of female head teachers in Kalabo District are fundamentally shaped by the perceived incongruity between the feminine gender role and the leadership role, a incongruity that is reinforced by cultural norms, institutional practices, and political dynamics.

4.1 Social Role Theory and the Gendering of Leadership

Social role theory (Eagly, 1987) posits that gender stereotypes arise from the historical division of labor, where women were primarily responsible for domestic and nurturing tasks, and men for public and agentic roles. In Kalabo, traditional gender roles remain strongly demarcated: women are expected to be caregivers, submissive to their husbands, and focused on the home; men are expected to be decision-makers, providers, and authority figures. When a woman becomes a head teacher, she violates these expected roles, leading to cognitive dissonance among community members, staff, and even district officials. As one teacher put it, *"In our culture, a woman is supposed to be behind, not in front."*

This violation triggers what role congruity theory describes as prejudice (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The head teacher is seen as either too feminine (and therefore weak) or too masculine (and therefore unfeminine). The "double-bind" described in the literature (Shakeshaft, 1989) was evident in the participants' accounts: if a female head is collaborative and nurturing, she is perceived as not "tough enough"; if she is assertive and directive, she is labeled as aggressive or "bossy." This double-bind makes it difficult for female heads to adopt a leadership style that is consistently accepted.

The finding that majority of participants still believe leadership is "for men" illustrates the internalization of these stereotypes, even among some teachers and officers. This internalization creates a self-fulfilling prophecy: when staff believe a female head cannot be effective, they may behave in ways that make it difficult for her to succeed, thereby "proving" their belief correct.

4.2 Socio-Cultural Rejection as Manifestation of Role Incongruity

The most frequently cited challenge lack of acceptance by some quarters of society is a direct manifestation of role incongruity. In communities where male authority is the norm, a female head represents an anomaly. Participants described how PTA executives would bypass the head and communicate directly with the DEBS, effectively treating her as a non-entity. This is consistent with findings from other African studies. Mahlase (1997) documented how black women principals in South Africa were often dismissed as "girls" and excluded from decision-making. Similarly, Celikten (2005) found that female principals in Turkey faced resistance from parents and community members who viewed schools as masculine domains.

The cultural framing of women as "kitchen assets" (as one head teacher lamented) relegates them to the private sphere, making their presence in the public sphere of school leadership suspect. This is not merely a matter of prejudice; it has material consequences. Female heads in remote schools reported that parents were less willing to contribute labor or resources to school projects when led by a woman, and that community meetings were

poorly attended. In some cases, traditional leaders (village headmen) openly questioned the wisdom of appointing a woman to head a school.

4.3 Male Insubordination and the Challenge to Authority

Male teacher insubordination, reported by majority participants, can be understood as a gendered response to role incongruity. When male teachers are accustomed to being led by other men, a female head challenges their sense of hierarchy and masculinity. The behaviors described truancy, drunkenness, open defiance are not just individual acts of misconduct but symbolic acts of resistance that aim to re-establish male dominance. Similar patterns have been observed in other contexts. In Kenya, Karuiki (2007) found that female principals faced "subtle and overt resistance" from male staff, which sometimes forced them to adopt autocratic styles as a defensive mechanism.

The threat of political connections used by male teachers adds another layer: it invokes external power structures (political carders) to intimidate the female head, leveraging the fact that women are often seen as less politically connected. This intersection of gender and politics makes it even harder for female heads to enforce discipline.

4.4 Institutional Neglect and the Gap Between Policy and Practice

The lack of support from higher offices points to a critical institutional failure. While Zambia's National Gender Policy mandates gender equity, it has not translated into effective support mechanisms for female leaders at the district level. District officers, themselves predominantly male, may share the same gender stereotypes as the community, leading to inaction when female heads report problems. This finding echoes Pont et al. (2008), who noted that school leaders, especially women, often lack the support they need to manage the complexities of their roles.

The "false promises" described by participants reveal a systemic issue: female heads are left to navigate conflicts alone, with no guarantee that their complaints will be acted upon. This not only undermines their authority but also increases their vulnerability. When a female head cannot rely on the district office to back her up, she may become reluctant to confront difficult staff, leading to a deterioration of school discipline.

4.5 Political Intimidation: A Gendered Threat

The political intimidation reported by some participants is a distinctive finding that deserves attention. In contexts where political parties exert influence over public appointments, female heads may be targeted as part of broader power struggles. However, the gendered nature of this intimidation is significant: women are more likely to be portrayed as

"disobedient" or "insubordinate" when they attempt to enforce rules, and their challenges to male authority can be framed as political opposition. This intertwining of gender and politics creates a unique vulnerability that has been underexplored in the literature on educational leadership. Comparative studies from the Global South reinforce this finding. Research on women's leadership in Indian higher education institutions similarly documents how political networks, operating through informal patronage systems, create structural disadvantages for women who lack male sponsors or political affiliations (Mathew & Nair, 2022). In the Nepali context, Biswakarma (2024) found that female academic leaders were frequently excluded from decision-making through informal channels that bypassed formal governance structures, a dynamic closely mirroring the political intimidation reported in Kalabo. These parallels suggest that political interference in female leadership is not an aberration of specific local cultures but a manifestation of broader patriarchal governance systems that deserve sustained scholarly attention across Global South contexts.

4.6 Dual Responsibilities and Psychological Cost

The dual burden of work and family is a classic challenge for working women, but in the context of rural headship, it takes on added dimensions. Female heads often live apart from their families due to limited housing in remote areas, which adds to their isolation. Those who do live with their families face long hours that leave little time for domestic responsibilities. The psychological cost anxiety, stress, and occasional feelings of hopelessness was palpable in the interviews. This aligns with findings by Hoff and Mitchell (2008) that women in leadership often experience "role overload" and must constantly negotiate between competing demands.

4.7 Coping Strategies: Agency and Resilience

Despite these formidable challenges, the female head teachers in this study demonstrated remarkable agency and resilience. Their coping strategies delegation, professional development, community engagement, record keeping, and mentoring are not merely individual tactics but reflect a strategic approach to managing role incongruity. By delegating, they distribute authority, reducing the perception that they are "holding power" in a masculine way. By upgrading qualifications, they build objective legitimacy that counters subjective stereotypes. By engaging the community, they transform potential adversaries into allies. By keeping records, they arm themselves with evidence against those who would question their competence.

These strategies resonate with the concept of "feminine leadership" described by some scholars as more collaborative and relational (Shakeshaft, 1989). However, it is important to note that these women are not simply enacting a "feminine" style; they are deliberately

choosing strategies that work in their specific context. Their agency is constrained by structural barriers, but they exercise it to the fullest extent possible.

4.8 Theoretical Contributions and Integration

The findings provide strong support for role congruity theory. The prejudice and resistance female heads experience are directly attributable to the perceived mismatch between the feminine gender role and the leadership role. However, the study also extends the theory by highlighting how institutional and political factors interact with gender stereotypes. Role incongruity does not operate in a vacuum; it is activated and amplified by the lack of institutional support, the presence of political intimidation, and the physical isolation of rural schools. In other words, the gender gap in leadership is not just about individual attitudes but about the entire system within which women work.

Moreover, the study reveals that the "congruity" itself is dynamic. When female heads successfully build support networks, demonstrate competence, and engage the community, they can shift perceptions and create a new norm. The head teachers who reported positive experiences had, over time, achieved a degree of congruity their leadership was accepted because they had proven themselves. This suggests that role congruity is not fixed but can be negotiated through sustained performance and relationship-building.

4.9 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings have several implications for policy makers and practitioners. First, there is an urgent need for gender sensitization programs targeting not only teachers but also community members, traditional leaders, and district officers. These programs should challenge stereotypes about women's leadership and highlight the benefits of gender-diverse leadership teams. Second, district education offices must be held accountable for supporting female heads. This could include establishing a dedicated gender desk or assigning a female officer to serve as a mentor and advocate. Third, policies should be developed to protect female heads from political intimidation, with clear procedures for reporting and investigating threats.

Fourth, the Ministry should invest in infrastructure that reduces the dual burden on female heads, such as providing housing near schools, ensuring access to electricity and water, and considering family postings. Fifth, mentorship programs should be formalized, pairing new female heads with experienced female or male mentors who can provide guidance and support. Sixth, professional development opportunities like HEADLAMP should be expanded and made accessible to aspiring female teachers, creating a pipeline of qualified candidates.

4.10 Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its focus on a single district, which restricts generalizability. However, the depth of qualitative data provides rich insights that may be transferable to similar rural contexts. Future research could compare multiple districts with varying levels of gender policy implementation. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable to track how female heads' experiences evolve over time and to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of male teachers who resist female leadership could yield insights into how to address their resistance constructively.

5. CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study has illuminated the lived experiences of female head teachers in six primary schools in Kalabo District, Zambia. The findings reveal a duality: when supported by communities, staff, and district offices, women thrive in leadership, experiencing it as empowering and fulfilling. When unsupported, they confront a host of gender-based challenges: cultural rejection, male insubordination, institutional neglect, political intimidation, and the unrelenting dual burden of work and family. These challenges are not random but are rooted in the perceived incongruity between the feminine gender role and the leadership role an incongruity that is reinforced by deep-seated stereotypes and systemic failures.

Yet, the women in this study are not passive victims. They demonstrate remarkable agency through delegation, professional development, community engagement, and meticulous record-keeping. Their resilience challenges the very stereotypes that constrain them. The study contributes to the literature on gender and educational leadership by demonstrating how role congruity theory applies in a rural African context and by highlighting the intersection of gender with institutional and political dynamics.

To achieve genuine gender equity in school leadership, policies must move beyond aspirational statements to concrete actions: gender sensitization, institutional accountability, protection mechanisms, infrastructure improvements, and formal mentorship. The voices of female head teachers in Kalabo call for a transformation not only in who leads, but in how leadership is conceptualized and supported. As one head teacher poignantly concluded: Specifically, three priority actions are recommended. First, the Ministry of General Education should mandate the establishment of structured mentorship programs that pair newly appointed female head teachers with experienced mentors whether female or supportive male colleagues for a minimum of two years, with formal quarterly check-ins and documented progress reviews. Such formalized mentorship, as opposed to the ad hoc informal support currently described by participants, provides a sustained developmental foundation during the most vulnerable period of female headship.

Second, the District Education Board Secretaries (DEBS) across rural districts must undergo mandatory gender sensitization training, co-designed with female school leaders

and civil society organizations, to address the "institutional neglect" that renders formal gender policies ineffective at the district level. This training should include enforceable accountability measures, such as requiring DEBS offices to maintain transparent logs of complaints from female heads and the actions taken thereon, with oversight from the provincial education office. Third, the Ministry should establish a dedicated reporting and protection mechanism modeled on existing whistleblower frameworks for female heads experiencing political intimidation or staff misconduct, with guaranteed response timelines and non-retaliation guarantees, so that women can enforce professional standards without fear of politically motivated retaliation.

"We can lead just as well as men. All we need is a chance and support. When we are given that, the school benefits, the children benefit, and the community sees that a woman can do it."

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ARTICLE

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The Moroccan Public University under Platform Rule: Digital Transformation, Academic Mediation, and the Reconfiguration of Public Higher Education

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Abstract

As digital infrastructures move to the center of university life, the question is no longer whether Moroccan public universities use platforms, but what these platforms do to the institution itself. This article examines how the rise of platform-based environments reconfigures Moroccan public higher education as a mode of access, mediation, coordination, and government. Based on a critical documentary analysis of scientific studies, public reform discourses, and institutional digital environments, the article argues that the transition exceeds the adoption of tools. It signals a shift from an administrated university toward a connected university organized through interfaces, services, and trace-producing systems. The analysis shows that platformization reshapes access to public service, displaces the pedagogical relationship, redistributes academic and administrative work, standardizes pathways, and produces a new figure of the student as connected, autonomous, and visible. It also identifies five tensions structuring the Moroccan case: the gap between technical access and academic participation, the persistence of unequal appropriation, the link between fluidity and control, infrastructural dependence within public modernization, and the reordering of multilingualism through digital language hierarchies. The article concludes by arguing that digital transformation must be assessed against the public university's mission as a service, an intellectual milieu, and an institution of knowledge.

Keywords

Moroccan public university; platformization; digital transformation; higher education governance; academic participation

1. INTRODUCTION

In Moroccan public universities, digital platforms no longer appear as peripheral instruments added to teaching after the health crisis. They increasingly operate as gateways through which students access courses, administrative procedures, institutional communication, digital resources, and forms of academic presence. Research on Moroccan higher education has often approached this shift through continuity of learning, distance education, learner satisfaction, system quality, faculty experience, and the measurement of distance education effectiveness during COVID-19 (Jebbour, 2022; Ouajdouni & al., 2021; Iflahen & al., 2025). Such work clarifies constraints of infrastructure, engagement, training, and evaluation. Yet the platform also raises another problem: when access to the university becomes mediated by accounts, dashboards, learning management systems, mobile services, and data traces, the institution itself is reorganized through technical architectures.

This article asks: how does the rise of digital platforms reconfigure the Moroccan public university as a mode of access, mediation, and institutional government? The question does not concern the effectiveness of one platform, nor the attitudes of students toward online learning. It concerns the form of university life produced when academic and administrative relations are increasingly routed through interfaces. The platform is therefore treated as a social arrangement: it distributes roles, sets thresholds, organizes circulation, and frames what counts as participation. This positioning allows the article to avoid a technological narrative and to approach the university as an institution whose rules, rhythms, and relations are increasingly mediated by organized digital environments. The issue is not whether platforms are useful, but what they make possible, what they render visible, and which forms of academic participation they silently presuppose. This shift gives the inquiry its critical and institutional scope within the Moroccan public university system today.

The central hypothesis is that Moroccan public higher education is moving from a logic of digital equipment toward a platform regime. In this regime, digital tools do not merely support pre-existing practices; they participate in defining the conditions under which services are requested, courses are followed, documents are obtained, communication is maintained, and academic presence is recognized. Studies on e-learning in Morocco show that system quality, instructor quality, perceived usefulness, satisfaction, and learner anxiety shape platform success (Ouajdouni & al., 2021; Ouajdouni, 2024). This article extends that discussion by shifting the focus from success measurement to institutional form. The analysis relies on an operationalized critical documentary methodology. The corpus was constructed through a systematic selection of three document types: (1) peer-reviewed scientific studies on Moroccan higher education published between 2020 and 2026, retrieved via major academic databases; (2) primary public reform texts, specifically the ESRI 2030 Pact and Framework Law 51.17, which were analyzed directly to capture the state's modernizing rationale; and (3) systematic observations of the institutional digital environments deployed

across several of Morocco's twelve public universities. The analytical procedure employs a critical thematic reading, categorizing the data around institutional form, pedagogical mediation, and power dynamics, while carefully distinguishing the structural regime of platformization from the contingent emergency distance learning of the COVID-19 era. It also draws on recent work on learning analytics, which shows that platforms store and process traces of learner activity and raise questions of privacy, consent, and transparency in Moroccan higher education (Fadli & El Mediouni, 2024). The method is interpretive and socio-technical. It examines documents, services, interfaces, and institutional vocabularies as elements of the same configuration. No field survey is claimed; the object is not reported experience, but the public organization of university access through platforms.

The article proceeds in five movements. First, it defines the platform regime as a way of thinking the university beyond the language of tools. Second, it situates the Moroccan digital turn within reforms of higher education and public service modernization. Third, it examines the material organization of platform access through applications, learning environments, digital services, and institutional portals. Fourth, it analyzes the effects of platformization on access, pedagogical mediation, administrative work, and student visibility. Finally, it discusses the tensions between technical access and academic participation, inclusion and appropriation, service fluidity and datafication, before returning to the public mission of the university.

2. THINKING THE UNIVERSITY UNDER A PLATFORM REGIME: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND CRITICAL ANGLE

2.1. From Digitalization to Platformization

If the introduction located the problem in the growing mediation of university life through interfaces, the present section clarifies the analytical shift required to read that transformation. Digitalization, in the first sense, refers to the conversion of activities, documents, and interactions into digital formats. At that level, the university appears as an institution that adds technological supports to pre-existing practices. Moroccan research has often described this movement through the spread of e-learning, online courses, virtual resources, and distance education, with attention to continuity, efficiency, and pedagogical adaptation (Ben Attou, 2022; Elouesdadi & Rochdi, 2021). Yet such a vocabulary remains insufficient once digital environments cease to function as supplementary tools and begin to organize the ordinary passage through the institution itself. The analytical problem then changes: what is at stake is no longer the presence of digital instruments in the university, but the rise of a form that arranges access, circulation, coordination, and verification through interconnected systems.

This is where the notion of platformization becomes useful. In the Moroccan literature, the transition toward what is sometimes named the digital or intelligent university already signals that the university is being rearticulated through integrated digital environments rather than isolated applications (Benmoussa & al., 2024; Tamer & Knidiri, 2023). The issue is not simply that teaching uses technological supports, but that multiple university functions tend to converge within environments that centralize services, normalize user pathways, and produce operational continuity between pedagogical, administrative, and informational layers. Platformization, in this perspective, designates a change in institutional morphology. It marks the passage from dispersed digitalization to organized infrastructures through which the university is entered, navigated, and managed. The concept therefore allows the analysis to move beyond the language of innovation and to focus on the reconfiguration of institutional relations. This framework builds upon the international scholarship on the "platform society" (van Dijck & al, 2018) and the platformization of higher education (Williamson & Selwyn, 2020), conceptualizing the Moroccan case as a regional translation of these global socio-technical shifts.

2.2. The Platform as a Socio-Technical Dispositif

To define the platform as a socio-technical dispositif - borrowing Foucault's concept of an apparatus that coordinates power, knowledge, and social relations - is to refuse a purely technical reading. A platform is not reducible to software, interface, or repository. It combines norms, procedures, roles, forms of visibility, and rules of circulation. Moroccan studies on learning management systems already point in that direction when they show that learner success depends not only on content availability but also on system quality, information quality, service quality, self-regulation, and continuance intention (Safsouf & al., 2020). What appears, then, is a mediated space in which technical design and user conduct are mutually implicated. The platform does not merely host activities; it structures conditions under which activities become possible, legible, and recordable. It organizes time, channels exchanges, formats requests, and stabilizes what counts as valid participation. In that sense, it belongs to the order of institutional mediation as much as to the order of digital engineering.

The socio-technical nature of the platform becomes even clearer when one considers domains that appear, at first sight, administrative rather than pedagogical. Moroccan work on digital certifications, for instance, shows that the production, validation, storage, and authentication of academic documents are now conceived through digital signatures, centralized verification, and secure transmission architectures (Litoussi & al., 2022). Such arrangements are not external to the university form. They define how legitimacy is issued, how authority is encoded, and how the institution recognizes and certifies academic trajectories. Similarly, recent work on digital capabilities and IT governance in Moroccan higher education demonstrates that transformation is tied to structures, processes, and relational mechanisms rather than to equipment alone (Chahid & al., 2025). The platform

should therefore be understood as a dispositif in which technological architecture and institutional order are co-produced.

2.3. The Public University as an Institutional Form

A critical reading of platformization requires a prior understanding of the university not only as a place of instruction but as an institutional form. In the Moroccan debate, governance studies have insisted that higher education cannot be reduced to classroom delivery, since its functioning depends on arrangements of autonomy, accountability, decision-making, coordination, and relations with its social environment (Ayad & al., 2020; Dobli Bennani & al., 2021). This perspective is decisive for the present article. It makes it possible to see that the public university is composed of organized mediations: enrollment, certification, orientation, pedagogical supervision, evaluation, documentation, and communication. Once these mediations are increasingly routed through digital infrastructures, the transformation affects the form of the institution itself. The public character of the university is then engaged not as a legal abstraction, but as a concrete mode of organizing access to knowledge, recognition, and academic membership.

From this angle, the service public university is neither a neutral container nor a simple provider of educational services. It is an arrangement that binds pedagogical work, administrative recognition, and collective legitimacy. Moroccan scholarship on governance has shown that the university system has long been read through the questions of reform, regulation, and institutional crisis, which means that the issue of organization precedes the current digital turn (Ayad & al., 2020; Dobli Bennani & al., 2021). Platformization does not create the institutional question; it reopens it under new conditions. It forces one to ask how public service is translated when access passes through standardized pathways, when decisions are distributed across systems, and when academic relations become partially dependent on coded procedures. The platform, in that sense, is not added to the public university from the outside. It enters the very space where the institution gives form to its missions.

2.4. Why a Critical Reading in the Social Sciences?

A critical reading in social sciences is justified because platformization is not exhausted by the questions of usability, adoption, or performance. Those questions remain relevant, and Moroccan research has documented them with precision in relation to online learning, MOOCs, and digital pedagogies (Safsouf & al., 2020; Elouesdadi & Rochdi, 2021; Ben Attou, 2022). But the critical task begins where functional analysis stops. It asks how a technical environment reorganizes relations between actors, how it redistributes responsibilities, how it defines legitimate forms of access, and how it silently presupposes particular capacities of navigation, self-management, and compliance. Such an approach does not oppose

technology to education. It examines how educational relations are recoded when the institution increasingly operates through organized digital environments.

Within this perspective, the notion of platform regime offers a bridge between the previous introduction and the sections that follow. It preserves the institutional scale of the question while preparing the analysis of the Moroccan case without anticipating it. The concept allows one to hold together several dimensions that are often separated in the literature: pedagogical mediation, administrative rationalization, governance, certification, and digital capability (Benmoussa & al., 2024; Chahid & al., 2025; Litoussi & al., 2022). The critical angle adopted here is therefore neither external suspicion nor technical determinism. It is an attempt to understand how a university changes when mediation itself becomes infrastructural, and when infrastructure begins to orient the ordinary conditions of academic life. By mobilizing the political economy of platforms and critical data studies (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Srnicek, 2017), this approach positions the Moroccan case not merely as a localized technological adoption, but as a site where global platform capitalism intersects with the specificities of the Maghreb public service. On that basis, the next section can move to the Moroccan reform sequence without losing the conceptual thread established here.

3. THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF MOROCCAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A REFORM CARRIED BY THE LANGUAGE OF ACCESS, FLUIDITY, AND INNOVATION

3.1. Public Orientations of Digital Transformation

Once the conceptual distinction between digitalization and platformization has been established, the Moroccan case can be approached at the level where reform first acquires intelligibility: the level of public orientations, strategic vocabularies, and institutional priorities. In Morocco, digital transformation in higher education does not emerge in isolation. It is inscribed within a broader movement of public-sector modernization in which digitization is associated with efficiency, transparency, service redesign, and proximity to users. In that wider administrative frame, the shift from e-government to "digital by design" marks a passage from the computerization of procedures to the reorganization of public action through digital logics (Nachit & al., 2021). Higher education enters this sequence not as a separate policy island, but as one of the spaces where state reform, organizational rationalization, and knowledge production intersect. This insertion is decisive because it explains why the digital turn is presented less as a pedagogical choice than as a structural necessity of modernization.

This orientation appears with clarity in recent scientific work on Moroccan higher education reform. A direct reading of the ESRI 2030 Pact reveals that the policy text frames

digital transformation through national and international partnerships, explicitly defining digital interoperability as a condition for institutional modernization. As highlighted by Ez-zouhayry and Fallaki (2024), the Pact links this transformation to inclusion, student autonomy, and the redefinition of graduate preparation. Their analysis does not reduce reform to infrastructure; it situates digitization within a policy language that binds competitiveness, institutional openness, and the renewal of educational content. In this policy horizon, digital transformation functions as a reform grammar. It names an expectation of alignment between university organization and a changing environment, while also assigning to higher education a role in economic adaptation and social mobility. What matters here is not yet the concrete device, but the way reform discourse gives digital transformation the status of a public horizon rather than a local experiment (Ez-zouhayry & Fallaki, 2024).

3.2. Higher Education in the Discourses of Modernization

Within this reform grammar, higher education is described through a lexicon of modernization whose recurring terms are access, innovation, agility, skills, and quality. Moroccan research on University 4.0 captures this movement by showing that the university is increasingly imagined as a space expected to respond to labor-market shifts, digital cultures, and new forms of learning organization (Amini & al., 2023; Kerroum & al., 2020). What is at stake in these texts is not only the introduction of technology into the university. The university itself is re-described through categories borrowed from transition, adaptation, and strategic responsiveness. This discursive movement transforms the meaning of reform. The university is no longer addressed only as an institution of transmission and certification, but also as an actor required to synchronize with technological change, to reorganize its internal processes, and to prepare subjects for uncertain professional trajectories (Amini & al., 2023).

Such a discourse also produces a shift in the scale at which higher education is read. Instead of being framed primarily through curricular or pedagogical questions, it is increasingly approached through management, governance, and transformation capacity. Kerroum & al. (2020), in their work on Hassan II University, formulate digital transformation as a strategic process that requires planning over years, organizational coordination, and a specific steering structure. In a different register, Serhane and Outmane (2026) argue that Moroccan higher education is experiencing a phase in which digital transformation extends beyond service digitization and raises questions of leadership, strategic alignment, data governance, and institutional maturity. Read together, these studies indicate that modernization discourse is not confined to teaching innovation. It redefines the university as an organization whose legitimacy is increasingly linked to its ability to manage complexity, coordinate change, and produce continuity under digital conditions (Kerroum & al., 2020; Serhane & Outmane, 2026).

3.3. From an Administered University to a Connected University

At the institutional level, this reform language implies a reorientation of the university's governing model. The university historically organized through procedures, offices, and segmented chains of authority is progressively reimagined through connection, interoperability, and circulation. The passage is not merely technical. It concerns the administrative imagination of higher education. In the administered university, reform tends to target rules, structures, and legal competences. In the connected university, reform begins to privilege mobility of information, coordination across functions, continuity of service, and the simplification of user pathways. For that reason, digital transformation is repeatedly attached to notions such as processing time, traceability, and service coherence in recent Moroccan studies (Serhane & Outmane, 2026). What emerges is a new institutional norm: the university is asked not only to govern knowledge, but also to govern flows.

This passage is also sustained by another strand of Moroccan scholarship: the literature on evaluation and quality assurance. Oustous & al. (2021) show that Moroccan higher education reforms, from Law 01.00 to the Strategic Vision 2015–2030 and Framework Law 51.17, place continuous evaluation and quality assurance at the center of institutional reform. The role assigned to ANEAQ confirms that reform is not only a matter of expansion or access; it is also a matter of accountability, comparability, and continuous improvement. This is important for the present argument because the language of digital transformation enters a field already structured by governance and evaluation. The connected university is therefore not simply more technological than the administered university. It is a university inserted into a regime where performance, quality, and responsiveness become legitimate criteria of reorganization (Oustous & al., 2021).

3.4. Institutional Promises: Inclusion, Efficiency, Continuity, Quality

The reform sequence outlined above is sustained by a set of promises that confer coherence on digital transformation. The first is inclusion. In recent Moroccan work, digital transformation is regularly associated with broader access to educational opportunities, with support for student autonomy, and with the possibility of reducing inequalities through adapted programs and coordinated public policy (Ez-zouhayry & Fallaki, 2024; Serhane & Outmane, 2026). The second is efficiency, understood through administrative simplification, faster processing, and organizational coordination (Nachit & al., 2021). The third is continuity, a promise reinforced by the post-pandemic experience, where digital transformation appears as a condition for institutional resilience rather than as an optional innovation (Serhane & Outmane, 2026). The fourth is quality, supported by the consolidation of evaluation procedures and by the increasing centrality of institutional assessment in Moroccan higher education reform (Oustous & al., 2021).

At this stage of the article, these promises must be treated as components of a reform discourse rather than as established outcomes. Their function is political and institutional before being empirical. They define the horizon within which Moroccan higher education is called to transform itself. They also prepare the shift from a university organized by bureaucratic segmentation to one increasingly organized by connection, coordination, and service rationality. For that reason, the next section will not return to the level of policy rhetoric. It will move toward the material organization through which this reform sequence becomes concrete in the university field.

4. THE MATERIALITY OF THE PLATFORM REGIME IN THE MOROCCAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

If the previous section situated digital transformation within a national reform sequence, the present one moves to another level of observation: the level at which the platform regime becomes visible in the ordinary architecture of university access. The question here is not yet what these dispositifs produce in terms of institutional effects, but how they are materially arranged. What emerges from recent Moroccan research is neither a single platform nor a uniform technical model. Rather, one encounters a layered environment composed of learning management systems, classroom applications, synchronous communication tools, assessment devices, multimedia repositories, and digital spaces through which students and teachers enter university life. (Kaouni & al., 2022; El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025). While these material configurations are documented through case studies of specific institutions (such as Hassan II, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah, ENS Casablanca, and Ibnou Zohr), they reflect a structural standardization that traverses the twelve Moroccan public universities. The widespread adoption of standardized open-source architectures indicates that platformization is a systemic national reality rather than a localized experiment.

4.1. The Application and the Digital Space as Institutional Entry Points

The first material feature of this regime lies in the multiplication of digital entry points. Access to the university is no longer limited to the timetable, the classroom, the office, or the notice board. It now begins with a connection to a named digital environment. Kaouni, Lakrami, and Labouidya (2022) show, through their review of Moroccan higher education during the pandemic, that universities mobilized several e-learning platforms in order to ensure continuity and organize the passage from face-to-face teaching to distance or hybrid arrangements. In the later synthesis proposed by El Aasri and Bouziane (2025), this movement appears with greater clarity: "most universities have opted for the same open-source LMS, Moodle" (El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025, p. 38). The significance of this point exceeds

the technical choice itself. Moodle, in this setting, becomes a recurrent doorway through which the student encounters courses, teachers, files, and instructions. The entry to the institution is therefore increasingly mediated by a login architecture rather than by physical co-presence alone.

This logic is also visible in case studies centered on specific institutional spaces. Mouaziz & al. (2022) describe how, at Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, distance learning was implemented through platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, which were used to maintain contact, circulate content, and host virtual classes. A similar structuring role appears in the case of ENS Casablanca, where a dedicated environment, ENS Classroom, is presented in the literature as a platform created for distance learning within the institution. In another institutional setting, Juidette and Zraiouil (2025) analyze a learning management system named Marketing PSJ, designed to support e-learning in higher education and to broaden access to marketing education for students and professionals. Across these cases, the application or digital space is not a peripheral add-on. It functions as the first organized threshold of academic affiliation. (Mouaziz & al., 2022; Juidette & Zraiouil, 2025).

4.2. The aggregation of services: schooling, resources, communication, training

A second characteristic concerns aggregation. The platform regime does not materialize through one function only. It takes shape by gathering several services within the same digital environment or within interconnected environments. Kaouni & al. (2022) emphasize that Moroccan institutions did not simply upload documents; they combined platforms for course delivery, communication, and continuity. The review by El Aasri and Bouziane (2025) adds that teachers used different hardware and software, including email and social media, while universities developed digital resources in different environments and placed them at students' disposal. The material arrangement is therefore composite from the outset: course spaces, communication channels, repositories, and support functions appear side by side rather than separately.

The same aggregation becomes more concrete in studies devoted to particular academic settings. In Moroccan public medical faculties, Hjiej & al. (2022) report that students' distant learning involved multimedia studying resources and online interactive sessions with teachers. At Hassan II University, Mrisse & al. (2023) describe online assessment as part of a "digital device" that mobilizes multiple technological tools in order to organize evaluation, diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, and identity verification. The digital environment thus does not stop at lecture transmission. It extends to assessment, interaction, and resource circulation. In material terms, the platform regime brings together pedagogical content, communication, monitoring, and evaluation in a single chain of access. The university is no longer encountered through isolated procedures, but through aggregated digital operations. (Hjiej & al., 2022; Mrisse & al., 2023).

4.3. The interface as a mode of organizing university life

At this point, the interface itself can be described as an organizational surface. It orders the student's and teacher's movements through menus, folders, deadlines, links, virtual sessions, uploads, and feedback paths. Juidette and Zraiouil (2025), in their study of LMS acceptance, do not only examine perceptions of use; they indirectly show the centrality of the platform as the place where the learning experience is structured and judged. What the user evaluates is not merely a technical object, but a sequence of academic actions made possible by the interface. In the same manner, Mrisse & al. (2023) treat the digital device as the environment within which assessment practices are selected, administered, and controlled. The interface therefore works as a practical ordering mechanism. It aligns academic gestures - consulting a course, receiving instructions, submitting work, joining a virtual class, completing an evaluation - within a navigable visual order.

This material organization also explains why several Moroccan studies describe difficulties not only in terms of connection, but also in terms of interaction, orientation, and continuity of use. Mouaziz & al. (2022) show that the online experience was hindered by connection issues and weak interaction, while the ENS Classroom study points to the platform as the central medium through which students discovered distance learning during quarantine. What matters here is not to interpret these difficulties yet, but to note what they reveal descriptively: the platform is the space where academic presence is arranged, and the interface becomes the format through which the university is navigated. (Mouaziz & al., 2022; Hammoumi & El Youssfi, 2020).

4.4. From the university place to the integrated digital environment

Taken together, these studies describe a movement from the university as a bounded place toward the university as an integrated digital environment. Hammouch & al. (2023), in their study of twelve Moroccan universities, conclude that institutions were not ready for a fully online shift but were able to ensure a hybrid learning environment. The point is important because it clarifies the morphology of the current system. The Moroccan public university is not dissolving into distance education alone; it is being rearticulated through environments where face-to-face arrangements and digital pathways coexist. El Aasri and Bouziane (2025) reinforce this view by showing that remote learning platforms and methodologies expanded rapidly, while universities combined Moodle with various complementary applications and resources. The material form that emerges is therefore neither the traditional campus alone nor the virtual campus alone. It is an integrated environment in which the university extends across classrooms, portals, LMS structures, communication tools, and digital assessment dispositifs. That environment will have to be analyzed in the next section not merely as a technical arrangement, but as a reorganization of institutional life. (Hammouch & al., 2023; El Aasri & Bouziane, 2025).

5. THE INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTS OF UNIVERSITY PLATFORMIZATION

If the previous section described the architecture through which the platform regime becomes materially visible, the present section shifts the level of inquiry. The question is no longer what dispositifs are present, but what they do to the institution once they become ordinary channels of access, coordination, and evaluation. In the Moroccan public university, platformization does not merely add technical mediation to pre-existing routines. It modifies the conditions under which the public service is reached, the pedagogical relation is sustained, academic and administrative work are distributed, learning paths are formatted, and students are rendered both autonomous and visible.

5.1. Reconfiguring Access to the Public University Service

Under a platform regime, access to the university public service ceases to be reducible to formal enrollment. It becomes conditioned by readiness, connectivity, equipment, and the capacity to remain continuously reachable. In their study of Moroccan university students, Hafa & al. (2023) show that readiness for distance learning remained moderate, while satisfaction remained low and barriers persisted around ICT access, technical skills, self-learning, and interaction. What follows from such findings is not only an educational difficulty. A displacement occurs in the very meaning of access: the student is not simply admitted into a public institution but is expected to maintain a stable relation with a digital environment whose use presupposes devices, network continuity, and a practical command of mediated learning routines. Bouayad & al. (2024) reach a related conclusion in the context of hybrid teaching. Even when hybridization is perceived as a response to overcrowding and as a way to widen access, the actual following of courses remains uneven. Access, then, is no longer a single administrative right; it becomes a sequence of operational conditions through which the right must be exercised.

5.2. Displacement of the pedagogical relationship

The pedagogical relationship is also displaced. Platformization does not abolish the teacher-student relation, yet it re-mediates it through interfaces, asynchronous exchanges, uploaded files, recorded sessions, and assessment feedback loops. The Moroccan literature consistently shows that this mediation does not automatically produce pedagogical continuity. Mounjid & al. (2021) report that teachers faced "technology, training, and socio-economic challenges that acted as barriers to the processes of online education" (Mounjid & al., 2021, p. 38). In parallel, Menyani & al. (2022) note students' "lack of feedback provided by their professors" (Menyani & al., 2022, p. 194), alongside concerns about honesty and the

value of online assessment. These two findings should be read together. What is displaced is not only the channel of communication but the mode of pedagogical presence itself. Teaching becomes partly dependent on a chain of technical and organizational mediations: setting up courses, formatting content, maintaining interaction, troubleshooting, monitoring submissions, and providing feedback through systems that fragment the immediacy of exchange. Bouayad & al. (2024) show that hybrid teaching remains appreciated by many respondents because it preserves flexibility and some form of teacher-learner contact. Yet the same study indicates that face-to-face teaching is still perceived as more effective for the transmission, acquisition, and assessment of knowledge. The pedagogical relationship is therefore not replaced; it is re-situated within a mediated regime where continuity depends on the quality of the platformized environment.

5.3. *Redistributing Administrative and Academic Work*

Another effect concerns the distribution of work inside the institution. Platformization draws academic labor toward tasks that were once secondary or externally supported: digital formatting, uploading, scheduling, responding across channels, following activity traces, and organizing assessment through mediated procedures. At the same time, administrative labor is drawn into a parallel movement of digital adjustment. Ajrouh and Slamti (2020), in their study of seven Moroccan higher education institutions, show that online learning is still scarcely promoted for administrative staff professional development, despite employees' willingness and their perception of its value for institutional functioning. This point is central. The platform regime does not concern teachers and students alone; it requires administrative actors capable of sustaining the digital continuity of the university. When such support remains underdeveloped, academic staff absorb part of the technical and organizational burden, while administrative structures risk lagging behind the new operational demands. The effect is a redistribution rather than a substitution of work. University labor becomes more transversal, more dependent on digital coordination, and more exposed to demands of constant availability. Platformization, in that sense, does not simply modernize work. It redefines who must do what, through which channels, and with what forms of support.

5.4. *Standardizing Academic Pathways and Producing Traces*

Platformization also standardizes academic pathways by converting heterogeneous practices into comparable formats: deadlines, uploads, quizzes, discussion threads, consultation frequencies, and assessment records. Dehbi & al. (2023) state that the pedagogical environment they describe can "evaluate students through MCQs and have an automatic correction," "track student progress in real-time," and "schedule tasks" (Dehbi & al., 2023, p. 105). These functions matter institutionally because they transform learning into sequences that can be formatted, monitored, and compared. The platform becomes not only

a space of access but a machine for ordering academic gestures. Bouziane and Rouijel (2024), from the side of assessment practices, identify "massification, absenteeism and lack of standardized course packs" (Bouziane & Rouijel, 2024, p. 432) as structural constraints in Moroccan open-access higher education. Under a platform regime, the pressure toward standardization partly answers those constraints by formatting access to course content and assessment procedures. Yet the same movement also increases trace production. Consultations, submissions, absences, response times, and completion patterns become legible to the institution. A new administrative intelligibility emerges: not the university as a set of dispersed encounters, but the university as a field of recorded actions.

5.5. *The New Figure of the Student: Connected, Autonomous, and Visible*

From these transformations arises a new figure of the student. Rather than straightforwardly producing a new identity, platformization presupposes and invokes a specific figure of the student. The platformized student is expected to be connected, to manage learning with a degree of initiative, and to remain visible through activity. This expectation does not come from discourse alone; it is embedded in the organization of digital learning. Dehbi & al. (2023) explicitly link platform use to the identification of students with difficulties and to the monitoring of their activities. At the same time, Lamkhanter (2022) shows that Moroccan university students display positive attitudes toward learner autonomy and report behaviors that can support greater self-direction. Yet the same study also indicates that the learning environment does not always provide the relational and pedagogical conditions that would sustain that autonomy in practice. Hafa & al. (2023), likewise, point to the gap between the institutional expectation of self-learning and the actual difficulties students face in readiness and satisfaction. The new student figure is therefore marked by a tension. On the one hand, the platform presupposes initiative, self-regulation, and constant connectivity. On the other, those capacities remain unevenly distributed and institutionally supported. Visibility further complicates this figure. Through digital consultations, participation logs, and assessment traces, the student appears less as a mere recipient of instruction than as a readable user whose presence becomes measurable. The university thus encounters the student through a double expectation: to act independently and to remain continuously legible within the platformized order.

A further institutional effect of platformization is the materialization of digital language hierarchies. The architecture of digital interfaces and standard learning pathways frequently prioritizes English or French, moving the issue of language from a broad internationalization strategy to an immediate technical barrier for students whose primary academic comfort is Arabic. This reconfiguration implies that platforms are not linguistically neutral; they embed foreign-language proficiency into the basic requirements of academic navigation. Consequently, the platform regime implicitly defines who is adequately equipped to

participate in the connected university, translating interface design into institutional gatekeeping (Ben Hammou & Razkane, 2026; R'boul, 2024).

Taken together, these effects show that platformization in Moroccan public higher education is not exhausted by the question of technological adoption. It reorganizes institutional access, re-mediates pedagogy, redistributes work, formats academic pathways, and reshapes the student's institutional identity. For that reason, the next section must move from effects to contradictions, where inclusion, continuity, visibility, and autonomy will have to be re-read as tensions rather than as self-evident gains.

6. THE CONTRADICTIONS OF THE PLATFORM REGIME IN THE MOROCCAN CONTEXT

The Moroccan university platform regime carries its own tension. What is presented institutionally as simplification, continuity, and opening does not unfold on an empty social surface. It meets unequal equipment, unequal linguistic capital, unequal digital familiarity, and unequal capacity to convert technical access into academic participation. For that reason, the critical question is no longer whether the platform extends access, but under what conditions this access becomes effective participation, under what forms it renders students governable, and through which hierarchies it redistributes opportunities inside the university field.

6.1. Technical Access and Academic Participation

A first contradiction emerges between technical connection and academic participation. Moroccan research has shown that online access does not automatically translate into pedagogical involvement, sustained interaction, or meaningful accompaniment. In a national survey of 800 university students, satisfaction depended on interactivity, course duration, teaching methods, and mastery of digital tools rather than on mere access to online courses (Zouiri & El Kinani, 2022). The same study indicates that only 40% of students felt accompanied by their institution during distance learning, while 64% reported managing problems on their own (Zouiri & El Kinani, 2022). The contradiction is clear: the service becomes technically reachable, yet the student can remain weakly supported inside it. Participation here cannot be reduced to logging in, downloading files, or attending a virtual session. It presupposes guidance, interpretive support, feedback, and relational continuity, which the platform does not guarantee by itself. The Moroccan case therefore reveals a threshold problem: digital entry broadens formal access, but academic participation still depends on mediations that are unevenly distributed across students and institutions.

6.2. Digital Inclusion and Inequalities of Appropriation

The second contradiction concerns the gap between the discourse of digital inclusion and the reality of unequal appropriation. Recent work on Moroccan university students' intention to use e-learning services shows that usage barriers, value barriers, and individual barriers significantly reduce intention to use, while age moderates some of these effects (Oulamine & al., 2025). This result matters because it moves the debate beyond infrastructure alone. The problem is not exhausted by internet availability or device ownership. It also involves perceptions of relevance, habits of learning, prior digital confidence, and the social capacity to integrate platformed study into everyday life. The same line of tension appears in the national study by Zouiri and El Kinani (2022), where students lacking basic computer skills reported a weaker perception of distance learning. Inclusion, then, remains incomplete when the institution provides an interface but leaves unresolved the unequal distribution of the practical competencies needed to inhabit it. In such conditions, the platform can expand formal opportunity while reproducing differentiated educational trajectories through unequal appropriation.

6.3. *Service Fluidity and the Densification of Control*

A third contradiction lies in the relation between service fluidity and control. The same infrastructures that promise faster communication, smoother assessment, and better monitoring also intensify the legibility of students' actions. In recent Moroccan research on learning analytics, students expressed interest in using analytics to improve assessment, yet they simultaneously demanded transparency, consent, and support around the collection and use of their data (Zine & Kaaouachi, 2025). This expectation is not secondary. It indicates that optimization is inseparable from the question of who reads student traces, for what ends, and under what institutional guarantees. The contradiction becomes sharper in studies on AI implementation in Moroccan higher education. Academics identify potential gains in efficiency and administrative support, yet they also stress data privacy concerns, reduced student–instructor interaction, unequal access to advanced technologies, and new forms of cheating (Mjahad & al., 2025). What is marketed as fluid service delivery therefore carries a parallel movement: students become more visible, their learning more trackable, and assessment more exposed to verification, suspicion, and data extraction. The platform does not simply accelerate institutional operations; it thickens the university's observational capacity. In this sense, fluidity is not the opposite of control. It is often one of its operating conditions.

6.4. *Public Modernization and Infrastructural Dependence*

A fourth contradiction concerns modernization and infrastructural dependence. The Moroccan university is encouraged to modernize through digital tools, AI systems, and data-

driven services, yet the effective use of these technologies remains dependent on infrastructures, regulatory maturity, training, and trust. In their study on AI adoption, Razzouki, Ben Hammou, and Izenzal (2025) show that trust positively moderates the transition from adoption to effective use. This is not merely a psychological variable. It points to an institutional condition: technology does not become operational simply because it is available. Its use depends on confidence in its fairness, usefulness, and governance. The same study explicitly notes that regulatory frameworks and institutional policies related to AI in Moroccan higher education are still evolving (Razzouki & al., 2025). A related study on academics' perceptions similarly shows that Moroccan universities face challenges linked to limited resources, uneven familiarity with AI, socio-economic disparities, and the need for clear policies on privacy and academic integrity (Mjahad & al., 2025). The contradiction, then, is structural. Public modernization is articulated as an internal reform of the university, but its realization remains tethered to technical systems, policy environments, and expertise that are not always fully stabilized within the institution itself. Modernization proceeds, yet under conditions of infrastructural and regulatory dependence that complicate the promise of sovereign digital transformation.

6.5. University Multilingualism and Digital Language Hierarchies

The fifth contradiction concerns language. Moroccan higher education is often described through multilingualism, yet recent research suggests that the digital and internationalizing turn can reorganize this plurality into new hierarchies. R'boul's study of English-medium instruction in Moroccan universities argues that the growing status of English may reinforce linguistic dependency and create forms of epistemic injustice by marginalizing local languages within academic value systems (R'boul, 2024). Ben Hammou and Kesbi (2023), working with graduate students in Moroccan science universities, show that attitudes toward English-medium instruction are shaped by expectations of mobility and academic opportunity, but this orientation also redistributes advantage toward those already better positioned to navigate foreign-language demands. More recent work by Ben Hammou and Razkane (2026) adds another layer: lecturers regard English as a possible means of disciplinary advancement and even linguistic decolonization, while simultaneously identifying limited proficiency and insufficient training as obstacles to broader implementation. The contradiction is therefore not simply between Arabic and English, or between French and English. It lies in the fact that the digital university valorizes participation in transnational knowledge circuits while exposing unequal linguistic preparedness among students and staff. Under these conditions, multilingualism may persist institutionally while functioning practically as a stratified order of access to knowledge, legitimacy, and future academic mobility. This tension is fundamentally tied to platform logics because the digital interface actively enforces these linguistic requirements at the point of entry and daily

navigation, making linguistic dependency an inescapable feature of the infrastructural design rather than just a distant internationalization policy.

Taken together, these contradictions reveal that the platform regime in Moroccan public higher education cannot be assessed through connectivity, innovation, or service expansion alone. Its limits appear where technical access fails to become academic participation, where inclusion remains formal, where fluidity merges with traceability, where modernization depends on fragile infrastructures, and where multilingualism coexists with unequal linguistic legitimacy. The next section will return from these tensions to the question that underlies the whole article: what remains of the public mission of the university when its modes of access, mediation, and recognition are increasingly reorganized through platform logics?

7. RETHINKING THE MISSION OF THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN THE PLATFORM ERA

7.1. The University as Service, Intellectual Milieu, and Institution of Knowledge

The Moroccan case leads, at this stage, to a question that exceeds the technical sequence of reform: what is a public university expected to remain when access, coordination, and recognition increasingly pass through platform logics? This question cannot be answered by opposing technology to education. It requires a return to the plurality of university missions. Recent Moroccan scholarship has insisted that higher education must still be understood as a public good, not only because it produces qualifications, but because it carries research, teaching, service to society, and social critique within the same institutional space (Houssami, 2024). In a related reflection on University 4.0, Tamer and Knidiri (2023) argue that digital transformation affects the university's "main missions and functions" and that the university remains the place where knowledge is produced and transferred to society (Tamer & Knidiri, 2023, p. 21). The issue, then, is not whether the university should transform, but whether transformation preserves this composite mission. A public university cannot be reduced to a service counter, because it is also an intellectual milieu where inquiry, disciplinary formation, and collective criticism are sustained over time.

This distinction matters in the Moroccan public sector because the university is already shaped by tensions of governance, funding, scale, and reform continuity. Jaida and Haoucha (2025) show that Moroccan public universities remain strongly dependent on ministerial steering and state funding, while governance issues continue to weigh on institutional performance. Such a configuration means that the public university is not simply a provider of educational outputs; it is a mediated institution whose mission is tied to public coordination, knowledge production, and social responsibility. Once digital transformation is introduced into that space, the central problem is not merely operational modernization. It is the risk of narrowing the university's mission to what is visible through digital service delivery:

registration, communication, certification, monitoring, and rapid response. Recalling the university as service, intellectual milieu, and institution of knowledge is therefore not a nostalgic gesture. It is a theoretical requirement for judging whether platform-led reform strengthens or contracts the meaning of public higher education.

7.2. Criteria for Evaluating a University Digital Transformation

If the mission of the university is broader than service circulation, then the evaluation of digital transformation must also move beyond indicators of deployment. Moroccan work on e-management is useful here because it defines e-governance not only through efficiency, but also through the capacity to deliver quality public services and widen stakeholder engagement (Elhissi & al., 2022). The same article notes that digital technologies now touch "the heart of the university's major functions," including training, research, human resource management, steering, and financial management (Elhissi & al., 2022, p. 19). This observation suggests a first criterion: digital transformation should be assessed by its relation to the whole institutional mission rather than by the speed of procedures alone. A second criterion follows from recent work on the ESRI 2030 Pact, which highlights structural reforms in pedagogical norms, credit frameworks, and institutional diversity while also pointing to regional imbalances and ongoing disparities (Benhima, 2024). A transformation that leaves those inequalities intact cannot be evaluated only as a technical success.

A third criterion concerns security, resilience, and infrastructural coherence. Chahid & al. (2025) show that digital transformation in Moroccan universities is linked not only to educational delivery and operational efficiency, but also to cybersecurity barriers whose interdependence affects the viability of reform. This is not a secondary issue. A university transformation that expands interfaces while neglecting governance, protection, and continuity risks weakening the institution it claims to modernize. A fourth criterion concerns organizational change. Tamer and Knidiri (2023) explicitly note that digital transformation implies a change in the organizational model and cannot be reduced to technological injection. From that perspective, the relevant question becomes more demanding: does digital transformation improve the conditions of knowledge transmission, research support, institutional coordination, and public accountability, or does it merely multiply digital layers over unresolved structural problems? In the Moroccan case, a credible evaluation must therefore combine service quality, institutional equity, security, governance capacity, and consistency with the university's knowledge mission. These criteria must function as a rigorous normative framework: if a digital infrastructure merely accelerates administrative transactions without measurably improving the intellectual milieu or reducing structural inequalities, it fails the foundational test of the public service mandate.

7.3. For a Critical Reading of Reform through the Interface

A critical reading of reform through the interface begins at the point where the interface is no longer seen as a neutral screen. It condenses choices about what is made accessible, what is simplified, what is recorded, and what is considered evidence of institutional performance. For that reason, the interface should be read as a political and organizational surface. When reform is conducted through platforms, the university risks being judged by the fluidity of transactions rather than by the density of intellectual formation. Moroccan discussions of public higher education reform repeatedly return to this difficulty. Houssami (2024) frames higher education as a public good whose value lies in its societal functions; Jaida and Haoucha (2025) stress that modernization efforts have not removed structural shortcomings; Tamer and Knidiri (2023) argue that the university must adapt to digital change without losing sight of its broader role in knowledge and society. Taken together, these studies suggest that the interface should not become the measure of the institution. It should remain one medium among others within a public university that still has to teach, research, criticize, and serve society.

From this standpoint, the central contribution of the Moroccan case is not to reject digital transformation, but to relocate its meaning. Reform by interface is legitimate only if it remains answerable to the missions that justify the public university in the first place. The platform may organize access, but it does not define by itself what higher education is for. That question belongs to the institution, to its public mandate, and to the forms of knowledge and participation it is able to sustain.

8. CONCLUSION

This article asked how the rise of digital platforms reconfigures the Moroccan public university as a mode of access, mediation, and institutional government. The answer that emerges is not limited to the diffusion of digital tools across teaching and administration. What takes shape is a deeper transformation in the way the university is entered, navigated, and experienced. The platform does not remain at the margin of institutional life. It becomes one of the forms through which the public university organizes access to courses, services, communication, evaluation, and recognition. In that sense, the platform is not only a technical support. It participates in the redefinition of the university as an ordered environment of interfaces, procedures, and traces.

From this perspective, the Moroccan public university appears less as an institution that has simply adopted digital solutions than as an institution whose everyday functioning is increasingly mediated by them. Access to the public service is reworked through digital conditions of presence. The pedagogical relation is displaced into mediated sequences. Administrative and academic work are redistributed through new obligations of coordination, formatting, and follow-up. Student pathways become more legible, more organized, and more exposed to monitoring. A figure of the connected student gradually emerges, expected

to combine availability, autonomy, and readability within the institutional order. The central result of the article therefore lies in this displacement: the digital turn is not only a matter of equipment, but a change in institutional form.

The contribution of this article lies first in its analytical shift. Rather than treating digital transformation as a question of technological adoption, pedagogical continuity, or service improvement taken separately, the article has proposed to read the Moroccan case through the notion of a platform regime. This move has made it possible to connect elements that are often studied in isolation: digital access, institutional modernization, pedagogical mediation, administrative reorganization, student visibility, and linguistic hierarchy. By doing so, the article has sought to restore the coherence of a process that is frequently fragmented by sectoral analyses.

A second contribution concerns scale. The article has moved from public orientations to institutional materiality, then from materiality to institutional effects, and finally from effects to contradictions. This progression has allowed the Moroccan case to appear not as a local technical response, but as a site where a broader question of public higher education is being reformulated. The issue is not whether the university should transform, but according to which criteria and under which conception of its mission. In that respect, the article has shown that the digital university can only be understood if one keeps in view the public character of the institution, its intellectual function, and its role in the production and transmission of knowledge.

The limits of this study follow from its own methodological choice. The analysis has relied on a documentary and critical reading of public orientations, scientific studies, and institutional environments. It has therefore focused on the public intelligibility of the platform regime rather than on situated practices observed through fieldwork. Such a choice allows one to grasp the institutional logic of transformation, but it does not provide access to the full diversity of lived experiences inside Moroccan universities. The analysis has also privileged the level of institutional form, which means that disciplinary variations, local arrangements, and informal adaptations remain outside its empirical scope.

Another limit concerns temporality. The platform regime is still evolving. Some of the transformations discussed here remain unstable, uneven, or in transition. For that reason, the article does not claim to offer a final map of Moroccan higher education under digital conditions. It proposes, rather, a conceptual and critical reading of an ongoing reorganization.

The main opening suggested by this study concerns the need to reconnect digital transformation to the mission of the public university. A university cannot be evaluated only through the fluidity of its services, the extension of its interfaces, or the multiplication of its digital channels. It must also be judged by its capacity to sustain access as participation, knowledge as formation, and public service as an institutional relation rather than a sequence of transactions. The question that remains, then, is not whether the platform will continue to structure the university. It is whether the public university will remain capable of governing

that structure according to its own mission, instead of allowing the logic of the interface to become the silent measure of reform.

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ARTICLE

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NAVIGATING CIVIC EDUCATION: QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS FROM SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS USING THE TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Social Studies serves as the primary vehicle for civic education in the Philippines, yet a disconnect exists between curriculum implementation and teacher preparation. Misalignment between faculty specializations and the multidisciplinary requirements of the field poses a significant risk to the quality of instruction. This study determines the perspectives of Social Studies teachers at a local college toward navigating civic education. It explores how educators conceptualize democracy, define citizenship education, and identify values essential for a democratic society. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive case study design, data were gathered from four full-time faculty members at Mabalacat City College. The research employed semi-structured interviews and open-ended surveys grounded in the Civic Education Teachers' Knowledge Framework. Transcribed data underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring labels related to democracy, values, and pedagogical strategies. Findings indicate that teachers conceptualize democracy as both a structural government system and a moral ideology. Participants identified civic education as a lifelong process for preparing active community members, emphasizing values like Pakikisama and Pagiging Makatao. While experiential learning is recognized as vital, a gap exists regarding the discussion of controversial issues in the classroom. The study underscores that while teachers possess robust conceptual knowledge, pedagogical execution is heavily influenced by professional specialization and institutional context. Institutions must prioritize faculty development to ensure civic instruction moves beyond rote theory toward meaningful engagement.

Keywords

Civic Education; Democracy; Social Studies; Teachers' Knowledge Framework

1. INTRODUCTION

Social Studies is a vehicle for civic and citizenship education in the Philippines. Civic education also known as citizen or democracy education is a learning area that equip learners with democratic values and empowers them to be a good citizen and active participants in democratic process (McCracken, 2012). The idea and goal of civic education as a learning area is simply the involvement and participation of the citizens in a good governance. In addition, civic education has been used as a learning area to address political and social issues.

In fact, all educational institutions are required to provide civic education under Article XIV, Section 3, paragraph 2 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution: "Inculcate patriotism and nationalism, foster love of humanity, respect for human rights, appreciation of the role of national heroes in the historical development of the country, teach the rights and duties of citizenship, strengthen ethical and spiritual values, develop moral character and personal discipline, encourage critical and creative thinking, broaden scientific and technological knowledge, and promote vocational efficiency."

The implementation of the K to 12 curriculum has also changed the subjects taught in Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies) in the basic education curriculum, as well as courses in the higher education curriculum. Adarlo (2016) in his study enumerated the focus of Civic Education in the Philippines from Basic to Higher Education. In the Kindergarten: Values Education and Social Studies (positive self-concept, awareness of one's social identity, concern for self and others, manifest love of God, country, and fellow. Appreciation to cultural diversity, school community, people, and environment). Grades 1 to 10: Values Education (understanding of oneself, role in the society for nation building, values of truth, freedom, justice, and love). Social Studies (history, geography, politics, economics, and social sciences). Grades 11 to 12 – Introduction to Philosophy of Man, Personal Development, Understanding Culture, Society, and Politics. In the Higher Education: Understanding the Self, Readings in Philippine History, The Contemporary World, Ethics, and National Service Training Program.

The challenge of this implementation and reform is how to teach Civic Education and instill the values of civic and citizenship education, skills, and values in the new curriculum as well as in the higher education curriculum. Jamieson (2013) enumerated the challenges facing civic education in the twenty-first century: (1) quality of civic education taught; (2) social studies textbooks; (3) socio-economic status of students; (4) school funds to implement civic education reforms; and (5) educational reforms.

Guilfoile et al., (2014) enumerated six (6) proven teaching practices for effective learning: (1) Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy; (2) incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events in the classroom; (3) design and implement school programs that linked community service to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction; (4) extracurricular activities that involved students in their schools or

communities; (5) encourage student participation in school governance; and (6) encourage students' participation in simulation of democratic processes and procedures.

There is an urgent need to conduct this study due to the emerging disconnect between curriculum implementation and teacher preparation in local colleges. While frameworks for effective learning exist, such as the use of experiential learning and the discussion of controversial issues, there is a noted absence of these practices in the current pedagogical landscape. Furthermore, the misalignment between faculty members' academic specializations and the multidisciplinary requirements of Social Studies education poses a risk to the quality of civic instruction. Without addressing how teachers perceive and internalize their role through a structured framework, the goal of developing ideal citizens may remain a theoretical aspiration rather than a classroom reality.

This research directly contributes to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education, specifically Target 4.7. This target mandates that by 2030, all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through education for human rights, gender equality, and the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence. By utilizing the Civic Education Teachers' Knowledge Framework, this study identifies the internal and external knowledge sources that influence how teachers shape the next generation of global citizens.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the perspectives and professional views of Social Studies teachers in a local college toward navigating civic education. By utilizing the Civic Education Teachers' Knowledge Framework, the study explores how teachers' internal reflections and external institutional contexts shape their pedagogical approaches to civic and citizenship training. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do Social Studies teachers conceptualize democracy?
2. What are the perspectives of teachers regarding the definition and role of civic and citizenship education in the Philippine context?
3. What specific values do teachers perceive as essential for a good citizen to possess within a democratic society?
4. What specific courses, topics, or subject areas are utilized by teachers to instill civic skills among students?
5. What teaching practices and pedagogical strategies are employed by teachers to ensure effective civic learning and student engagement?

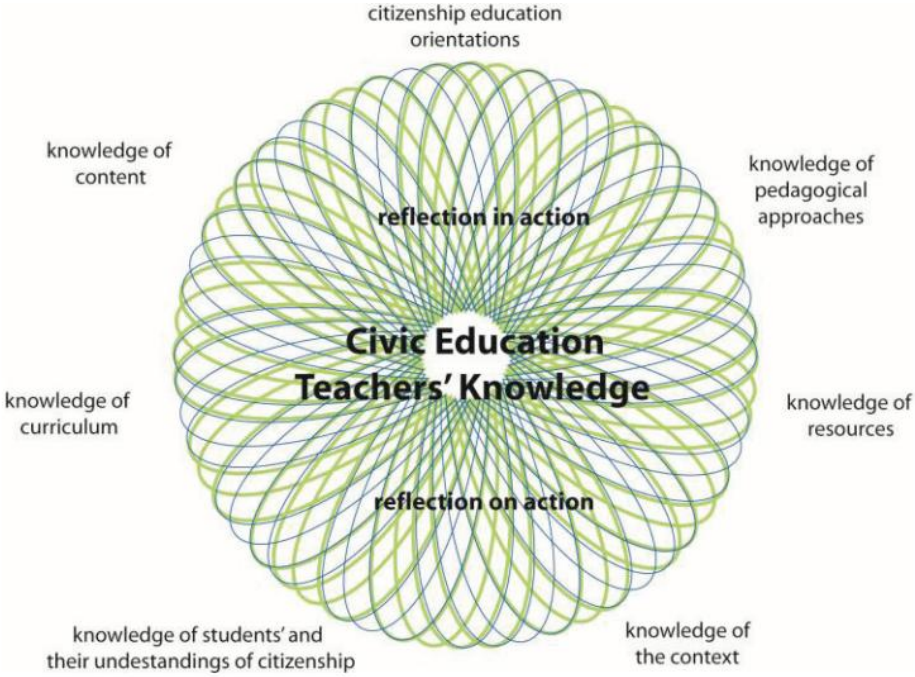
2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Nogueira and Moreira (2012) developed the framework of The Civic Education Teachers Knowledge. The purpose of this framework was to give and determine the teachers'

knowledge for Civic Education, which would subsequently serve as the foundation for future training proposal. This framework is a heuristic value dimension for teachers based on a combination of internal (personal reflection, examination of behaviors and sentiments) and external (information to be taught, social environment, curriculum, and working circumstances) knowledge sources. Particularly, the framework includes dimensions of teachers' reflection in action, reflection on action, citizenship education orientation, knowledge of pedagogical approaches, knowledge of sources, knowledge of context, knowledge of students' and their understanding of citizenship, knowledge of curriculum, and knowledge of content.

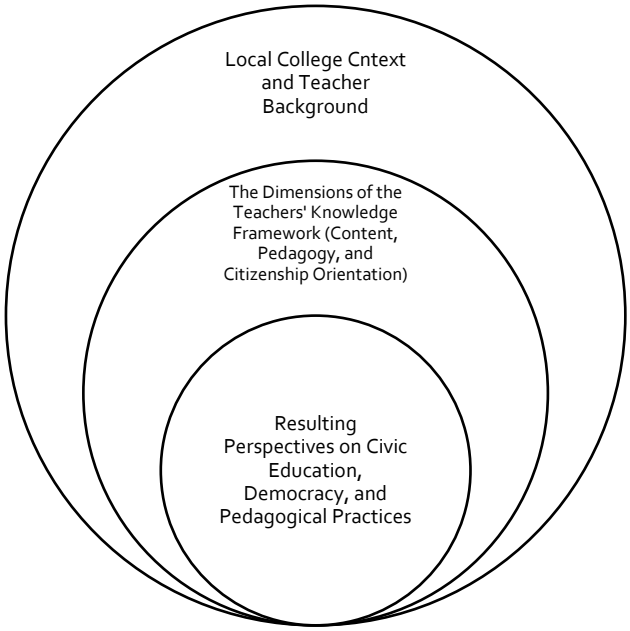
All these dimensions are critical within the framework of civic and citizenship education because they impact all of the decisions made by teachers in the classroom context.

Figure 1 - The Civic Education Teachers' Knowledge Framework



Evidently, this framework categorizes the internal and external knowledge sources of the teacher are the variables adopted in this study.

Figure 2 - The Relational Research Paradigm



The relational paradigm illustrated in Figure 2 maps out how the dimensions of the Civic Education Teachers' Knowledge Framework (Nogueira & Moreira, 2012) directly interface with classroom realities. Rather than displaying a linear cause-and-effect relationship, the paradigm operates dynamically: (1) Internal Sources (the teacher's internal reflection-in-action and personal orientation) interact continuously with External Constraints (institutional loading, the multidisciplinary nature of the department, and local curriculum structures); (2) This friction shapes how teachers conceptualize Core Civic Variables (Democracy and Citizenship Values); and (3) ultimately, these conceptualizations dictate the Pedagogical Output (the reliance on experiential learning vs. the avoidance of controversial contemporary issues). This explicitly demonstrates how structural alignment, or the lack thereof, impacts actual classroom instruction.

3. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design specifically utilizing a descriptive case study approach. This design was selected to gain an in-depth, nuanced understanding of the professional perspectives and lived experiences of Social Studies teachers within the unique context of a Philippine local college. By focusing on qualitative inquiry, the researcher was able to explore the how and why behind pedagogical choices that quantitative measures might overlook.

2.2 Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at Mabalacat City College (MCC), a local government-funded institution in Pampanga, Philippines. The participants consisted of four (4) full-time faculty members from the Department of Social Sciences, Institute of Arts and Sciences, and Institute of Teacher Education. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who are actively teaching Social Studies courses, ensuring that the data gathered was rich with relevant professional experience.

While a sample size of four participants from a single institution is small, it aligns strictly with the parameters of an information-rich qualitative descriptive case study where the focus is depth of professional insight over statistical generalizability. In qualitative inquiry, small sample sizes are heavily justified when the participants possess specialized institutional and contextual knowledge that directly answers the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Data collection was continued until thematic saturation was achieved, meaning no new conceptual dimensions regarding the Teachers' Knowledge Framework emerged during the final depth interviews.

2.3 Research Instrument

Data were gathered through a semi-structured qualitative interview guide. The instrument was designed based on the dimensions of the Civic Education Teachers' Knowledge Framework (Nogueira & Moreira, 2012). The guide focused on three primary domains: Conceptual Knowledge: Definitions of democracy and citizenship; Pedagogical Knowledge: Strategies for teaching civic competence; and Contextual Knowledge: The influence of the local college environment on teaching practices.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, data collection involved in-depth interviews and open-ended qualitative surveys. To ensure ethical standards, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms such as Instructor A, Instructor B, Instructor C, and Instructor D. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure the integrity of the participants' voices.

2.5 Data Analysis

The collected data underwent Thematic Analysis. The process involved: First, familiarization: immersing in the transcripts to identify recurring ideas. Second is the initial coding: labeling

key phrases related to democracy, values, and teaching methods. Third is thematic generation: grouping codes into broader themes, such as Democracy as an Ideology and Experiential Learning as a Civic Tool. Ang lastly, review and refinement: ensuring the themes accurately represented the data and aligned with the theoretical framework.

The collected data underwent qualitative Thematic Analysis utilizing an inductive coding approach, allowing themes to emerge directly from the participants' lived experiences rather than forcing data into pre-existing theoretical molds. The analysis strictly adhered to the six-phase thematic analysis framework established by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The process involved: (1) Familiarization: Immersing in the transcripts through repeated reading to identify recurring ideas. (2) Initial Coding: Generating systematic data labels and shorthand codes across the dataset using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software to manage transcripts efficiently. (3) Thematic Generation: Sorting and grouping codes into broader, overarching candidate themes. (4) Reviewing Themes: Checking candidate themes against the operationalized extracts and the entire dataset. (5) Defining and Naming Themes: Refining the conceptual specifics of each theme, such as Democracy as an Ideology and Experiential Learning as a Civic Tool, and finally (6) Producing the Report: Selecting vivid anchor examples and linking the analysis back to the research questions and the theoretical framework.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with strict adherence to established ethical standards for qualitative research to ensure the protection of the participants and the integrity of the data. Before the commencement of the data collection process, formal permission was sought and obtained from the administration of Mabalacat City College. All participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, which is to determine their perspectives on teaching civic education using the Teachers' Knowledge Framework. Participation was entirely voluntary, and each educator signed an informed consent form prior to the interviews. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any professional or personal penalty. To safeguard the professional identities of the faculty members, strict confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. All recorded interviews and verbatim transcripts were stored in password-protected digital files accessible only to the researcher. The study employed member checking to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings. Participants were given the opportunity to review and validate their transcribed responses to ensure that the themes generated accurately reflected their professional views. Furthermore, the researcher ensured a non-judgmental environment during interviews, particularly when discussing sensitive topics like the misalignment of academic specializations or the challenges of the K to 12 implementation, to prevent any risk of professional distress or reputational harm.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

3.1 Participants Concept of Democracy

The discussion on the first research problem, the teachers' concept of democracy, the research study analyzed two (2) themes, namely, democracy as a government, and democracy as an ideology.

3.1.1 Democracy as Government

Traditional political literature often defines democracy fundamentally as a government of the many, where political power is systematically exercised by a majority of the populace (De Leon, 2014). However, contemporary civic theory expands this definition far beyond simple majoritarian rule. True democratic governance encompasses institutionalized systems of checks and balances, the absolute protection of pluralistic minority rights, legal accountability, and transparent civic channels that allow citizens to actively alter social structures (Creswell, 2021; UNESCO, 2023). Because of these multi-tiered layers, democracy operates simultaneously as an institutional mechanism and a cultural ideal, rendering it complex to navigate in real-world pedagogy:

> "*Often people associate democracy with a government system that is ruled by many. It is characterized by the authority to decide the majority of the people who elect in government*..." – Instructor A

> "*Democracy in order to flourish should be practiced together with the right form of government so that citizen's needs could be effectively addressed*." – Instructor B

> "*Democracy is a system of government of the people, by the people and for the people. The elected officials from the lowest up to the highest are servants of the people and not their masters. The ultimate source of power and authority lies in them."* – Instructor C

> "*In my perspective, democracy serves as both a form of government and a political ideology. It embodies a system in which individuals are granted the privilege to elect representatives who will govern on their behalf..."* – Instructor D

3.1.2 Democracy as Ideology

An ideology is a set of concepts, opinions, and behaviors that people consciously or unconsciously hold and that reflect or mold their perceptions of the social and political landscape (Freeden, 1998). It serves to advocate for, defend, or support collective action aimed at maintaining or improving political customs and institutions. In an interview with the two (2) participants, they view democracy as an ideology:

> *"…However more than a government system, I appreciate the study of democracy as part of a political theory, specifically normative democratic theory. Normative democratic theory studies the moral foundations of democracy and the democratic institutions within the government. This theory focuses more on the people/citizen, government official, and their moral duties under a government of democracy. As a political theory, the function of normative democratic theory is to evaluate the different moral justification of democracy being adopted as a form of government. Where this is quite interesting in the context of the Philippines where often democracy is either oversimplified or misunderstood."* – Instructor A

> *"… However, I find it challenging to fully endorse the notion that democracy is a government solely by and for the people, as it often prioritizes the interests of the majority, inadvertently marginalizing the voices of minority groups. Hence, while democracy functions as a governing structure, it also encompasses a set of political ideals."* – Instructor D

Relatively, this finding shows that democracy was defined according to a concept in which they consider as a government and an ideology to what it does to transform democratic precepts into substance and reality for the common good.

3.2 *Participants' Definition of Civic and Citizenship Education*

The discussion on the second research problem is the teachers' definition of civic and citizenship education, the research study analyzed two (2) themes, namely, civic and citizenship education prepares learners to become good citizens and active members of their community.

3.2.1 Prepare learners to become good citizens

As defined by McCracken (2012), civic education can be generally described as the provision of knowledge and learning experiences to citizens in order to equip and empower them to participate in democratic processes. Boyle-Baise and Zevin (2009) in their study described civic education as a learning area that cultivates civic competence and responsibility in

students, allowing for the growth of social justice values and perspectives. In an interview with the participants, they defined civic and citizenship education in different ways:

> *"Civic education is the process of refining the beliefs, capabilities, perspective, and action of a person that is aligned with the norms of the communities. Thus, civic education functions as preparation for young people how to be good citizens. But this process also is a lifelong process that involves understanding different social institutions. Hence the process of becoming a good citizen of the community is also a continuous process."* – Instructor A

> *"Civic education is a process where an individual affects its beliefs, attitudes and values in relation to his involvement as a member of the community."* – Instructor C

3.2.2 Active members of their community

By attempting to balance the unity and diversity of peoples and cultures around the world, citizenship education promotes a global dimension to education (Halvorsen and Wilson, 2010). In addition, Schugurensky, (2011) believed that citizenship education encompasses all educational programs and initiatives whose primary goal is to prepare individuals to become citizens. Participants in the interview said:

> *"Civic and citizenship education teaches students to understand what a democratic society is, and what are the institutions that plays a vital role within it, this gives the students skills to effectively engage in social, economic and political issues of a society."* – Instructor B

> *"Citizenship education is a study of understanding concepts, be aware of, participate in and contribute for the betterment of his society"* – Instructor C

> *"For me, civic and citizenship education teaches people how to be responsible members of their society. It helps individuals understand their rights, as well as their obligations towards their community and country."* – Instructor D

The study's findings revealed that civic and citizenship education is an important tool for instilling the democratic values required by individuals to become the ideal citizen who is active and participative in the democratic process.

3.3 *Participants' Perceived Values of a Good Citizen*

The discussion on the third research problem, the perceived values of a good citizen, the research study analyzed two (2) themes, namely, democratic values and professional values.

3.3.1 Democratic Values

The most important identifier of a good citizen is a law-abiding citizen (Mellor and Kennedy, 2003), and good citizens possessed democratic values. Murtaza and Akber (2020) enumerated the categories of democratic values that an individual must possessed; equality and equal opportunities, honesty, justice, respect to freedom of life, respect for diversity of peoples, respect for human dignity, freedom of expression, tolerance, cooperation, responsibility, sensibility, self-esteem, self-respect, safe and peace, solving individual conflicts in a peaceful way, supremacy of law and development. In the interview with the participants, they stated:

> "*The following are values a good citizen must have: Community concern and awareness, sense of responsibility, the pursuit of truth, being morally upright, promotion of the common good to all, and, concern and responsibility for the environment"* – Instructor A

> *"He is responsible, principled and an advocate human equality, respect human rights and cultural diversity and promote peace and unity among people."* – Instructor C

> *"A good citizen is characterized by responsibility and cooperation, which I believe are essential values for individuals to be considered as such. Responsibility entails understanding and fulfilling one's obligations within society to prevent dysfunction. By acting in accordance with their roles, citizens contribute to the smooth functioning of the community."* – Instructor D

3.3.2 Professional Values

Professional values refer to the values acquired from the different organizations and workplaces in the society. Humans develop a set of values from the practice of his or her profession. Professional values may differ, but it actualizes the mission and responsibility of each person in the society (Del-Castillo, 2013). Examples of these Filipino professional values are social acceptance, pakikisama, amor propio, economic security, and pagmamay-ari which are discovered, learned, and practice while an individual finds meaning in the workplace. In the interview, one participant mentioned that:

> "*Value that adheres to one's culture to foster harmonious environment to its citizens, in Philippine context, Pakikisama and Pagiging Makatao is really important"* – Instructor B

The findings of study also narrowed down to the values that is expected to Filipino citizen must possessed in a democratic country.

3.4 *Courses or Topics Taught to Instill Civic Skills*

The discussion on the fourth research problem is the courses or topics taught to instill civic skills, the research study analyzed only one (1) theme, the social sciences.

3.4.1 Social Sciences

Social science is a systematized body of knowledge about human beings and society. It is a discipline in which it emphasized on the application of scientific methods and rigorous standards of evidence to the study of the humanity and the social world. Social science, therefore, is the field of science concerned with the studies of the social life of human groups and individuals. Knowledge of Social Sciences can help us improve our societies and we study on (1) how people put their societies together; (2) the impacts of their decisions about their societies; and (3) how societies should be put together. Participants stated on their interview that courses or topics that instill civic skills were:

> "*The good foundation for teaching civic education would be history, sociology, and political science. Students must t first understands the inner working of society and how people interact. In this way, students would easily develop their skills as they have the theoretical foundation of civic skills."* – Instructor A

> "*Social Work, Human Rights, and Gender Studies"* – Instructor B

> "*Primary Levels: Good Manners and Right Conduct; Basic Nationalism and Patriotism*
> *Secondary Levels: Civics and Culture; Citizens Army Training*
> *Tertiary Levels: Global Citizenship and Peace Education"* – Instructor C

> "*To instill civic skills, I think the following subjects, courses, or topics should be taught: Social studies or social sciences, government and politics, global citizenship or the contemporary world." – Instructor D*

The participants' answers supported the claim of Guilfoile et. al., (2014) that providing instructions in government, history, law, and democracy were effective in instilling civic skills.

It is also important to mention that controversial issues are excellent topics to be taught to develop civic skills. Ersoy (2013) revealed in his study that teaching about controversial issues in Social Studies programs is therefore vital for enhancing teachers' knowledge of their own capacities to teach about citizenship concerns, as well as, their ability to teach about controversial matters in their classrooms.

3.5 *Teaching practices for effective civic learning*

The discussion on the fifth research problem, the teaching practices for effective civic learning, the research study analyzed two (2) themes, namely, national values and professional values.

3.5.1 Experiential Learning

As mentioned by Guilfoile et. al., (2014), there were six (6) proven practices for effective civic learning. Experiential learning and offering extracurricular activities that allow young people to become involved in their schools or communities is one of these practices. As mentioned by the participants:

> *"I think immersion is the most effective teaching strategy to use in teaching civic skills. After all, the main reason why we teach civics is for students to use it in their respective communities and be good citizens. Doing immersion as part of experiential learning would strengthen the theoretical concepts that were thought in the classroom. Moreover, immersion would give them learning opportunities in using the theoretical concept in real-life scenarios." – Instructor A*

> *"Application; Experiential Learning – It is best for students to appreciate the lesson, longer retention and instilling in their daily lives if they have seen or experienced the lesson or situation that was taught." – Instructor C*

> *"Based on my teaching experience, the best teaching practices or strategies for effective civic learning are active learning, collaborative learning, and inquiry-based learning. By implementing these teaching practices and strategies, we, teachers can create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that fosters effective civic learning." – Instructor D*

3.5.2 Voter Education

Voter education refers to educating voters on the fundamentals of taking part in elections (Polyas.com, n.d.). Doing voter's education and encouraging student to participate in simulations of democratic processes and procedures is another effective practice mentioned by Guilfoile et al., (2014). One participant said:

> *"Take advantage of the events, especially during elections to raise awareness on voter registration and informed decisions on voting."* – Instructor B

5. DISCUSSION

The primary findings of this research indicate that Social Studies teachers at Mabalacat City College conceptualize democracy both as a structural system of government and as a normative political ideology. Participants viewed civic and citizenship education as a vital, lifelong process aimed at preparing students to be active, responsible members of their communities. These findings support the study's underlying premise that teachers' perspectives are shaped by a complex interplay of internal reflections and external institutional contexts, as suggested by the Civic Education Teachers' Knowledge Framework. When contextualized within the broader academic landscape, the participants' definitions of democracy as a government of the many align closely with traditional Philippine political scholarship. Furthermore, the emphasis on values such as Pakikisama and Pagiging Makatao mirrors established literature on the role of professional and cultural values in the Philippine workplace. However, a significant discrepancy was noted: while existing literature strongly advocates for the discussion of controversial issues to develop civic skills, no participants explicitly mentioned this strategy during their interviews. This highlights a potential gap between theoretical best practices and actual classroom implementation in local colleges.

This structural and ideological dualism directly ties back to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education, specifically Target 4.7, which promotes global citizenship and human rights education. When educators struggle to bridge the gap between structural theory and lived democratic practice, Target 4.7 is compromised. This mirrors local scholarship within the Philippine archipelago; as noted by Agbarabar (2021) and Valdez (2022), civic education in local domains often suffers from a heavy reliance on macro-political concepts rather than localized community frameworks. By anchoring these concepts within the Civic Education Teachers' Knowledge Framework, this study proves that local college faculty require contextualized professional interventions to successfully convert global SDG indicators into actionable, values-driven localized teaching strategies.

The implications of these findings suggest that the quality of civic education is deeply tied to the alignment of a teacher's field of specialization. Practically, the study demonstrates that without specialized training in Social Studies education, the transition from theoretical democratic concepts to experiential classroom learning may be hindered. This bridges the

gap between empirical data and policy by suggesting that local government-funded institutions must prioritize faculty development and specialized loading to ensure that civic instruction moves beyond rote memorization toward meaningful engagement.

This study is subject to certain limitations, particularly regarding the sample size and setting. With only four full-time faculty members from a single local college, the generalizability of these findings to larger university systems or different geographical regions may be limited. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data through interviews introduces potential response bias, as participants might provide answers that align with institutional expectations rather than their daily classroom realities.

For future inquiry, research should be expanded to include other domains of the Teachers' Knowledge Framework, such as teachers' specific knowledge of the civic curriculum and their students' own understandings of citizenship. Further studies could also explore the specific correlates between a teacher's educational attainment and their students' levels of civic engagement. Ultimately, this research underscores that the status of civic education in local colleges requires serious attention; only through the alignment of specialization and continuous pedagogical training can teachers effectively foster the democratic minds and attitudes necessary for the next generation of Filipino citizens.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study explored the critical intersection of teacher perspective and civic instruction, specifically addressing how Social Studies teachers at a local college navigate their roles within the Philippine higher education landscape. The findings provide a definitive answer to the primary research question: while teachers possess a robust conceptual understanding of democracy as both a governing structure and a moral ideology, their pedagogical execution is significantly influenced by the complex interplay of their professional specialization and institutional context. By mapping these views against a validated theoretical framework, the research successfully identified the variables—ranging from internal professional reflection to external curricular constraints—that dictate the current quality of civic instruction.

The implications of this work offer a vital contribution to the existing body of knowledge regarding Social Studies education in the local government-funded college setting. Academically, the study highlights a specialization gap, demonstrating that the goal of fostering active citizenship is often hampered when instructors lack a specific doctoral or foundational background in Social Studies education. For administrators and practitioners, the research establishes the practical necessity of aligning faculty expertise with multidisciplinary mandates and underscores the urgent need for pedagogical training that moves beyond rote theory into experiential and controversial-issue-based learning.

To ensure the continued vitality of civic instruction based on this evidence, several specific steps are necessary for future action. Institutions must prioritize the alignment of

faculty specialization, ensuring that those teaching Social Sciences possess the requisite academic background to provide deep pedagogical insights. Furthermore, there is a clear need for professional development that empowers teachers to integrate the discussion of controversial social and political issues, a strategy currently underutilized in the classroom. Finally, future inquiry should expand to include the student perspective, seeking to determine how these teacher-led strategies directly correlate with the development of student civic competence and understanding. Ultimately, this study serves as an authoritative call to action for local colleges to reorient their approach to teacher preparation, ensuring that civic education serves as a practical and powerful catalyst for a more engaged and democratic citizenry.

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ARTICLE

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SUSTAINABILITY OF ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN OPEN AND DISTANCE E-LEARNING: LESOTHO'S HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Abstract

Open and Distance e-Learning (ODeL) has been recognised for its potential to bridge educational gaps in higher education. However, the digital divide in Lesotho and other sub-Saharan African countries seemingly pose a threat to sustainable online learning. In this context, the digital divide encompasses disparities in access to devices and connectivity, digital literacy, and the ability to benefit meaningfully from technology use. Presumably, despite the growing adoption of online teaching and learning (OTL) globally and in Lesotho, its sustainability remains uncertain due to infrastructural limitations, affordability challenges, digital literacy gaps, and inconsistent access to digital learning platforms. Guided by the Community of Practice (CoP) theory, this article aimed to explore the sustainability of online teaching and learning in ODeL programmes at one higher education institution (HEI) in Lesotho through a qualitative case study design. Thematic analysis of data generated from students, instructors, and administrators revealed key challenges, including financial constraints, inadequate digital training for students and academics, and infrastructural gaps as barriers to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) integration.

Notwithstanding these challenges, online platforms such as WhatsApp and email accessed via smartphones and computers facilitated meaningful communication and collaboration. The article discovered that while OTL is partially sustainable, addressing the digital divide through subsidised data, structured digital skills training, and streamlined administrative processes is essential. The article concludes that context-sensitive and inclusive approaches

are key to sustaining OTL in resource-constrained environments and to building resilient learning communities.

Keywords
Blended Learning, Higher Education, Learning Communities, Online learning, Open and Distance e-Learning, Sustainability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Open and Distance e-Learning (ODeL) has become a transformative approach in higher education, particularly in regions where traditional learning models are constrained by economic, infrastructural and geographic challenges. Aluko et al. (2022) describe ODeL as an educational approach that facilitates engagement of students with content and instructors with limited constraints of physical space and time. Central to the characteristics of ODeL is the combination of open learning principles, distance education methodologies, and electronic learning technologies for flexibility and access to learner-centred education (Mokenela, 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, where many higher education institutions (HEIs) struggle with overcrowding, limited resources, and accessibility issues, ODeL offers a viable alternative to conventional in-person learning (Omanyo & Ndiege, 2024).

ODeL comprises eLearning, which refers to the use of any digital device for delivery or access of content in teaching and learning "without any reference to a network or connectivity" (Lesotho Council on Higher Education 2021, p.iii). Furthermore, in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), central to the concept of ODeL and eLearning is Online Teaching and Learning (OTL), which sets the tone for this article. Different from eLearning, OTL has been perceived as the use of the Internet for synchronous and/or asynchronous content delivery and feedback (Mokenela, 2020; Pop, 2016). This suggests that, by leveraging digital platforms, OTL enables students to access educational resources remotely, reducing the need for physical presence and offering greater flexibility for students with diverse needs (Chanda & Phiri, 2023).

Notwithstanding the significant growth of ODeL and adoption of OTL globally, sustainability of OTL in higher education is a growing area of research, with scholars examining the role of digital education in long-term institutional resilience (Ionescu et al., 2020; Mian et al., 2020; Nagolia & Pagliari, 2016). Tilbury (2017) defines sustainability as the ability of a system to endure and remain effective over time. Although the concept of sustainability has been clouded with nebulousness (Joseph et al. 2022), its broadest view as a state that allows continued existence of human life remains relevant. In this regard, sustenance for human life encompasses economic, environmental, and social shocks, referred to also as resilience, in the short term and in the long run (Solow, 1991). Furthermore,

Joseph (2022, p.4) posits that "sustainability, in its broad sense, has emerged as an approach to ensure long-term sustenance of human life in the context of universal mega-challenges such as changing climates, populations, technology and resources".

Mutisya and Makokha (2016) emphasise that sustaining e-learning in African universities requires overcoming challenges related to ICT infrastructure, digital literacy, and institutional readiness. Specific to OTL, sustainability denotes creating systems that not only work in the short-term but can adapt to evolving needs of students and instructors (Crawford et al., 2020). This perception is particularly relevant to the Lesotho higher education context, where challenges such as digital literacy gaps, affordability constraints, and infrastructural limitations continue to hinder the effective use of online learning (Mokenela, 2020). Ensuring sustainability in this context requires a systematic and continuous improvement of key interrelated systems including digital tools, Internet infrastructure, pedagogical approaches, and the competencies of both faculty and students. It involves maintaining both quality and access over time while addressing challenges such as resources, infrastructure, and social factors that influence educational outcomes (Tilbury, 2017). In this article, therefore, sustainability of OTL in ODeL institutions depends on continually improving digital tools, infrastructure, pedagogy, and competencies of faculty and students to ensure long-term effectiveness and inclusivity.

The growing adoption of OTL in developed economies such as the USA, Japan, and the UK highlights its ability to provide flexible, accessible, and cost-effective educational opportunities. For instance, in the United States, nearly 6 million students were enrolled in at least one online course by the fall of 2015, illustrating the increasing preference for online learning (Allen & Seaman, 2016). This latter assertion demonstrates that OTL is not only a viable option in developing regions but also a growing and preferred mode of education globally, as it enables students to learn beyond traditional time and location constraints.

While OTL in the ODeL context has shown significant growth in developed nations, its impact in developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, has also been acknowledged. In countries such as Kenya and South Africa, ODeL has been pivotal in overcoming educational barriers such as limited access to traditional learning spaces, inadequate infrastructure, and social inequalities. For instance, Kenya's e-Learning project in primary schools has equipped over 21,000 schools with digital devices and internet access, positively influencing learning outcomes (Otieno et.al, 2018). Similarly, in South Africa, institutions such as the University of South Africa (UNISA) have leveraged OTL to expand higher education access, particularly among underserved populations (Leta & Cloete, 2019). These developments indicate that while the challenges may differ across regions, applicability of OTL has been evidenced in developed and developing countries.

In Lesotho, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid transition to OTL. HEIs, including the National University of Lesotho (NUL), adopted the use of platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and a Learning Management System (LMS) named 'Thuto,' which was launched in 2010, to facilitate teaching, learning, and assessment processes (Ayanwale et al.,

2022). However, the sustainability of these initiatives remains uncertain due to infrastructural limitations, financial constraints and gaps in digital literacy. Makumane (2023) emphasises that the effectiveness of online learning relies on the accessibility of LMSs and communication tools, yet many students and instructors in Lesotho struggle with affordability and connectivity issues. Despite these challenges, digital technologies hold great potential to enhance education systems in Lesotho. Ayanwale et al. (2022) emphasise that the effectiveness of e-learning tools in Lesotho HEIs depends on factors such as accessibility, instructor and student training and user-friendliness. Additionally, Mokenela (2020) suggests that a blended learning approach incorporating face-to-face, print-based, and online instruction could offer a more sustainable model in the Lesotho context.

Despite these localized initiatives, a significant gap remains in how HEIs transition from emergency, short-term online delivery to long-term operational sustainability. While existing research frequently documents broad infrastructure limitations and immediate user frustrations (Makumane, 2023), there is a critical lack of empirical clarity regarding how specific institutional challenges and hidden instructional opportunities interact within daily teaching and learning processes. This gap creates a severe operational vulnerability; without a granular understanding of how instructors and students navigate online systems over time, strategic efforts to improve digital accessibility, pedagogical effectiveness, and stakeholder satisfaction may remain futile. Consequently, this systematic ambiguity directly threatens the long-term viability and inclusivity of digital education frameworks.

Chanda and Phiri (2023) emphasise that while e-learning contributes to sustainability by increasing accessibility and reducing infrastructural burdens, the lack of empirical studies focusing on its long-term viability in African HEIs highlights a significant gap. This article, therefore, aims to explore the sustainability of OTL in ODeL programmes at one HEI in Lesotho. The key questions guiding this inquiry were:

1. How sustainable are online teaching and learning tools used by students and instructors in ODeL programmes in one HEI in Lesotho?
2. What challenges and enablers affect the sustainability of online teaching and learning in ODeL programmes at the selected HEI?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Open and Distance e-Learning (ODeL) has ostensibly played a transformative role in expanding access to education in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in overcoming geographical and economic barriers (Mokenela, 2020). Institutions such as the UNISA have successfully implemented ODeL to offer inclusive and flexible learning opportunities for underserved populations (Leta & Cloete, 2019), demonstrating the potential of ODeL to bridge educational inequalities across the sub-Saharan region (Omanyo & Ndiege, 2024). Among the widely acknowledged benefits are enhanced student collaboration, increased

access to educational resources, reduced social isolation, and improved interaction among students, instructors, and digital content (Ionescu et al., 2020).

Critical to the sustainability of OTL in ODeL are institutional factors such as accessibility of resources, adequate infrastructure, pedagogical strategies, digital literacy skills, and robust support systems for students and staff (Angolia & Pagliari, 2020; Mokenela, 2020). Ionescu et al. (2020) further emphasise that the effectiveness of OTL is influenced by the experiences of both instructors and students in using digital technologies. A sustainable OTL system, therefore, requires an enabling environment that fosters positive learning experiences, multicultural inclusivity, consistent feedback, and the appropriate use of educational technologies (Mokenela, 2020). A supportive policy environment, investment in digital infrastructure, and comprehensive instructor training have been identified as key enablers of sustainable OTL implementation (Ayanwale et al., 2022; Letsae et al., 2024). These factors are critical in enhancing the long-term viability of OTL in Lesotho's HEIs.

In addition, the availability of technological resources also plays a vital role. The use of accessible tools such as WhatsApp and email has been identified as a practical way to complement formal online learning, particularly in resource-constrained contexts (Ayanwale et al., 2022; Mokenela, 2020). These low-bandwidth platforms help make online learning more inclusive and adaptable. Blended learning approaches have also been acknowledged as promising for enhancing the sustainability of OTL in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in settings with infrastructural limitations (Makumane et al., 2023).

Mokenela (2020) highlights how blended learning promotes critical OTL success factors such as student engagement, motivation, and a sense of community. Hybrid models that combine digital tools with face-to-face interactions are seen as particularly effective in environments where connectivity and access remain challenges. As Omanyo and Ndiege (2024) argue, blending digital tools with traditional classroom interactions can overcome challenges of connectivity and accessibility, thereby ensuring sustainable OTL in ODeL implementation. Thus, hybrid learning models are seemingly key to the long-term success and sustainability of OTL in ODeL in resource-constrained regions.

Notwithstanding the enablers of sustainable OTL implementation outlined above, there are challenges that ostensibly threaten long-term sustenance of the use of digital spaces. These include limited digital literacy, technological, infrastructural, and financial barriers, inter alia. According to Makumane (2023), there is lack of digital literacy among both students and instructors and this hinders effective use of OTL platforms. For instance, in Lesotho, limited exposure to digital tools and inadequate ICT training have been identified as barriers to online learning adoption (Mokenela, 2020). Notably, digital literacy extends beyond device access as it involves equipping users with the competencies necessary to effectively participate in OTL (Chimbunde & Jakachira, 2024). Addressing these skill-based gaps is therefore critical to ensuring the sustainability of OTL in ODeL programmes in Lesotho. A major underlying issue is the digital divide, which extends beyond connectivity and device ownership. van Deursen and van Dijk (2019) conceptualise it across four dimensions:

motivation, access (inequitable availability of devices and internet), skills (variations in digital competencies), and usage (differences in the ability to derive educational benefits from technology use).

In Lesotho, all four dimensions are prevalent, with students and instructors frequently facing lack of motivation to use technological tools due to unaffordable data costs, inadequate access to digital devices, and limited digital proficiency, particularly in rural areas. This layered understanding makes it clear that access alone is insufficient. Achieving sustainable OTL requires integrated, context-sensitive strategies that simultaneously address infrastructure, skill development, and meaningful digital engagement.

This reality is echoed by several local studies that highlight persistent structural and pedagogical challenges within HEIs in Lesotho. Mokenela (2020) and Mashinini (2020) report that many university instructors lack adequate training and intrinsic motivation to effectively adopt digital teaching methods, often due to limited institutional support, scarce incentives, and a lack of clearly defined digital teaching policies. Makumane et al. (2023) and Makumane (2023) further emphasise that although some strides have been made in expanding ICT infrastructure within HEIs, disparities in access between urban-based institutions and satellite campuses particularly those serving rural populations continue to disadvantage many students and lecturers. Makafane & Chere-Masupha (2021) also observe that low digital literacy levels among students, compounded by high data costs and unreliable connectivity, hinder meaningful participation in online learning environments.

These findings collectively suggest that addressing the digital divide in HEIs requires more than infrastructure, it demands a holistic and context-sensitive approach that fosters digital skills development, sustained motivation, and institutional commitment to equitable digital transformation. Without such integrated efforts, sustainable OTL implementation in Lesotho's higher education sector may remain elusive. With regard to financial constraints, Maphosa (2021) identifies the high cost of data as a significant obstacle for students in Lesotho, making OTL unaffordable for many. This view was earlier noted by Mashinini (2020) and Henaku (2020), who point out that the high cost of internet data continues to limit sustained participation in OTL across the region. Mfaume (2019) also emphasises that these financial challenges extend to other countries, such as Tanzania, where teachers face difficulties affording internet services necessary for delivering online content.

In addition to financial barriers, Dube (2020) and Letsae et al. (2024) reveal that many students in Lesotho lack access to essential digital devices, further hindering their ability to engage with OTL platforms. Furthermore, Oketch-Oboth (2021) and Chimbunde and Jakachira (2024) underline the impact of infrastructural constraints, such as unreliable electricity and poor internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas, which exacerbate the accessibility challenges of online education in sub-Saharan Africa. These findings from various scholars underscore the need for targeted interventions to address these barriers and support the successful implementation of OTL in ODeL in Lesotho HEIs. The next section attempts to theorise sustainability of OTL in ODeL.

2.1 Theorising sustainability of online teaching and learning in ODeL

This article is undergirded by the Community of Practice (CoP) theory, which was developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). Lave and Wenger (1991) developed this theory in an attempt to address the social dynamics of learning. In other words, this theory purports that learning is a social process that is created overtime through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

According to Busch-Jensen (2014), peripherality and participation denote location and identity in the social world, while legitimation alludes to characteristic ways in which individuals belong to communities within which they operate. In the words, learning is believed to take place through individuals' participation in multiple social practices with an idealised eventuality of attaining a specified outcome (Farnsworth, Kleanthous and Wenger-Trayner, 2016). Thus, CoP in the educational context is a social theory that supports negotiating competence over a given time through mutual engagement and through sustainability enablers that include accessibility to resources, infrastructure and pedagogical strategies to ensure long-term effectiveness and inclusivity. The key principles of this theory are: the domain (what gives a group its identity and distinguishes it from other groups; the community (a group of people for whom the domain is relevant, including the quality of the relationships among members); and the practice (the body of knowledge, methods, tools, inter alia, that members share and use together) (Smith, Hayes and Shea, 2017).

This theory was deemed appropriate for this article as it provides a compelling lens through which to examine social dynamics of learning in ODeL environments. In the context of this study, CoP suggests that learning is a process of engagement and participation in a community of practice, wherein students, instructors and administrators interact using a shared legitimate peripheral learning environment to attain a specified educational goal (Busch-Jensen, 2014). Put differently, this theory underscores the importance of accessibility, infrastructure, both physical but especially digital, and adaptive pedagogical strategies that foster collaboration, social interaction and shared experiences in the construction of knowledge, especially in online spaces.

This line of thought is substantiated by Smith, Hayes and Shea (2017), who assert that technologies, either asynchronous and/or synchronous, help facilitate learner engagement in generating communal knowledge and resources that form their social practice and thus ostensibly promote sustainability of OTL in ODeL. Therefore, applying CoP theory to the ODeL context in Lesotho, this article explores how students and instructors create a virtual community despite the challenges presented by seemingly limited resources through the domain, the community, and the practice established. Wenger (1998) argues that communities of practice are crucial in fostering social learning and engagement, especially in virtual settings. This article is thus premised on the contention that in the case of ODeL,

where physical interactions are existing though minimal, creating opportunities for online collaboration becomes essential to building a sustainable learning community of practice.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

A case study research design was adopted in this qualitative study which investigated participants' experiences to determine sustainability of OTL in ODeL. Case studies can facilitate the essential comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences in exploring intricate social issues such as online teaching and learning (de Araujo, 2020). In this context, a case study was suitable in order to enhance deeper understanding of experiences of the participants in relation to the sustainability of OTL in ODeL, and to guide purposeful sampling of individuals who could provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights.

A sample is a subset of the population used to draw conclusions about the entire group and should be chosen in a manner that ensures it accurately represents the population, meaning the sample's characteristics should closely mirror those of the population (Gravetter and Forzano, 2019). A sample of participants was selected from a population comprising students enrolled in three Adult Education programmes at different levels: Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, and Masters (139), as well as instructors (40), Programme coordinators (3), Head of the Adult Education (1) and Information and Technology (IT) personnel (1). In order to select the required information-rich sample to provide relevant insights to the objectives of the article (McMillan & Schumacher, 2018), purposive sampling technique was used. The technique was suitable to this article in that it allowed a focused exploration of specific experiences rather than broad generalisations across populations (McMillan & Schumacher, 2018; Patton, 2018).

The criteria for purposive sampling were as follows: a student registered in the Diploma, Degree, or Masters in Adult Education programmes in 2023/2024 with a minimum online learning experience of two years; a part-time and full-time instructor as well as staff members, such as Programme coordinators, head of department, and IT specialist involved in these programmes were included. Participant accessibility and willingness to participate also informed the recruitment process. The participant categories, population and sample distribution are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Population and Sample Distribution

Participant Category	population	sample
Students	139	12
Instructors	40	3
Programme Coordinators	3	2
Head of Department	1	1
IT Personnel	1	1

Source: Author's compilation based on fields participants (2026).

Table 1 shows that participants were selected based on their direct involvement and experience with OTL in the institution.

3.2. Data generation methods

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews were employed in generating data on the sustainability of OTL in an ODeL context. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) note, both FGDs and semi-structured interviews allow for a deep exploration of the phenomenon at hand, and systematic data generation that enhance the principles of trustworthiness, which, according to Lincoln and Guba (2017), are credibility (truth value), dependability (consistency), transferability (applicability) and conformability (neutrality). The researchers obtained permission to conduct the study from the Registrar of the institution before data generation commenced. Semi-structured interviews and FGDs were scheduled according to the participants' availability and convenience in order to maximise generation of authentic data and to ensure inclusivity and accessibility.

A total of three FGDs were conducted, each group consisted of 4 students from various academic levels: diploma, bachelors, and masters. These groups were formed to ensure a balanced and diverse representation of experiences across all levels of the study. Each FGD lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. FGDs, through the use of pre-prepared guiding questions, were selected for their capacity to foster interactive dialogue, allowing participants to clarify and build upon one another's perspectives. This method was deemed appropriate as it supports the development and sustainability of learning communities within innovative open education environments.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 3 instructors and 4 key administrative personnel involved in the implementation and support of online teaching and learning in the ODeL programmes. Each interview, lasting between 20 and 30 minutes, was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol specifically designed to align with the participants' professional roles and responsibilities. Ethical procedures were strictly observed. All participants were fully informed about the purpose of the article, the intended use of the data, guarantee of anonymity through the use of pseudonyms, and their right to voluntarily withdraw at any stage. For telephone interviews, verbal consent was obtained and recorded.

All interviews were audio-recorded using a smartphone, and supplementary field notes were taken to capture key insights and contextual observations. This integration of two rigorous data generation methods enhanced understanding of the experiences of the participants in relation to sustainable practices in ODeL. It also reinforced the role of communities of learning and practice in fostering resilient, inclusive educational systems that support long-term social and economic development.

4. FINDINGS

The findings from the perspectives of instructors, administrators, and students regarding their experiences with OTL in ODeL programmes are organized into themes that reflect key aspects of sustaining learning communities. This thematic approach aligns with Creswell and Cresswell's (2018) assertion that qualitative research relies on producing textual data, which is then analysed for emerging patterns and themes.

4.1 Theme 1: Accessibility of digital learning tools to students and instructors

The study found that students had access to digital tools necessary for engaging in online learning, although the quality and reliability of these tools varied. For instance, ***FG2 -A***, stated as follows: *"I use my smart tab and a laptop for online learning."* ***FG1 -D***, *"I use my smartphone to access course materials and communicate with my lecturers, but sometimes the screen size makes it difficult to read long documents."* Similarly, the instructors and staff members indicated access to multiple devices, including smartphones, laptops, tablets and desktops. The staff members contributed the following statements:

> ***Erica***: *"I have a smartphone and I also have access to my office desktop."*
> ***Nikitta:*** *"I have a laptop and a tablet that I use for my online lessons."*

These findings suggest that participants had access to multiple digital tools that supported participation in OTL, through accessibility and usability challenges remained evident among some participants.

4.2 Theme 2: Competencies of students and instructors in online teaching and learning

The administrators indicated that the digital literacy level of some students was low. This was demonstrated by students who often needed help navigating platforms before they could participate in online activities. ***Jenna*** mentioned that, *"Some students are not familiar with the e-learning platform, so we have to spend extra time guiding them before they can fully participate in online classes."* ***Elizabeth*** also indicated that; *"Digital literacy is relatively low in*

Lesotho. Even if the platforms are user-friendly, some users, both students and instructors are not adequately skilled to use them." This indicates that while access to digital tools may be available, the ability to use them competently remains a significant barrier for students. The need for constant support suggests gaps in students' digital skills, which are critical for the success of online education. These findings are supported by Makumane (2023) and Ayanwale et al. (2022), who emphasize that effective participation in online learning environments requires more than access, it requires digital competence. Makumane (2023) highlights that in the context of Lesotho, limited exposure to digital tools and inadequate ICT training hinders students' ability to navigate online platforms, while Ayanwale et al. (2022) recommend the integration of structured digital skills training to bridge this gap. Furthermore, Omanyo and Ndiege (2024) argue that for sustainable OTL, institutions must not only focus on affordability and access, but also on equipping users with the skills necessary to engage meaningfully with digital platforms. Jenna and Elizabeth's observation confirm this, showing that without foundational digital competencies, access alone cannot ensure active participation or success in ODeL.

4.3 *Theme 3: The effectiveness of OTL*

The effectiveness of OTL was widely acknowledged by both students and instructors. From the students' perspective, online learning was seen as a convenient means of maintaining academic engagement, especially in remote settings. ***FG1-D*** shared: "*They are really helpful because they allow me to do all the given tasks… I am able to complete the assignment from home."* This finding aligns with Hodges et al. (2020), who highlighted that online learning provides flexible access to resources and learning materials, offering opportunities for students to engage with content independently, especially in situations where face-to-face education is not feasible. Additionally, some students appreciated the role of online learning in fostering academic independence and self-regulation. ***FG2-A*** noted: "*Online learning plays a significant role in my successful learning. It provides quick access to resources…and enables collaborative learning."* This view supports Dube's (2020) findings, which emphasise the positive impact of online learning on student autonomy and the development of self-regulated learning skills. By allowing students to access content at their own pace, online platforms facilitate a deeper engagement with material, enabling learners to manage their time and learning strategies effectively. Peer interaction also played a vital role in enhancing the learning experience. ***FG1-A*** shared: "*We created a WhatsApp group where we share knowledge amongst ourselves and discuss things that we don't understand with our facilitators.* "This resonates with Dube (2020), who stressed the importance of peer collaboration in virtual learning environments. Collaboration fosters a sense of community, which is critical for student engagement and learning in online contexts.

Facilitators also affirmed the effectiveness of online teaching, particularly through the use of digital tools. For instance, **Erica** mentioned: "*I am able to prepare my lessons, share*

them, mark assignments there and not printing them." This perspective aligns with Bozkurt and Sharma (2020), who highlighted the benefits of online platforms in allowing educators to streamline their workflows, making lesson planning, resource sharing, and assessment more efficient. Similarly, ***Stefan*** praised the use of tools such as interactive whiteboards and breakout rooms for replicating in-person learning experiences: *"The online platforms I use have been instrumental in helping me conduct successful lessons… breakout rooms, interactive whiteboards, and live instruction help simulate in-person experiences."* This aligns with Güler et al. (2022), who emphasised the importance of creating an engaging online presence that mirrors the face-to-face classroom environment, promoting active student participation and collaboration.

However, challenges such as disappearing tools and navigation difficulties were reported by student participants. For example, ***FG1-C*** expressed: *"Helpful tools such as Turnitin and Thuto disappear over time… I used Turnitin once in the first semester, then I could no longer access it."* This concern reflects Bates (2019), who argued that technical barriers and the reliability of online platforms can impede the successful implementation of OTL, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

Administrators also provided a critical view, highlighting the limitations of online sessions in certain contexts. For example, ***Jenna*** stressed: *"At some point, the institution tried two out of five sessions online, but the online sessions were not effective, so, we went back to five face-to-face sessions."* This observation aligns with Li et al. (2023) who suggested that while online learning has potential, it is not always suitable for every type of content or learner. Hybrid models, such as blending online and face-to-face sessions, might be more effective in certain contexts.

4.4 Theme 4: Effective Communication

Effective communication emerged as a cornerstone of online teaching and learning. Both students and instructors cited tools such as WhatsApp and email as essential for exchanging information, submitting assignments, and receiving timely feedback. As **FG*1-C*** shared: *"WhatsApp makes it easy to share information and updates between us as students and a facilitator… We submit assignments and receive feedback through email."* This finding aligns with Güler et al. (2022), who emphasised the critical role of communication in sustaining engagement and collaboration in online learning. Effective communication tools ensure that students remain connected with instructors and peers, fostering a sense of community in the virtual classroom. Students further appreciated the privacy and immediacy that email provided for formal communication and feedback.***FG1-D*** remarked: *"Feedback is sometimes confidential… the lecturers send each one of the students their feedback through email."* This echoes Carrillo and Flores (2020), who highlighted the importance of asynchronous communication methods, such as email, for offering individualised feedback in a private,

reflective manner. The ability to engage in private, formal exchanges enables students to address personal academic concerns without the pressure of a public forum.

Instructors also valued the ability to provide timely and personalised feedback through digital platforms. ***Nikitta*** noted: *"I can leave comments on assignments directly in the LMS… students receive feedback almost instantly. I can also show them errors in real-time during class."* This aligns with Chaka and Govender (2021), who emphasised that providing real-time feedback enhances student learning by allowing immediate clarification of misunderstandings and reinforcing correct concepts. ***Tyler*** also highlighted their flexible approach to assignment submissions: *"Sometimes students struggle to submit through email, so they ask to send it via WhatsApp.* This flexibility reflects Bozkurt & Sharma (2020), who recommended adaptive teaching practices that cater to the diverse needs of students. By accommodating students' preferences, Tyler ensures that learning remains accessible and inclusive.

Overall, the findings reinforce the importance of effective communication in creating a responsive, inclusive and sustainable OTL environment. Whether through formal email, LMSs, or informal messaging tools such as WhatsApp, communication facilitates engagement, support, and academic success. This mirrors the findings of Omanyo and Ndiege (2024), who underscore that effective communication is vital for the success of OTL, especially in resource-constrained contexts.

4.5 *Theme 5: Sustaining Learner Engagement and Satisfaction through Communities of Practice in Online Education*

A recurring theme in the findings was that while learners appreciated the flexibility afforded by online education, they also expressed a strong longing for in-person interaction. ***FG 2- B*** noted, *"I enjoy the flexibility of online learning, but I miss face-to-face interaction with my classmates and lecturers."* This sentiment reflects a broader challenge in online and distance education: sustaining engagement in the absence of physical presence. According to Ayanwale et al. (2022), social presence is a key determinant of learner satisfaction in online environments. When students feel socially and emotionally connected to their peers and instructors, their level of engagement tends to increase, thereby enhancing their overall learning experience.

Instructors, too, expressed concern over the lack of active student participation in online discussions. ***Stefan*** remarked, "*Some students don't engage much in discussions, which makes teaching online feel isolating at times."* This aligns with Mokenela's (2020) study, which identified limited learner-instructor and learner-learner interaction as detrimental to the perceived quality of online education. The feeling of isolation reported by instructors underscores the necessity of adopting pedagogical approaches that actively foster interaction and collaborative engagement. In response to these challenges, institutional administrators highlighted the importance of balancing technological tools with human-

centered interaction. For instance, **Jenna,** emphasized: *"We need to balance technology with human interaction so that students feel part of a learning community."* This observation resonates with Oketch-Oboth (2021).,

These findings point to the potential of Communities of Practice (CoP) as a strategic framework for enhancing learner engagement and satisfaction in online education. CoP promote knowledge sharing, mutual support, and a sense of belonging among participants, elements that are especially crucial in technology-mediated learning environments. When online courses are intentionally designed to nurture social presence, collaboration, and shared learning experiences, they are more likely to lead to sustained student satisfaction and engagement.

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Accessibility of digital learning tools to students and instructors

The findings revealed that students and instructors had access to a range of digital learning tools that supported participation in OTL within the ODeL context. Access to smartphones, laptops, smart tabs, tablets, and office desktops demonstrates the growing integration of digital technologies in HEI in Lesotho. These findings suggest that digital learning tools contribute to improving access to educational resources and communication between students and instructors.

The findings align with Leta and Cloete (2019), who argue that ODeL has expanded access to higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa by reducing geographical and infrastructural barriers. Similarly, the findings support Omanyo and Ndiege (2024) assertion that digital technologies play an important role in enhancing accessibility and flexibility within online learning environments.

However, the findings also revealed challenges associated with usability and reliability of digital tools, particularly when using smartphones for accessing lengthy learning materials. This suggests that although digital devices support accessibility, unequal access to suitable devices and technological limitations may continue to affect effective participation in OTL. From the perspective of the CoP theory, access to digital learning tools is important in facilitating participation, interaction, and collaborative learning among students and instructors. Effective participation with online learning communities depends largely on reliable access to communication and learning technologies.

5.2 Digital literacy and competencies

The findings revealed that some students and instructors experienced difficulties navigating online platforms and participating effectively in online activities due to limited digital literacy skills. Although participants had access to digital tools, the ability to use these tools

completely remained a significant challenge affecting meaningful participation in OTL. This suggests that, access to technology alone is insufficient for sustaining effective online learning within ODeL contexts.

These findings align with Makumane (2023) on their observation that, limited exposure to digital technologies and inadequate ICT training hinder effective participation on online learning environment in Lesotho. Similarly, Ayanwale et al. (2022) argue that successful implementation of OTL depends not only on accessibility of digital tools, but also on user competency and confidence in using online learning platforms effectively.

The findings further imply that inadequate digital competencies may contribute to learner frustration, reduced participation, and dependence on continuous support from instructors and peers. In resource-constrained contexts, this may negatively affect the long-term sustainability of OTL programmes if structured digital literacy support is not provided.

From the perspective of the CoP, collaborative interaction and peer support observed among participants contributed positively to the development of digital competencies. Learning communities therefore, play an important role in helping students and instructors acquire practical technological skills necessary for meaningful participation on online learning environments.

5.3 *Communication and Learner Engagement*

The findings revealed that communication platforms and online interactions played an important role in supporting learner engagement within OTL environments. Participants indicated that communication through digital platforms enabled students and instructors to share information, receive academic support, and remain connected during online learning activities. This therefore, suggests that communication and interaction remain essential components of effective participation in ODeL programmes.

The findings further indicate that online communication platforms promoted collaboration and strengthened relationships between students and instructors despite physical distance. Participants valued opportunities for interaction and emphasised the importance of maintaining human interaction within online learning environments to promote a sense of belonging and active participation among learners.

These findings align with Omanyo and Ndiege (2024) argument that meaningful participation and interaction are important for sustaining online learning environments. Makumane (2023) also observed that collaborative engagement and continuous communication contribute positively to learner participation and support within digital learning contexts. The findings further imply that, limited interaction in online environments may contribute to feelings of isolation and reduced learner motivation. Sustainability in OTL therefore, depends not only on access to technology, but also on the ability of institutions and instructors to create supportive and interactive online learning communities.

From the perspective of CoP, participation, collaboration, and social interaction are central to meaningful learning. The findings therefore, support the view that communication and learner engagement strengthen participation within online learning communities and contribute positively to the sustainability of OTL in ODeL programmes.

5.4 Effectiveness of Online Teaching and Learning

The findings revealed mixed perceptions regarding the effectiveness of OTL among students and instructors. While some participants reviewed OTL as effective in improving flexibility, access to learning materials, and continuity of education, others indicated that challenges related to internet connectivity, limited interaction, and technological difficulties affected the quality of teaching and learning experiences. This suggests that the effectiveness of OTL depends largely on the availability of adequate technological and instructional support systems.

The findings further revealed that, OTL created opportunities for students and instructors to continue academic activities beyond traditional classroom settings. Participants appreciated the flexibility associated with online learning, particularly the ability to access learning materials and participate in academic activities from different locations. However, some participants expressed concerns regarding reduced face-to-face interaction and difficulties maintaining active learner participation in online environments.

These findings align with Leta and Cloete (2019) argument that, ODeL has expanded access to higher education by increasing flexibility and reducing geographical barriers to learning. Similarly, Omanyo and Ndiege (2024) maintain that digital learning technologies can enhance accessibility and continuity of education when supported by effective institutional systems and learner support mechanisms. The findings further imply that, the effectiveness of OTL extends beyond technological availability and includes the quality of learner engagement, communication, and institutional support systems, students may experience challenges that reduce meaningful participation and satisfaction within online learning environments.

Now, from the perspective of the CoP, meaningful learning occurs through active participation, collaboration, and interaction among members of the learning community. The findings therefore, suggest that the effectiveness of OTL is strengthened when online learning environments promote engagement, participation, and collaborative learning experiences among students and instructors.

5.5 Challenges affecting the sustainability of Online Teaching and Learning

The findings revealed that, several challenges continued to affect the sustainability of OTL within ODeL programmes. Participants identified poor internet access to suitable digital devices, and inconsistent participation in online activities as major barriers affecting effective

implementation of OTL. These findings suggest that infrastructural and economic challenges remain significant obstacles to sustainable online learning in the institution.

The findings further indicated that some students experienced difficulties participating consistently in online learning activities due to financial constraints and unreliable network services. Instructors also expressed concerns regarding limited learner participation, delayed communication, and difficulties monitoring student engagement in online environments. This implies that, sustainability of OTL depends not only on technical availability, but also on continuous institutional, financial, and technical support for both students and instructors.

These findings align with Makumane (2023) observed that, inadequate ICT infrastructure and limited technological support continue to affect effective participation in online learning environments in Lesotho. Omanyo and Ndiege (2024), also argue that, sustainable implementation of OTL requires reliable digital infrastructure, affordability of internet services, and adequate institutional support systems.

These findings further suggest that, persistent technological and economic barriers may widen inequalities among learners, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds or remote areas with limited digital access. Without adequate intervention, these challenges may negatively affect learner participation, engagement, and long-term sustainability of OTL programmes.

From the perspective of the CoP, effective participation and collaborative learning depend on active engagement and continuous interaction among members of the learning community. Challenges that limit access, communication, and participation may therefore, weaken collaborative learning processes and reduce the effectiveness and sustainability of OTL within ODeL programmes.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to explore sustainability of OTL in ODeL in one HEI in Lesotho. The article sought to establish how sustainable the OTL tools were in fostering accessibility to resources, infrastructure and effective pedagogical strategies to ensure long-term effectiveness and inclusivity. The findings of the study demonstrate that participants had access to digital tools that allowed them to participate in OTL. Furthermore, communication platforms such as WhatsApp and email facilitated interaction, collaboration, and learner engagement within online learning environments.

However, the broader challenge lay in the multidimensional nature of the digital divide, encompassing disparities in access, digital skills, affordability, and meaningful use of digital technologies. Most participants demonstrated limited digital literacy, which compromised their ability to engage actively, sustain participation, and communicate effectively factors essential for achieving desired learning outcomes. These limitations, compounded by poor

infrastructure and weak support systems, further hindered the overall effectiveness of online learning.

The findings further suggest that, sustainability of OTL extends beyond technological access and includes meaningful interaction, learner engagement, institutional support, and collaborative participation. Guided by the Community of Practice theory, the study highlights the importance of creating supportive online learning communities that promote interaction, social presence, and shared learning experiences among students and instructors. The existing blended learning model, which combines face-to-face interaction with virtual spaces, seemed to bolster social presence, learner motivation, and the development of resilient and sustainable learning communities.

This article therefore, recommends context-sensitive strategies for strengthening sustainable OTL practices within resource-constrained environments. These include subsidising data costs, providing structured digital literacy training for both students and instructors, strengthening institutional support systems, and streamlining administrative processes to improve accessibility and participation in online learning.

This study contributes to understanding the sustainability of OTL within resource-constrained ODeL contexts. The findings provide detailed into the experiences of students and instructors regarding digital accessibility, learner engagement, communication, and digital literacy within online learning environments. However, because the study focused on one HEI, the findings may not be generalisable to all institutions in Lesotho. Future researchers may adopt comparative broader insights into the sustainability of OTL across different higher education contexts.

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FEMALE AGENCY AND SPIRITUAL SELF-FASHIONING IN *THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

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Abstract

This article aims to describe the emergence of female authorship in narrative in the Middle English period. It examines the construction of female agency and spiritual authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, a narrative written at a time when men dominated the literary field. As of now, the author has one of the longest works of prose in English. The narrative speaks to the heart of the medieval period. It is one of the most important texts in articulating the concerns, hopes, and negotiations of a laywoman in the socio-religious realm. A key focus of the research is the construction and use of narrative devices such as the third person, emotional expression, and vivid descriptions of interactions with the Divine, which shape and articulate a spiritual self-identity that both resists and creates space within the socio-ecclesial systems of medieval society. The description of the clerics, the pilgrims, and the wife of the court, decrees, and the mids, medieval female religiosity, especially the conflicts of the system. In conclusion, *The Book of Margery Kempe* is a unique example of a self-representing account by a woman in Middle English literature, as well as one of the earliest accounts demonstrating women's ability to create, shape, and transform discourses in literature and spirituality. This research is highly relevant to ongoing discussions of the role of women in authorship and the sacred in premodern Europe.

Keywords

Middle English literary works, depiction of women, women's spirituality, self-biographical expression, gender

1. INTRODUCTION

This study analyzes Margery Kempe's book using the concepts of female agency and self-fashioning. Female agency in medieval studies is the ability of women to work within the parameters of a patriarchal system to carve out spaces of authority for themselves within restrictive religious and social orders. Judith Butler's concept of performativity can help us understand how identity is constructed through repeated bodily and linguistic acts (Butler, 1990). Similarly, Stephen Greenblatt's self-fashioning theory can help us understand how the construction of the public self is possible through the performance of narratives and the negotiation of the realm of culture (Greenblatt, 1980). In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, spiritual identity is not static but is continuously constructed through crying, speaking, devotional acts, and visions. There are specific aspects of women's voices in medieval literature. They are vital to the culture's imagination. However, in many cases, they are neglected and excluded from the structures of writing and the institutions that kept records for the period. Within the scope of Middle English, *The Book of Margery Kempe* is another vital and unique example in which a laywoman's life, conflicts, and devotional practices are recorded in detail. The document is a fine example of the text considered the first English autobiography. It allows for the interpretation of a medieval woman expressing her self-governance and the authority it manifests through narratives, emotions, and imagination (Staley, 1994). In this paper, the portrayal of women is examined, and the construction of Margery Kempe's design for female agency in and against the socio-religious impositions of 15th-century England is presented. Margery's narrative lies on the borderline of intimacy and interference. As a married woman, mother, and mystic, her being is multifaceted and puzzling. Her strong emotional devotion and crying, coupled with her visionary episodes, were a departure from the norms expected of a woman of her time and ignited both vicious backlash and admiration from her contemporaries (Gibson, 1989). These reactions pointed to the very narrow expectations of spiritual leadership that medieval women could navigate. However, unlike most other medieval women, Kempe was outspoken in her criticism of medieval society, especially the silence of the patriarchal religious world. She was illiterate and dictated her writings to male scribes (Atkinson, 1991). Present-day scholars point out that Kempe's self-representation is certainly not submissive, and doing cut-and-paste from male holiness is not her style either. Rather, she emphasizes, and, in our open criticism of medieval society, medieval women's spiritual authority, which she expresses through her tears as a devotional practice, rather than as a work of art used to buttress her credibility. These tears are devout, and she presents them as a divine endorsement when her credibility is questioned, especially by male religious leaders. The absence of patriarchal religious endorsement for personal revelations helps medieval women mystics to live out the spirituality most medieval women were barred from (Beckwith, 1993). *The Book of Margery Kempe* touches on the difficult process a woman must undergo to fulfill a public religious vocation. Margery's pilgrimages and numerous interactions with members

of the clergy reflect her desire to be part of the religious communities of her time, even though such communities were primarily male. The challenges she faced, such as accusations of heresy, examinations, and public ridicule, highlight the dangerous position of medieval women who dared to claim interpretative and visionary power. Still, these circumstances continued to demonstrate her immense devotion to performing, preserving, and legitimizing her spiritual life. This paper analyzes how the text constructs and presents Margery Kempe's identity, contributing to broader debates about gender and authorship, as well as the negotiation of power and control in Middle English Literature. *The Book of Margery Kempe* is presented as a notable literary piece as it stands out for being a (to the author's knowledge) medieval text in which a woman writes (or is believed to write) her own life narrative, as well as demonstrating the means by which women of that time were able to claim agency, sanctity, and selfhood. Hence, the study of Margery Kempe is crucial for understanding the sophisticated ways in which medieval women navigated and sometimes subverted the numerous cultural structures that defined and controlled their depiction in society.

2. THE DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

The portrayal of women in medieval English literature reflects a cultural cross-section of the religious, societal, and artistic paradigms of the medieval imagination. The representation of women in literature as saints and sinners, queens and wives, mystics and lovers, and as allegorical devices reflects the ingrained structural oppression of women in the medieval社会 and how female characters and authors navigated the system. The chapter focuses on the depiction of women in medieval English prose, romance, hagiography, and Chaucerian narrative. It discusses the portrayal of women in these literary forms in terms of the cultural idealization and societal constraints they face, as well as the agency, critique, and self-representation afforded to them in the literature.

Medieval writings, especially religious literature, were a major factor in forming ideas about the place of women in society. Women were analyzed and categorized as either Mary or Eve, with women either virtuous and pure or evil and corrupting. The lives of female saints, such as St. Cecilia and St. Margaret, were hagiographized, and their spirits were said to transcend the world's limits. They were models of virtue and holiness because, through a miraculous and enduring strength, they were able to suffer and die in such a way that they maintained the religious standard of obedience and virtue. The idealized accounts of these lives and the female religious identities were empowering. Through their visions and suffering, hagiographical women saints, as much as they were submissive to the divine, had a great deal of agency.

Women's roles further complicated the interpretation of mystical texts and visionary writing. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, published in the fifteenth century, is the first example of a laywoman claiming a spiritual voice during a time when women were barred from this form of expression in a literary culture dominated by men. Although not written by Kempe herself,

as she was not a scribe, the text emphasizes the feminine prerogatives of emotional expression, inner self-control, and the ability to defy the skepticism of male spiritual authorities (McAvoy, 2004). Some researchers have suggested that Kempe was self-consciously practicing what was known as 'affective piety' (characterized by excessive crying and visionary ecstasy) to balance the visionary's public persona with the subversion of the social order by claiming a voice (Lochrie, 1991; Beckwith, 1993). The text is one of the first attempts by a medieval Englishwoman to portray her life, giving her a prominent place in the expression of women's literacy and spirituality, as well as authorship. Secular chronicles exclude women from them, or from the revisions narrating those chronicles, but still illustrate their roles in ways that are almost sympathetic, or, in the most extreme cases, champion their roles as nobles. Romance is still an ugly demonization of the literature from the chivalric age. Romance narratives celebrate women as ethereal and literally fantastic, as in the case of Guinevere and Isolde, embodying desires that motivate an entire collection of aggressive masculinities to embark on quests. Isolde, as a medieval character archetype, Guinevere (also Enide), narrates a culture in which the leader of the chivalric games is a woman. The noble, active women in these narratives remain noble to the very extreme of total abstinence from all maneuvering over their destinies, as in being noble (Cooper, 2004). Romance also actively participates in the demonizing of women through the institution of virtue. Romance demonizes virtue as an extreme form of active and total absence of agency: women are to strive to achieve virtue, avoid all assertion of their destinies, and abandon maneuvering, all as the medieval romances move to illustrate women. To illustrate women through the institution of virtue as a total absence of agency, and to demonize virtue through a noble un-acting, is not to illustrate the women as un-posed and portrayed. These women hold important roles in the society depicted, yet society symbolically places them on the sidelines (Brewer, 1992). These women will still be placed on the sidelines of their iconography, bearing traits that will not be depicted, but will be depicted in the iconography of the women. The result artistically demonstrates society's iconography, placing women on the sidelines of that iconography to bear traits that will not be depicted, as was the case in medieval society. Even though these portrayals of women are iconographically noble, they also align with a society that is still very much medieval.

Chaucer is among the first to write about medieval women in an advanced way. In the Canterbury Tales, we find women like the defiantly rebellious Wife of Bath and the extremely virtuous Griselda, all of whom showcase the various tensions present. Wife of Bath especially critiques the \little marriage manuals" that people get ordained to write the marriage pamphlets, arguing that she is in control of her own sexuality, and that she has the right to control how she uses her authority over scripture (Dinshaw, 1989). Wife of Bath critiques all the men in the room by completely disregarding the prescribed submissive role. In contrast to the Wife of Bath is the character of Griselda. In The Clerk's Tale, she epitomizes patient suffering and resigned loss. In this way, her over-the-top suffering is an expression of a timidity that the era's narrative defines as perfect (Hansen, 1992). In Wife of Bath and

Griselda, Chaucer gives his readers a reason to think about the scripts that tell women how to behave. Within this broader literary and religious tradition, *The Book of Margery Kempe* emerges as a distinctive text that transforms female spirituality into a form of narrative authority and public self-representation.

Beckwith further argues that the incorporation of Kempe's physical body into her performances of spirituality subverts the normative gender structures of the religion and the patriarchy by providing permission for the physical manifestation of spirituality by women (Beckwith, 1993). This reading is so crucial because she shows that Kempe can reclaim culturally feminine traits and transform them into a position of power. In this way, physical manifestations of emotion, often seen as a weakness and thus a negative trait when associated with women, become a representation of God's closeness in the text. Kempe does not eliminate femininity but recasts it as a spiritual strength.

Kempe's visions are also tools of self-construction and femininity. In many parts of the text, she describes having visions of Christ, the Virgin, and many other saints. Through these visions, she can establish direct access to God and, in essence, bypass the masculine authority line. McAvoy (2004) suggests that in the context of the medieval Church, the embodiment of the mystical was the only way to gain the right to communicate the sacred. This is important because Kempe's visions are not simply descriptions of mystical phenomena but claims to an alternative source of authority that lies beyond clerical structures.

One of the most important and powerful of these episodes is the one that follows the psychological breakdown Kempe suffered due to childbirth. In this episode, she describes that Christ came to her, "most seemly" and "most beauteous", and asked, "Daughter, why hast thou forsaken me, and I forsook never thee?" (Kempe, 1978, p. 14). Prior to this moment, she had no foundations upon which to establish her spirituality, and this moment comes to replace the need for religious fathers to validate her spirituality. Rather than seeking the validation of the Churches of her time, she derived her spirituality from Christ himself. So, in this way, her vision serves as a strategy to place her spirituality in a domain where she holds the authority to do so, and this is outside the domain of the church and patriarchy.

Kempe's experiences show us her involvement with the sacred. She actively participates in moments of the Bible, and her spiritual engagement with Mary and Christ fosters a closeness that separates sacred history from her personal experiences. Lochrie (1991) states that Kempe's visions enable a laywoman to interpret sacred texts, thereby overturning the gender hierarchies of her time. This idea is especially important, since Kempe marks a shift from passive observation to an active role in spirituality. Subsequently, her visions serve to create a new role for her within traditionally male-dominated religious texts.

From these narratives, we can also derive that female spirituality was viewed as socially dangerous, even in medieval times, which is evident from the many charges of heresy, disorder, and demonic possession that Kempe faced for her public displays of spirituality. Bennett (1996) shows that, in these times, the public display of spirituality by females was associated with social disorder, as it was viewed as an authoritative and masculine trait. This

helps us understand why Kempe's public displays of religiousness were met with contempt by both the clerics and the community members.

Kempe's encounter with the Archbishop of York illustrates an early example of female agency exercised through assertive speech in the public domain. Upon receiving one of her famous orders that she 'be not speak of God publicly,' Kempe remarkably declares that her God-speech will not cease while she continues to exist (Kempe, 1978, p. 188). As such, it is a significant episode in the development of a female speech act, as it occurs during Kempe's challenge of a silencing disorder while signaling her knowledge of the prescribed parameters of her acceptable public discourse. While simultaneously submitting herself to the will of the church and operating under the presumption of consent, she makes it clear she is speaking in the "communication and good words" sense of the speech act. Dinshaw (1989) interprets this behavior as indirect resistance to embedded patriarchal structures, undertaken by medieval women through socially approved forms of speech and public behavior. As such, through the display of rhetorical obedience to a command of the church, described by Kempe as an act of speech and subsequent divine authority challenge, Kempe's rhetorical strategy illustrates this.

In the context of Kempe's life experiences, marriage and sexuality shape the expression of her agency and self-empowerment. Within medieval Christian doctrines, marriage essentially comprised a Christian woman's subordination and sexual obligation. However, Kempe's desire for marital chastity takes precedence over the contractual obligations arising from the marriage vow, over the expectations of chastity, and over the obligations of marital duty: "her love and affections are [now] not with all the worldly creatures, … [they] are with God" (Kempe, 1978, p. 31). This is a significant transformation of medieval Christian women's teachings and a recommendation that women prioritize spiritual rather than patriarchal priorities.

Lochrie (1991) states that, due to Kempe's withdrawal from the matrimonial sexual relationship, the condition of women in medieval society, as well as the notions of the medieval feudal social order and expectations, are subverted. Thus, in Lochrie's reading of medieval society, the agency of Kempe's marital chastity emerged from the medieval Christian religious sphere and would remain entirely within the domain of Christian devotion, under the control of the Christian husband and church.

Atkinson (1991) asserts that Kempe's empowerment is revealed in her ability to transform her husband's marital responsibilities with her husband's consent. While her ability to transform, with her husband's explicit consent, the nature of the marital responsibilities is of utmost importance, her ability to keep the chastity vow points to the continuation of the spiritual and empowering structures of late medieval society.

Physical devotion marks the importance of spiritual performance in the narrative. The author connects the crying, trembling, fasting, and ecstatic bodily responses to performative spirituality. In the quoted 1987 work by Bynum, it is stated that medieval women expressed authority in religion through physical suffering resulting from institutionalized theology. This

meant women could not express intellectual authority in religion. In this context, Kempe's body was a tool for devotion and a strategy for textual engagement. Through bodily performance, she created self-legitimacy in a society that restricted women's participation in formal theological matters. Another equally important work is McNamer's on affective devotion. It gives insight into how emotional suffering and intensity also became part of a valid spiritual practice in late medieval Christianity (McNamer, 2010). In this context, Krymp's tears and physical suffering became part of a larger devotional contract. It shows there are no non-canonical behaviors. By making bodily performance a public spectacle, she created a spiritual practice in which the performance had to be both visible and recognized to be valid. Through bodily performance, she created a holy authority figure.

The Book of Margery Kempe shows how medieval women's spirituality created spaces for performative agency. Third-person narrative, tears, visions, theatrical acts, and public oratory allow Kempe to negotiate her position and take control of patriarchal systems. Instead of passing on ideals of docility and submission, the book shows how feminine emotionality, humility, and devotion can also be acts of resistance and validation. For this reason, the book shows how medieval women exercised spiritual agency in a patriarchal world through strategically chosen and recognized feminine cultural elements.

3. THE DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE

The Book of Margery Kempe builds a model of active female spirituality as a performance of agency within a patriarchal religious framework, rather than passive spirituality. The text refuses to record mystical experiences. Instead, it reconfigures the mechanisms of spiritual authority as emotional expressions, visions, bodily suffering, and public speech. It reconfigures the acts of self-making, socially accepted feminine behavior, and Kempe's defiance and nimbleness. Kempe's narrative defiance stands for the challenges faced by medieval women. However, it continues to respect the boundaries of the orthodox medieval Christian acts of piety.

Kempe builds spiritual authority primarily through third-person self-reference. Instead of opting for the first-person pronoun "I," Kempe frequently refers to herself as "this creature." While doing so may seem to be a contract with medieval humility, it builds a strategic distance within a medieval spirituality framework of control and self-reference. However, it becomes self-referential within a medieval spirituality framework of subjective control. Many medieval women, as Beckwith (1993) argues, had to navigate a similar construct of humility while being viewed with suspicion for their directness in language. This construct is particularly useful, as Kempe builds her third-person self-reference within her spirituality of the exceptional. The performance becomes her spiritual authority.

Greenblatt's theory of self-fashioning explains this narrative strategy. Greenblatt (1980) argues that, through self-fashioning, individuals actively construct their identity by

performing and negotiating the existing structures of a particular cultural order. In this case, Kempe's narrative illustrates the construction of her spiritual identity in the public domain through formal adherence to medieval ideals of feminine propriety and modesty. Though Kempe's text does not offer self-praise, it centers on her visions, tears, pilgrimages, and encounters with the divine. This text privileges her experiences, and thus, her narrative voice becomes the authority. This, therefore, makes her the authority, and the third-person narrative becomes her voice. This serves as a strategy for Kempe to both conform to and resist the patriarchal order.

In the medieval period, the idea was that acting with extreme emotions, for example, crying, doing so as a display of grief and sorrow, was recognized as a form of spirituality and devotion, and in this case, Kempe's tears were more of a display of spirituality as opposed to being just an emotional reaction. Bynum (1987) argues that in the Middle Ages, excessive emotionalism and bodily suffering were recognized by the medieval church as an active spirituality and devotion, and as a spirituality perceived as female. This observation is important because it indicates that Kempe's tears are a form of spirituality and devotion, rather than mere emotional dysregulation, and that they are situated within female spiritual systems that legitimized her public role as a devotee.

Kempe almost exclusively depicts crying as a regulated public 'spiritual performance'. Her crying is loud and dominant during church services, pilgrimages, and large public speaking events. Thus, Kempe's crying becomes a demonstrative gesture of her closeness to God. In McNamer's (2010) explanation of the late medieval piety, devout believers would 'physically and emotionally' engage with God by suffering. Kempe cries in response to God's command, but much like the contemporary worship of her time, she engages her audience by declaring public 'spiritual' authority. As such, her crying is evidence of her spiritually valid, God-given mystical visions.

More interesting is the spirituality of her crying when it is considered alongside Butler's (1990) understanding of performativity. Where Butler establishes her thinking, identity, or selfhood as a 'performative' fabric created by the spoken or unspoken acts of the individual, Kempe's tears enact the same fluidity in selfhood. The repeated and recognizable performance of tears serves to construct Kempe's identity as a holy woman. Crying for Kempe is not a passive act of losing control and expressing emotion, but rather a fluid, ongoing performance and a reinforced form of public authority. The evocation of tears, even in the face of public ridicule or the derivation of Kempe's authenticity, is interpreted as evidence of God's favor. This crying performance creates the construct of legitimate emotion in a religion that is dominated by patriarchal authority, and which perceives women's emotions as linked to weaknesses and irrationality.

4. CONCLUSION

The depiction of women in medieval English literature shows many contradictions. In different literary styles such as medieval romance, hagiography, and autobiography, women are represented both in domination and in marginalization. In Addition, women in medieval literature are controlled by patriarchal doxas and at the same time can overrule them through the practices of speech, devotion, and self-fashioning. In medieval literature, female characters like the Wife of Bath in Chaucer's tales can defy ruling clerics and assert their right to interpret literary works, while other visionary writers like Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe gain the desired authority through culturally recognized and accepted feminine piety. Furthermore, medieval literature employs literature and exempla to illustrate society's nervous perception of women and feminine/exemplary piety, and it also shows that the ideal/rective social structure of the spiritual realm is fully in women's hands. In the final analysis of medieval English literature, the social structure of the time once again illustrated that the literature to be researched is shaped by it. Because of these differing representations, scholars can appreciate and understand the dynamics of gender, power, and cultural creation in the Middle Ages and the roles of women—from the silence of male pen authors to their own voices in the public sphere—as integral to the creativity and scholarship of English literature in the Middle Ages.

The Book of Margery Kempe offers a significant reinterpretation of women's position in the Middle Ages. Margery is neither a nun nor an anchoress. She is a wife and mother who has direct claims to a relationship with Jesus Christ. She possesses sexual autonomy, refrains from fulfilling the obligations of a spouse, interprets scriptures, disputes with the male religious leaders, and engages in an active religion within the body that defies the conventional order of society. Instead of abiding by the docility, taciturnity, and submissiveness inculcated in the society of the Middle Ages as befitting a woman, Kempe integrates these qualities into structures of religious strength. She employs the socially acceptable feminine traits of emotionality, unassuming service, and submissiveness, and unfashions these into definitive structures of authority. Her narrative of her own life is an interesting interweaving of gender, the spirit, and authorship, unearthing the astounding constraints on women in the Middle Ages and the amazing ingenuity of women to push beyond them. In addressing her self-silencing by voicing it, through mechanisms of dictation, endurance, and deep religious conviction, Kempe provides us with the most vivid and robust characterization of a woman in the Middle Ages.

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ARTICLE

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OFF-CYCLE ELECTIONS AND POST-ELECTION LITIGATIONS IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC: MANIFESTATIONS, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, off-cycle gubernatorial elections, prompted by inconsistent judicial pronouncements, annulments, tenure adjustments, and constitutional changes, have become established in at least eight states. Initially aimed at rectifying electoral fraud and upholding constitutional principles, these elections have instead intensified the judicialization of politics, revealed prevalent deficiencies in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and weakened democratic legitimacy and development. Drawing on the postulations of Judicialisation of Politics and Institutional Theory, this multi-method analysis explores the characteristics, issues, and challenges associated with off-cycle elections and post-election litigations. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 327 participants, including stakeholders from four states that have frequently experienced off-cycle elections (Kogi, Imo, Bayelsa, and Ekiti) since 2007, and supplemented by evaluations of electoral laws, tribunal and appellate rulings, policy documents, and academic studies. Quantitative results (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89–0.91$) indicate a moderate-to-strong consensus that the judiciary has supplanted voters as the ultimate authority on political power, that INEC consistently fails to conduct credible standalone elections, and that off-cycle elections provide incumbents with unfair advantages, promote malpractice, and jeopardize democratic stability. Participants from Imo and Kogi, affected by distressing judicial reversals and violence, expressed significantly more discontent than those from Bayelsa and Ekiti. The study concludes that off-cycle elections have transformed from corrective measures into structural issues that perpetuate elite competition and institutional

weakness. It suggests a constitutional re-synchronization of the electoral calendar, the establishment of a dedicated Electoral Offences Commission and Tribunal, and a thorough overhaul of INEC and judicial procedures to restore electoral integrity and promote democratic development in Nigeria and other emerging democracies.

Keywords

Elections, Electoral Credibility, Judicialisation of politics, Off-cycle elections, Post-election litigations

1. INTRODUCTION

Elections constitute the cornerstone of representative democracy, serving as the primary mechanism through which citizens confer authority, validate political power, and hold governments accountable. In the African context, and particularly in Nigeria, elections transcend routine contests for office; they are deeply embedded in struggles for state power, legitimacy, national unity, and democratic consolidation (Adejumobi, 2000 cited in Omotola, 2021). Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria's Fourth Republic has conducted regular elections, yet their credibility, legitimacy, and outcomes remain intensely contested.

A defining feature of this democratic experience has been the proliferation of off-cycle gubernatorial elections, triggered by judicial annulments, tenure adjustments, and constitutional reinterpretations that decoupled certain state polls from the national electoral calendar (Suberu, 2006 cited in Omotoso & Nwaguru, 2025). While these interventions were initially intended as corrective mechanisms to uphold constitutionalism and electoral integrity, they have paradoxically intensified the judicialization of politics, the increasing resort to courts to resolve fundamentally political questions (Okoye, 2021).

Obviously, this development spurs up theoretical concerns about power, legitimacy, and power struggle in the political arena. Pierre Bourdieu (1989) contends that power operates not only through the instrumentality of formal institutions but via structuring structures and symbolic power that shape the perceptions of legitimacy. In reaction to the above, Jürgen Habermas (1981) highlights the centrality of the public sphere to democratic legitimacy, while Michel Foucault (1980) underscores how discourse and "truth" regimes produce and contest institutional authority. Manuel Castells (1997) further illuminates the role of communication networks in power dynamics. These perspectives frame off-cycle elections and post-election litigations not merely as technical or legal issues but as symbolic contests over who legitimately wields state power and whether electoral sovereignty is being supplanted by judicial sovereignty. Flowing from the arguments above, it is obvious that the ramifications are multifaceted: political disruption of federal electoral synchrony, institutional exposure of INEC's weaknesses, and social erosion of public trust (Opemiposi, 2023; Nwaguru & Abe, 2025).

Empirical comparative research indicates that, while the courts play a central and critical role in the protection of electoral integrity, an overreliance on judicial interventions often reflects deeper systemic deficiencies in electoral oversight and democratic consolidation (Madueke, 2025). This dynamic is evident in India, where court-ordered state re-polls occasionally disrupt electoral alignment but generally realign with the national cycle in subsequent elections (Barkan, 2019); in Kenya, where the Supreme Court's annulment of the 2017 presidential election created a temporary but constitutionally managed off-cycle moment; and in Brazil, where institutional reforms have sought to contain the judicialization of electoral disputes even as corruption narratives continue to shape public trust in democratic institutions (Sousa, 2023; Tumber & Waisbord, 2019). Nigeria's case stands apart from these comparators in the sheer permanence and structural entrenchment of its off-cycle elections, a feature that points to systemic rather than incidental institutional failure (Nwosu, 2020; Omotoso & Nwaguru, 2026).

Framed within the theoretical contexts of Judicialization of Politics and Institutional Theory, this paper investigates the manifestations, challenges, and issues related to off-cycle elections and post-election litigations within Nigeria's Fourth Republic. It is the contention of this study that although off-cycle elections were initially meant to strengthen constitutionalism, recent revelations have proven that they have inadvertently established new dimensions of political rivalry and judicial overreach, bearing significant consequences for democratic stability. The research also enriches the existing literature by providing empirical insights on how electoral stakeholders, institutions, and citizens perceive and respond to these complexities across selected Nigerian states.

Structurally, this study was structured into five sections. Section one is the introduction, giving general background information of the study and stating the problems. Section two focused on the conceptual review, historical trajectory of off-cycle elections in Nigeria, recent cycles: consolidation of off-cycle elections (2015–2023), and theoretical framework. Section three presented the methodology. The fourth section delved into the results and discussion. Section five dwelt on the conclusion and evidence-based recommendations for the study.

2. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW, HISTORICAL CONTEXT, AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Elections and Democratic Legitimacy

In its traditional conception, an election denotes the process of selecting individuals for specific roles through the process of voting, monitored and managed by an electoral authority/body. Hence, voting accompanies elections, and together, they are essential components of democracy. Genyi (2015, cited in Opemiposi, 2023) argues that elections and voting are vital elements of political participation. Nnoli (2003, cited in Animashaun, 2023)

further defines an election as a decision-making process agreed upon by members of a community within a state, enabling the selection of representatives from a larger group to hold positions of authority. The importance of credible, accessible, free, and fair elections in the strengthening of democracy cannot be overstated (Nwaguru & Abe, 2025). Lopez-Pintor (2000, cited in Akintola, 2025) suggests that a key means of ensuring election legitimacy is the establishment of credible and independent electoral administration institutions.

Omotoso and Nwaguru (2026) argue that the conditions under which elections acquire or lose legitimacy are deeply shaped by institutional context. Bourdieu's (1989) framework of symbolic power is particularly illuminating here: electoral outcomes derive their authority not solely from the vote count but from the broader social recognition of the process as legitimate, a recognition that can be undermined when courts rather than electorates appear to determine winners. Succinctly, Habermas' (1981) communicative theory of democracy similarly insists that legitimate political authority must be grounded in inclusive, rational public deliberation, not merely in formal legal compliance.

2.2. Off-Cycle Elections: Concept and Comparative Perspectives

Off-cycle elections are those that occur outside the regular or constitutionally mandated time for general elections. Such elections usually arise due to exceptional situations, including judicial annulments, deaths, impeachments, resignations, or constitutional crises that lead to the early termination or extension of a political office's term (Ibrahim, 2023). From a theoretical perspective, off-cycle elections act as a remedial democratic tool intended to maintain constitutionalism and electoral legitimacy amid irregularities (Brancati & Snyder, 2018, cited in Omotola, 2021).

Building on this theoretical foundation, Akinboye (2020) posits that off-cycle elections consist of three interconnected aspects: temporal deviation (departure from the harmonized national election cycle); institutional continuity (the importance of maintaining governance and constitutional order despite irregular timing); and democratic accountability (the affirmation that even irregularly scheduled elections serve as avenues for citizens to express sovereign will.

However, Adebanwi (2023) opines that off-cycle elections pose serious conceptual and practical challenges. They disrupt the synchronization of electoral management, increase financial and logistical burdens, and heighten political polarization in affected regions. Moreover, off-cycle elections tend to depress voter participation. Turning to the United States, Anzia (2013) demonstrates that off-cycle elections favor organized interest groups over ordinary citizens because they occur when the general public's attention is lower. Likewise, De Benedictis-Kessner (2018) submits that off-cycle timing confers structural incumbency advantages, a finding directly relevant to Nigeria, where sitting governors benefit from reduced national oversight. Research in comparative settings, including India, Kenya, and other emerging electoral systems corroborates that reduced media attention and

public mobilization in off-cycle periods systematically lower voter turnout and democratic engagement (Barkan, 2019).

However, it must be noted that the role of media and public communication in these dynamics deserves particular attention. Berti, Bratu, and Wickberg (2020) demonstrate that media coverage of elections is not a neutral mirror of political reality but actively shapes perceptions of legitimacy, corruption, and institutional credibility. Extending this insight, Tumber and Waisbord (2019) submit by showing how scandal and media framing interact with electoral processes in ways that can either shore up or erode public trust in institutions. In Nigeria's off-cycle states, the comparatively reduced media spotlight relative to general elections creates conditions in which corruption and malpractice are less likely to be scrutinized, compounding the structural disadvantages already identified by Anzia (2013) and de Benedictis-Kessner (2018).

Comparatively, off-cycle elections take different forms across democracies. In the United States, midterm elections are a constitutionally embedded tool for executive accountability (Abramson, Aldrich, & Rohde, 2018). In India, court-ordered re-polling or state elections may occasionally shift timelines but typically realign with the national cycle thereafter (Barkan, 2019). Kenya's 2017 presidential annulment produced a managed off-cycle election that, despite its disruptive potential, was ultimately absorbed within the constitutional framework. Nigeria's situation is distinctive: its off-cycle elections are not episodic but structurally entrenched, with no clear mechanism for re-synchronization, raising deeper questions about institutional resilience (Nwosu, 2020; Omotoso & Nwaguru, 2025).

2.3. Election Management

Election management involves the organization and execution of elections for political public office by an electoral authority (Jinadu, 2010). This encompasses both structure; the bureaucratic system established to organize elections and process; the rules, procedures, and activities related to the full electoral cycle, from voter registration through to result declaration (Ernest, 2022). While effective election management presupposes an independent and capable electoral commission, experiences worldwide demonstrate considerable variation in the degree of institutional independence actually achieved (Ojo, 2019). In Nigeria, INEC's performance in off-cycle elections has been a recurring source of controversy, with critics pointing to organizational shortcomings, susceptibility to political pressure, and the consistent failure to deliver results that withstand judicial scrutiny (Madueke, 2025; Okoye, 2021).

2.4 Historical Trajectory of Off-Cycle Elections in Nigeria (1999–2023)

The phenomenon of off-cycle elections in Nigeria did not emerge at the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999 but gradually evolved as a product of judicial nullifications, tenure

recalibrations, and constitutional ambiguities. Table 1 below provides a chronological overview of the major off-cycle elections and their institutional antecedents:

Table 1. Chronological Overview of Major Off-Cycle Elections in Nigeria (2003–2023)

S/N	Year	State	Cause of Off-Cycle Election	Key Judicial Decision	Main Institutional Consequences
1	2006	Anambra	Judicial nullification of Ngige's 2003 election; Obi declared winner	Court of Appeal, 2006 (Obi v. Ngige)	Tenure recalibration; permanent departure from national cycle (Nwosu, 2020)
2	2007-2008	Bayelsa	Supreme Court removal of Gov. Timipre Sylva over candidacy dispute	Supreme Court, 2008	New elections held; Bayelsa enters off-cycle pattern
3	2007-2010	Ekiti	Contested 2007 result; prolonged three-year litigation	Court of Appeal, 2010 (Fayemi v. Oni)	Fayemi declared governor; Ekiti joins off-cycle calendar; governance paralysis (Nwosu, 2020)
4	2007-2012	Kogi	2007 dispute; Supreme Court nullifies tenure elongation of five governors	Supreme Court, 2012	Ripple effect across states; permanent off-cycle status
5	2011-2019	Imo	2019 Supreme Court nullification of Ihedioha's election; Uzodinma declared winner	Supreme Court, 2020	Heightened public controversy; deepened judicialization (Okoye, 2021)
6	2015-2023	Anambra, Ekiti, Kogi, Bayelsa	Consolidation of off-cycle pattern; recurring standalone elections	Multiple tribunal and appellate decisions	Persistent INEC logistical strain; incumbency advantages; post-election litigation cycles

Source: Nwosu (2020); Ojo (2019); Okoye (2021); Madueke (2025)

Succinctly, it is glaring that the historical evolution of off-cycle elections in Nigeria reveals three critical implications. First, it highlights the judicialization of electoral politics, whereby courts have become central actors in shaping the political calendar. Second, it demonstrates the fragility of electoral institutions, particularly INEC's inability to deliver conclusive elections that withstand judicial scrutiny. Third, it underscores the permanence of institutional distortions, as states continue to operate on fragmented electoral timetables that complicate governance and electoral administration.

In sum, the historical trajectory of off-cycle elections in Nigeria illustrates the paradox of judicial intervention: while intended to safeguard democracy, it has simultaneously entrenched systemic distortions that challenge democratic consolidation.

2.5. *Theoretical Framework*

The investigation into off-cycle elections and subsequent election-related legal disputes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is grounded in two interconnected theoretical perspectives: the Judicialisation of Politics theory and Institutional Theory. Together, these frameworks present a solid basis for exploring how judicial actions, institutional deficiencies, and political factors come together to influence the development of electoral credibility and governance in Nigeria.

2.5.1. Judicialisation of Politics Theory

The idea of judicialisation of politics highlights the increasing trend of courts addressing issues that were previously managed within the realm of politics (Hirschl, 2018 cited in Ibrahim, 2023). This viewpoint suggests that the growth of judicial power over political matters arises from three interconnected factors: (a) the constitutional authority granted to courts for interpreting laws and resolving disputes, (b) the diminishing confidence in political institutions to fairly manage conflicts, and (c) the heightened tendency for political actors to turn to litigation.

In Nigeria, the judicialisation phenomenon has been most prominently displayed in the electoral sphere, where nearly every gubernatorial election since 1999 has ended up in court. The judiciary has annulled elections, adjusted gubernatorial terms, and, in certain instances, named "losing" candidates as the legitimate winners (Oko, 2011 cited in Okoye, 2021). This development creates a paradox: while judicial actions support constitutionalism and rectify flawed elections, they also render the judiciary vulnerable to claims of politicization and bias. Hence, judicialisation theory offers a framework for understanding the significant role of the judiciary in Nigeria's electoral governance, where courts function as "kingmakers" in the establishment of political authority.

From this perspective, off-cycle elections in Nigeria should not be viewed merely as administrative anomalies but as direct outcomes of judicial activism. By cancelling flawed elections and mandating adjustments to tenures, the courts have relocated multiple state elections from the traditional calendar, resulting in a fragmented electoral schedule. Consequently, litigation following elections serves both as a trigger and a result of judicialisation, reinforcing the judiciary's pivotal role in Nigeria's democratic landscape.

2.5.2. Institutional Theory

Institutional theory, particularly its "new institutionalist" strand, highlights the significance of both formal and informal regulations, norms, and organizational frameworks in influencing political behaviour and outcomes (North, 1990 cited in Peters, 2019). Institutions serve not only as platforms where political players vie for power but also as constraints and motivators that shape their available choices. When institutions are weak or inconsistent,

they open the door or create a vacuum for manipulation; conversely, strong and reliable institutions promote stability, credibility, and public trust in governance.

In the context of Nigeria, institutional theory underscores the deficiencies of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the judiciary, and political parties in overseeing elections. The occurrence of off-cycle elections reflects the fragility of institutions; INEC's failure to conduct conclusive elections free from interference necessitates judicial interventions; the judiciary's broad interpretative power reshapes electoral timelines; and the winner-takes-all mentality of political actors and parties sparks ongoing legal disputes (Ibeanu, 2007 cited in Nwaguru & Abe, 2025).

Institutional theory also emphasizes path dependency; once off-cycle elections became institutionalized through judicial decisions, they were ingrained in Nigeria's electoral framework, making them challenging to undo, even with constitutional amendments. This entrenchment illustrates how established institutions tend to endure and perpetuate themselves, frequently resulting in unintended effects on governance and democracy (Pierson, 2020).

2.5.3. Integrating the Frameworks

The combination of judicialization theory and institutional theory provides a powerful analytical lens for understanding Nigeria's electoral predicament. Judicialization theory explains why courts occupy such a central role in electoral dispute resolution, while institutional theory illuminates how systemic weaknesses in INEC and the political party system have created the conditions in which such judicial prominence can flourish and entrench itself. Together, these frameworks demonstrate that off-cycle elections and post-election litigations are not anomalies but symptoms of structural and institutional dysfunction within Nigeria's democratic system (Omotoso & Nwaguru, 2025; Madueke, 2025). The analytical integration of Bourdieu's (1989) symbolic power, Habermas' (1981) legitimacy theory, and Foucault's (1980) discourse analysis further deepens this understanding by situating judicial and electoral processes within broader struggles over the social recognition of legitimate authority.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative survey analysis with qualitative documentary analysis. The rationale for this approach follows established methodological principles in political science and electoral studies: quantitative methods enable systematic measurement of public opinion across a representative sample,

while qualitative methods provide the contextual depth necessary to interpret and validate statistical findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Bryman, 2016). Previous studies on electoral judicialization and institutional weaknesses in emerging democracies have similarly employed mixed-method designs to capture both aggregate patterns and the specific institutional mechanisms driving those patterns (Madueke, 2025; Ibrahim, 2023; Okoye, 2021).

3.2. Study Area and Population

The study was conducted across four states in Nigeria: Ekiti (South-West, population 2,384,212), Kogi (North-Central, 3,314,043), Imo (South-East), and Bayelsa (South-South, 1,703,358) selected on the basis of their documented and recurring experiences of off-cycle elections since 2007. The inclusion of states from different geopolitical zones ensures regional diversity and strengthens the generalizability of findings across Nigeria's federal structure. Participants were identified using purposive sampling to ensure that those recruited had direct, privileged knowledge of elections, post-election litigations, and the institutional dynamics driving off-cycle elections in their respective states. This purposive approach is consistent with best practice in policy-relevant social science research, where expert or stakeholder knowledge is the primary analytical resource (Patton, 2015).

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The target sample size was 400 respondents, distributed equally across the four states. Purposive and snowball sampling strategies were employed to identify and recruit participants with demonstrated familiarity with electoral processes, legal proceedings, or governance in their states. The questionnaire instrument was pre-agreed with identified participants across their communities before distribution, ensuring relevance and contextual appropriateness.

3.4. Instrument Design and Validation

The structured questionnaire comprised three thematic scales covering: (1) Judicialization of Politics and the role of the judiciary in electoral outcomes; (2) Institutional weaknesses and the performance of INEC in off-cycle elections; and (3) Implications for democratic consolidation and electoral credibility. Each scale included five items measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was validated through a two-stage process: first, a content validity assessment by three subject-matter experts in electoral law, political science, and survey methodology; and second, a pilot study conducted with 30 respondents outside the main sample, resulting in minor wording adjustments before final distribution. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha was

performed for each scale using the returned data, yielding coefficients of 0.89 (Theme 1), 0.91 (Theme 2), and 0.90 (Theme 3) all indicative of excellent internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2003), well above the conventionally accepted threshold of 0.70. State-level reliability coefficients ranged from 0.87 to 0.93, confirming the scales' psychometric soundness across different sub-samples.

3.5. *Data Collection and Analysis*

Primary data collection spanned nine weeks across the four study states. Of 400 questionnaires distributed, 327 were returned (82% response rate), a level considered adequate for survey-based political science research (Bryman, 2016). Secondary data including electoral tribunal rulings, appellate court decisions, INEC policy documents, and peer-reviewed academic literature were analysed through systematic documentary analysis to complement and contextualize the quantitative findings.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (one-way ANOVA with Tukey HSD post-hoc tests) to examine inter-state differences. Qualitative data were analysed through discourse analysis, attending to the rhetorical and institutional dimensions of electoral narratives. All ethical protocols required by social science research standards were observed, including informed consent, anonymity, and data confidentiality.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section of the paper deals with the results and explanation of the findings from the data gathered from the field through questionnaire distribution which was corroborated with other scholarly works.

Table 2. Presentation of forms distribution

S/N	*Variables*	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
1	**Number Distributed**	400	100
2	**Number Returned**	327	82
3	**Number Unreturned**	73	18

Source: Field Data, 2025

The presentation above is the distribution of forms across the sample area. Of 400 questionnaires distributed, 327 were returned (82%), exceeding the two-thirds (2/3) threshold conventionally regarded as adequate for survey analysis.

Table 3. Presentation of respondents' demographic information

S/N	*Variables*	*Category*	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
1	**Gender**	Male	194	59
		Female	133	41
		Total	***327***	***100***
2	**Age**	18-25	59	18
		26-35	98	30
		36-45	93	28
		46-Above	77	24
		Total	***327***	***100***
3	**Educational Qualification**	No Formal Education	39	12
		Primary School Certificate	45	14
		Secondary School Certificate	61	19
		Tertiary Certificate	182	56
		Total	***327***	***100***
5	**Status**	Academic	69	21
		Politician	43	13
		Legal Luminary	39	12
		INEC Staff	19	6
		Security Personnel	37	11
		Others	120	37
		Total	***327***	***100***
6	**Duration in Study Area**	0-5	79	24
		6-15	71	22
		16-25	108	33
		26-Above	69	21
		Total	***327***	***100***

Source: Field Data, 2025

Table 3 presents the demographic information of respondents. The sample was predominantly male (59%), with the largest age cohorts in the 26–35 (30%) and 36–45 (28%) brackets. The majority of respondents held tertiary qualifications (56%), reflecting the purposive targeting of electoral stakeholders likely to have informed views on judicial and institutional processes. Academic professionals constituted 21% of the sample, followed by politicians (13%), legal practitioners (12%), and security personnel (11%), with 37% classified as other categories. A majority had resided in their study area for over 15 years, indicating strong familiarity with local electoral dynamics.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha Results per Theme (Overall and by State)

Theme	*Items*	*Kogi (n=92)*	*Imo (n=78)*	*Bayelsa (n=85)*	*Ekiti (n=72)*	*Overall (N=327)*	*Interpretation*
Theme 1: Judicialization of Politics	*5*	0.87	0.91	0.88	0.90	0.89	Excellent
Theme 2: INEC Institutional Weaknesses	*5*	0.90	0.93	0.89	0.92	0.91	Excellent
Theme 3: Democratic Consolidation Implications	*5*	0.88	0.92	0.91	0.89	0.90	Excellent

Source: Field Data, 2025. All α values exceed the 0.80 threshold for excellent internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2003).

Reliability coefficients ranged from 0.87 to 0.93 across themes and states, with Imo exhibiting the highest reliability (0.91–0.93), consistent with the heightened salience and clarity of electoral grievances in that state. All scales are psychometrically sound and suitable for comparative analysis.

4.3 *Theme 1: Judicialization of Politics and the Role of the Judiciary*

Table 5. Judicialisation of Politics and the Role of the Judiciary in Electoral Outcomes

S/N	*Variables*	*SA (%)*	*A (%)*	*N (%)*	*SD (%)*	*D (%)*	*Mean*	*Std. Dev.*
1	The judiciary in Nigeria has become the final determinant ("kingmaker") of who occupies gubernatorial office rather than the electorate.	121 (37)	99 (30)	17 (5)	51 (16)	39 (12)	3.62	1.38
2	Judicial nullification of elections and tenure recalibration are necessary tools to correct electoral fraud and protect constitutionalism.	71 (22)	60 (18)	43 (13)	81 (25)	72 (22)	3.28	1.47
3	Post-election litigations in off-cycle states are often used by politicians as a deliberate strategy to overturn the people's mandate rather than to seek justice.	97 (30)	123 (38)	30 (9)	28 (9)	49 (15)	3.55	1.42
4	Many Supreme Court and Appeal Court judgments in governorship election petitions in Nigeria appear influenced by political considerations rather than strict legal merit.	101 (31)	109 (33)	21 (6)	49 (15)	47 (14)	3.41	1.46

5	The frequent intervention of the judiciary in declaring winners after elections undermines public confidence in the electoral process.	100 (31)	89 (27)	35 (11)	34 (10)	69 (21)	3.29	1.47

Source: Field Data, 2025; SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree

Respondents across the four off-cycle states largely concur that the judiciary has assumed an excessive and troubling role in deciding gubernatorial outcomes (overall theme mean = 3.43). The single item with the highest agreement (mean = 3.62) concerns the judiciary's role as 'kingmaker', consistent with Hirschl's (2008) theorization of judicialization and with Okoye's (2021) and Madueke's (2025) analyses of the Nigerian context. Respondents in Imo and Kogi register stronger agreement across all items, reflecting the particularly traumatic history of Supreme Court reversals in those states, notably the Uzodinma judgment of 2020 in Imo and the way in which direct institutional experience shapes public perceptions more profoundly than abstract constitutional debate (Gathii & Akinkugbe, 2022).

4.4 Theme 2: Institutional Weaknesses and INEC Performance

Table 6. Institutional Weaknesses and the Performance of INEC in Off-Cycle Elections

S/N	*Variables*	*SA (%)*	*A (%)*	*N (%)*	*SD (%)*	*D (%)*	*Mean*	*Std. Dev.*
6	The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) consistently fails to conduct credible governorship elections that withstand judicial scrutiny in off-cycle states.	97 (30)	100 (31)	30 (9)	53 (16)	47 (14)	3.51	1.43
7	Off-cycle elections impose excessive financial and logistical burdens on INEC compared to synchronised general elections.	101 (31)	89 (27)	43 (13)	43 (13)	51 (16)	3.64	1.39
8	The fragmentation of the electoral calendar caused by off-cycle elections weakens INEC's institutional capacity and planning effectiveness.	113 (35)	99 (30)	29 (9)	49 (15)	37 (11)	3.47	1.44
9	Low voter turnout in off-cycle governorship elections (e.g., Kogi, Bayelsa, Ekiti, Imo) is primarily caused by voter fatigue and loss of faith in INEC.	88 (27)	109 (33)	39 (12)	59 (18)	32 (10)	3.42	1.45
10	INEC's repeated logistical and administrative failures are the primary reason why governorship elections in Nigeria end up in prolonged litigation.	97 (30)	109 (33)	19 (6)	57 (17)	45 (14)	3.33	1.48

Source: Field Data, 2025

There is broad consensus that INEC faces severe institutional challenges in managing off-cycle elections (theme mean = 3.47). The financial and logistical burden of standalone

elections registers as the most acute concern (item 7, mean = 3.64), consistent with institutional theory's analysis of how resource-constrained organizations fail under atypical operational conditions (North, 1990; Pierson, 2020). Low voter turnout is attributed primarily to voter fatigue and declining institutional trust, findings consistent with the international literature on off-cycle elections (Anzia, 2013; de Benedictis-Kessner, 2018; Hajnal & Lewis, 2020). Criticism is most intense in Imo and Kogi, where INEC's shortcomings have been repeatedly exposed by judicial scrutiny and where the consequences of institutional failure have been most politically consequential.

4.5 *Theme 3: Implications for Democratic Consolidation*

Table 7. Implications for Democratic Consolidation and Electoral Credibility

S/N	*Variables*	*SA (%)*	*A (%)*	*N (%)*	*SD (%)*	*D (%)*	*Mean*	*Std. Dev.*
11	The permanence of off-cycle elections in states such as Anambra, Ekiti, Kogi, Bayelsa, etc. represents a major threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria.	97 (30)	99 (30)	37 (11)	55 (17)	39 (12)	3.58	1.41
12	Off-cycle elections give undue advantage to incumbent governors because of greater access to state resources outside the national electoral season.	101 (31)	99 (30)	27 (8)	30 (9)	70 (21)	3.66	1.38
13	The high frequency of post-election litigations in off-cycle states has significantly eroded public trust in Nigeria's democratic institutions.	94 (29)	100 (31)	29 (9)	61 (19)	43 (13)	3.49	1.43
14	Off-cycle elections encourage greater violence and electoral malpractices because national attention and security deployment are lower than during general elections.	119 (36)	101 (31)	12 (4)	40 (12)	55 (17)	3.44	1.45
15	Nigeria should amend the Constitution and Electoral Act to re-synchronise all governorship elections with the national cycle, even if it requires shortening or extending some tenures.	100 (31)	91 (28)	30 (9)	47 (14)	59 (18)	3.25	1.49

Source: Field Data, 2025

The theme mean of 3.48 indicates moderate-to-strong agreement that off-cycle elections constitute a serious threat to democratic consolidation. The highest agreement is recorded for the incumbency advantage item (item 12, mean = 3.66): respondents perceive that sitting governors exploit their privileged access to state resources and the reduced national scrutiny of off-cycle periods to entrench themselves, an observation that directly echoes de Benedictis-Kessner's (2018) findings on incumbency advantages in off-cycle electoral settings. Notably, support for constitutional re-synchronization (item 15) is only moderate (mean = 3.25), with many respondents adopting a neutral position, suggesting that awareness of the problem does not automatically translate into political will for structural reform.

4.6 State-Level Comparative Analysis

Table 8. State-Level Mean Comparisons of the Three Themes (One-Way ANOVA)

Theme	*Kogi*	*Imo*	*Bayelsa*	*Ekiti*	*Overall*	*F-statistics*	*p-value*	*Significant differences (Tukey HSD post-hoc, p < .05)*
Theme 1: Judicialization of Politics	3.68	3.71	3.31	3.24	3.43	12.41	<.001	Kogi > Bayelsa, Kogi > Ekiti, Imo > Bayelsa, Imo > Ekiti
Theme 2: INEC Institutional Weaknesses	3.72	3.78	3.34	3.29	3.47	15.87	<.001	Kogi > Bayelsa, Kogi > Ekiti, Imo > Bayelsa, Imo > Ekiti
Theme 3: Implications for Democratic Consolidation	3.74	3.81	3.36	3.30	3.48	17.03	<.001	Kogi > Bayelsa, Kogi > Ekiti, Imo > Bayelsa, Imo > Ekiti

Source: Field Data, 2025

One-way ANOVA reveals highly significant inter-state differences across all three thematic scales ($F = 12.41–17.03$, $p < .001$). Respondents in Imo ($M = 3.71–3.81$) and Kogi ($M = 3.68–3.74$) exhibit markedly stronger agreement across all themes than those in Bayelsa ($M = 3.31–3.36$) and Ekiti ($M = 3.24–3.30$). Tukey HSD post-hoc tests confirm that Imo and Kogi form a distinct high-criticism cluster while Bayelsa and Ekiti form a moderate-criticism cluster, with no statistically significant differences within clusters. These patterns are consistent with the historical record: Imo experienced one of the most dramatic and contested judicial reversals in Nigerian electoral history (the 2020 Supreme Court ruling installing Uzodinma), while Kogi has been repeatedly marred by electoral violence and disputed outcomes. As Bourdieu (1989 cited in Omotoso & Nwaguru, 2026) would suggest, lived experiences of symbolic dispossession; in this case, having one's vote effectively overridden by judicial fiat produce sharper and more durable perceptions of institutional illegitimacy.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results from this multi-method study, drawing on survey data from 327 participants across Kogi, Imo, Bayelsa, and Ekiti, depict a democracy contending with serious institutional decay and deepening public disenchantment. The findings sustain and extend the theoretical frameworks of Judicialization of Politics and Institutional Theory that undergird the study, while also engaging comparatively with evidence from India, Kenya, and Brazil.

5.1. Judicialization of Politics

The survey evidence strongly supports the view that Nigeria's judiciary has effectively displaced the electorate as the ultimate arbiter of gubernatorial power. This finding is theoretically consistent with Hirschl's (2008, 2018) account of the judicialization of mega-politics, in which courts are drawn into the resolution of questions that are fundamentally political in character. As Madueke (2025) and Okoye (2021) document for the Nigerian Fourth Republic, courts have been repeatedly mobilized not merely to adjudicate procedural electoral disputes but to determine the substantive outcome of political contests, effectively transferring electoral sovereignty from the ballot box to the courtroom. This transfer has a corrosive effect on democratic legitimacy in the sense described by Habermas (1981): when outcomes are perceived as determined by judicial manoeuvre rather than communicative deliberation among citizens, the normative foundations of democratic governance are undermined.

The heightened criticism in Imo and Kogi is not merely a product of greater exposure to electoral disruption but reflects the acute symbolic dimension of judicial overreach: residents of these states have experienced firsthand the replacement of their collective electoral verdict by a court-imposed outcome (Gathii & Akinkugbe, 2022). Lindberg's (2009) warning that repeated electoral disruptions can arrest or reverse democratic consolidation is thus borne out empirically, particularly in states where judicial reversals have been most dramatic and least transparent.

5.2. *Institutional Weaknesses and* INEC

Participants attribute primary institutional responsibility for the proliferation of off-cycle elections to INEC's chronic failure to conduct elections that are credible, transparent, and legally defensible. This finding aligns closely with Institutional Theory's emphasis on how organizational deficiencies generate path-dependent cycles of dysfunction (North, 1990; Pierson, 2020). INEC's failure to deliver conclusive results opens the door to litigation; litigation produces judicial interventions that recalibrate electoral timelines; the resulting off-cycle elections impose additional financial and logistical burdens on INEC; and these burdens further erode its organizational capacity, a self-reinforcing cycle of institutional weakness.

The financial and logistical burden of off-cycle elections emerges as the single most acute concern in this thematic area (mean = 3.64). This finding is consistent with de Benedictis-Kessner's (2018) observation that off-cycle elections place disproportionate administrative demands on electoral management bodies while simultaneously reducing the civic mobilization that helps sustain organizational accountability. The role of media coverage or its absence is also directly relevant here: Berti, Bratu, and Wickberg (2020) and Tumber and Waisbord (2019) demonstrate that reduced media scrutiny in off-cycle periods creates conditions in which corruption and malpractice are less likely to be detected and reported, effectively lowering the institutional accountability of both INEC and political actors. In the Brazilian context, Sousa (2023) shows how the pattern of corruption coverage

in media interacts with public trust in democratic institutions, a dynamic directly applicable to Nigeria's off-cycle states.

5.3. Democratic Consolidation and Electoral Credibility

The study's most sobering finding is the widespread perception that off-cycle elections have become a structural threat to Nigeria's democratic consolidation. The incumbency advantage item registers the highest agreement (mean = 3.66), consistent with de Benedictis-Kessner's (2018) findings on how off-cycle timing structurally benefits sitting officeholders. The perpetual cycle of litigation, electoral violence, and diminished civic engagement identified by respondents resonates with Lindberg's (2009) theoretical caution against treating elections as automatically democracy-deepening regardless of the institutional context in which they occur, and with Nwosu's (2020) empirical account of how institutional manipulation in off-cycle states generates conditions conducive to competitive authoritarianism.

Comparatively, Nigeria's experience stands in contrast to the managed off-cycle moments witnessed in India and Kenya, where courts and electoral commissions have generally succeeded in re-embedding exceptional elections within a broader framework of institutional legitimacy (Barkan, 2019). The persistence and structural entrenchment of off-cycle elections in Nigeria rather than their eventual resolution and re-synchronization is the distinguishing feature that points to a fundamentally different institutional trajectory, one in which the corrective mechanisms of democracy have themselves become sources of democratic pathology (Pierson, 2020; Madueke, 2025).

The moderate support for constitutional re-synchronization (item 15, mean = 3.25) suggests that public recognition of the problem does not automatically generate political will for structural reform, a finding consistent with Foucault's (1980) insight that the production of legitimate discourse about institutional dysfunction does not in itself disrupt the power relations that sustain it. Reform, in this analysis, requires not only technical solutions but a fundamental restructuring of the incentive structures that make off-cycle elections attractive to political elites.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusion

This study has established that off-cycle governorship elections, initially introduced as judicial correctives to electoral fraud, have become one of the most destabilizing structural features of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Rather than reinforcing constitutionalism, they have entrenched the judicialization of politics, exposed the chronic institutional weakness of INEC,

granted incumbents unfair advantages, escalated electoral violence and malpractice, and profoundly eroded public faith in the democratic process. The empirical evidence from Kogi, Imo, Bayelsa, and Ekiti, marked by excellent scale reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87–0.93$) and statistically significant inter-state variation ($F = 12.41–17.03$, $p < .001$), reveals that citizens in states with the most traumatic histories of judicial reversals and disputed polls (Imo and Kogi) express the deepest institutional disenchantment.

Theoretically, this study makes three contributions to the political science literature. First, it demonstrates empirically that judicialization of politics, as theorized by Hirschl (2008), operates in Nigeria not merely as a procedural phenomenon but as a mechanism through which electoral sovereignty is systematically transferred from citizens to courts, undermining Habermasian communicative legitimacy and producing the kind of symbolic dispossession theorized by Bourdieu (1989). Second, it shows how Institutional Theory's concept of path dependency (North, 1990; Pierson, 2020) applies with particular force to Nigeria's off-cycle elections: once entrenched through judicial decisions, these elections have proved highly resistant to reform, even in the face of sustained public criticism and formal constitutional amendment efforts. Third, the comparative dimension of the analysis situating Nigeria's experience alongside India, Kenya, and Brazil demonstrates that the structural entrenchment of off-cycle elections is not an inevitable feature of emerging democracies but a product of specific institutional failures that are, in principle, amenable to reform.

Until the electoral calendar is constitutionally re-synchronized, INEC and the judiciary are granted genuine autonomy, and specialized electoral offences institutions are created, off-cycle elections will continue to undermine governance stability and democratic consolidation, not only in Nigeria but in other emerging democracies facing similar institutional fragilities. The study's most consequential finding is perhaps the most politically uncomfortable: the moderate support for constitutional re-synchronization signals that awareness of structural pathology does not automatically generate the political will necessary to overcome it. Immediate, bold reforms are not optional; they are imperative for restoring the primacy of the ballot box.

6.2. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing analysis, this study proposes the following evidence-based recommendations:

i. **Constitutional Re-synchronization:** The National Assembly should amend Section 180 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) and relevant provisions of the Electoral Act 2022 to return all governorship elections to a single national cycle by 2031, with staggered tenure adjustments (shortening or extending some terms by up to one year) where necessary. This measure directly addresses the structural incumbency advantages documented in this study;

ii. **Dedicated Electoral Justice Institutions:** A specialized Electoral Offences Commission and Electoral Offences Tribunal, separate from the conventional judiciary, should be created and funded on a first-line charge basis. This would reduce the burden on ordinary courts, expedite petition resolution, and insulate judges from the intense political pressures that currently fuel perceptions of judicial partisanship;

iii. **INEC Institutional Reform:** INEC must be granted full financial and administrative autonomy through direct charging of its budget to the Consolidated Revenue Fund, with permanent professional staffing replacing the current reliance on ad-hoc personnel, and sustained investment in technology and logistics. These reforms are prerequisites for the delivery of credible elections that can withstand judicial scrutiny;

iv. **Judicial Specialization and Independence:** The National Judicial Council should establish a dedicated Election Petition Division within the Court of Appeal and Supreme Court, staffed by judges with specialized training in electoral law, with strengthened tenure security and transparent appointment processes to reduce the vulnerability of judicial appointments to political pressure;

v. **Civic Education and Voter Mobilization:** Civil society organizations, INEC, and the National Orientation Agency should implement sustained, state-specific civic education programmes in Kogi, Imo, Bayelsa, and Ekiti, with special emphasis on youth and women as agents of democratic renewal. These programmes should directly address voter fatigue, declining institutional trust, and the normalization of vote-buying;

vi. **Media Accountability:** Nigerian regulatory authorities and civil society should promote sustained investigative media coverage of off-cycle elections to replicate the accountability-enhancing effects of national electoral scrutiny, thereby reducing the conditions under which malpractice flourishes.

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ARTICLE

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FROM SURFACE HAZARDS TO STRUCTURAL ROOTS: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BARANGAY TANDANG SORA, QUEZON CITY WASTE WORKERS

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Abstract

Waste work is vital to urban sanitation and public health yet remains stigmatized and undervalued within labor systems. While earlier studies examined waste management through a historical lens, this study builds on contemporary Philippine research by applying an intersectionality lens to analyze the lived experiences of waste workers in Barangay Tandang Sora, Quezon City. Using qualitative methods including ethnographic immersion (*pakikipamuhay*), interviews, site visits, and transect walks, the research documents occupational hazards, gendered labor divisions, and systemic neglect. Workers earn ₱9,500/month with uncertain employment status and limited access to health benefits, while facing exposure to contaminated waste, road accidents, and social discrimination. Thematic analysis and case study methods reveal how overlapping identities such as socioeconomic status, gender, and employment type, shape vulnerability. Applying the PESTEL framework, the study identifies macro-level forces including political neglect, economic precarity, technological gaps, and weak legal protections. These findings are further interpreted through the Iceberg Model, which uncovers internalized oppression and societal mental models that normalize exploitation. The study demonstrates that waste workers' immediate concerns are embedded in broader structural dynamics, aligning with Mills' concept of personal troubles as public issues. It recommends community-based interventions, stronger government accountability, and comparative research to inform policy reforms. By documenting these realities, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of intersectional labor marginalization and advocates for the recognition and protection of waste workers as vital contributors to public health and urban resilience.

Keywords

Intersectionality; Occupational Hazard; Sociological Imagination; Waste Work

1. INTRODUCTION

Waste is one of the most important, albeit overlooked aspects of social life. The importance of this field was recognized by early medical doctors through studies on morbidity and mortality, wherein the belief was that urban excess mortality was due to the cumulative effects of [a] contaminated ground saturated with putrefying waste and of the human and animal density (Barles 2014). The rapid industrialization and urbanization of the 19th century brought about not only economic upheavals, but also exposed health and environmental issues due to the deleterious conditions of cities with excessive waste generation, on top of the lack of proper waste management systems. Throughout the 19th century, efforts to rectify and improve the unsanitary conditions of highly urbanized cities, specifically in Europe focused on decreasing air putrefaction through improved ground covering, better management of human urban excreta, universalized sweeping and cleaning, and improved distribution of [waste management] services (idem).

This propelled waste management to become a formal occupation and essential public service. However, scholars later noticed that works related to urban waste disposal and management were disproportionately done by marginalized sectors in society. Thus, research on waste work began to develop from biomedical perspectives into more nuanced sociological and intersectional analyses. In his work, Good People and Dirty Work (1962), Everette Hughes coined the concept of "dirty work" which describes occupations that involve tasks considered as degrading or unpleasant but are in fact essential to societies focusing on key themes of collective identity among workers in stigmatized occupations. His work provided the foundations critically examining the complex occupational identities and societal perceptions shaping the experiences of those in stigmatized roles, and in the context of this study, the waste workers.

Presently, there are several studies exploring the lived experiences of waste workers; particularly in Puerto Princesa City, in the province of Palawan (Nicanor et. al. 2021); in the municipality of Cardona, in the province of Rizal (Estonanto 2024); and in the City of Baguio, in the Cordillera Administrative Region (Hermocilla 2025). These studies examined the problems faced by waste workers, their coping strategies, and highlighted insights through the Biopsychosocial framework proposed by George Engel (1977) which focused on the topic of health outcomes shaped by the intersection of three main factors: biological, psychological, and social. Aside from the waste workers' perceptions of their health and resilience, the latter studies (Hermocilla 2025; Estonanto 2024) also highlighted problems faced by waste workers such as occupational hazards, experience of social stigma, and their coping strategies.

The present study contributes to the scholarly inquiry into the lived experiences of waste workers, particularly those in Barangay Tandang Sora, Quezon City, who provide services under its Clean and Green Department. By narrowing its scope to this specific community and

institutional arrangement, the study acknowledges that its findings are limited to localized practices and contexts.

Building on this defined scope, the study's significance lies in situating these localized experiences within the broader urban challenges of Quezon City, wherein, the 2023 Metropolitan Manila Development Authority's (MMDA) report on solid waste generation showed that Quezon City generates about 1,200 – 1,500 tons of waste daily or roughly about 438,000 – 547,500 tons of waste annually. In contrast to the earlier works of Nicanor et. al. (2021), Estanto (2024) and Hermocilla (2025) which examined smaller municipalities or individual cities in the regions, this research builds on the absence of localized inquiry into the lived experiences of waste workers in one of the cities in the country's most urbanized and densely populated metropolitan centers.

Moreover, the present study also contributes to the theoretical gap in the understanding of waste workers' experiences. Foundational literature has largely examined waste work from a macro perspective, emphasizing its role in public service and sanitation, while more contemporary studies have shifted toward micro-level analyses that foreground the lived experiences and daily challenges of waste workers. This study bridges that gap by integrating a meso-level perspective, analyzing the experiences of waste workers in Barangay Tandang Sora from their individually nuanced realities to their collective experiences as a community, and further to the structural factors that shape these experiences. As C. Wright Mills (1959) posited, the goal of sociological imagination is to perceive the intersection of personal troubles and public issues. In this regard, the field study enabled the researchers to understand the personal troubles of waste workers through in-depth understanding of their nuanced experiences and to identify the public issues of social structures faced by the sector. This layered approach is integral to advancing a more comprehensive understanding of waste work, situating the individual narratives within the broader social, institutional, and structural contexts that define the sector.

In this regard, this study intended to (a) examine the lived experiences of waste workers in Barangay Tandang Sora, Quezon City engaged as service providers under the Clean and Green Department; (b) analyze the challenges they encounter at the community level; and (c) investigate the structural mechanisms shaping the waste work sector in the context of Barangay Tandang Sora.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research design that combined elements of ethnography and case study to capture the lived experiences of waste workers from personal to collective. To achieve these aims, the study employed a three-layered analytical approach that integrates micro, meso, and macro perspectives. While previous studies emphasized functionalist and biomedical perspectives at the macro level, and more contemporary research works shifted toward micro-level analyses or lived experiences at the individual

level, this study synthesizes both approaches by employing the Intersectionality Framework (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2015) at the micro-level lens, the PESTEL framework at the meso-level lens (Aguilar 1967), and the Iceberg Model (Hall 1976) at the macro-level lens, thereby bridging the scales of analysis to synthesize and contextualize the experiences of waste workers in Barangay Tandang Sora.

First, at the micro-level lens, the Intersectionality framework which was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) described how women of color experience compounded forms of oppression that cannot be understood through sexism or racism alone. This framework was later developed by Patricia Hills Collins (2015) as an analytical strategy for examining the mutual construct of power relations and social inequalities. In the context of this study, the waste workers were profiled through the varying intersectional identities that they are experiencing and how these individual identities overlap with their identity as a waste worker and the compounded challenges they faced along at the center of this intersectional identity.

Second, at the meso-level lens, the study focuses on the barangay community level, wherein, it is the smallest administrative unit in the Philippines and serves as a frontline of local governance. Waste workers in barangays are typically employed under units or departments such as the clean and green and their arrangements typically fall under job orders (JO) or contract of service (COS), which are temporary positions engaged in a specific duration with potential for renewal but does not guarantee stable employment and does not provide full employee benefits such as health insurance of social security. In order to shed the light on the challenges experienced by waste workers of Barangay Tandang Sora, Quezon City, the study utilized the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal (PESTEL) Framework first developed by Harvard professor Francis Aguilar (1967) initially to serve as an environmental scanning model but later became widely adopted as a tool in strategic planning and risk management in project development to organize these challenges into a coherent analytical structure and to make sense of how multiple community-level forces shape the conditions of waste work.

Lastly, at the macro-level lens, the study employs the Iceberg Model of analysis, first developed by Edward T. Hall (1976) as a metaphorical illustration in understanding culture and how visible events are only the surface of deeper levels of systemic patterns, invisible structures, and entrenched mental models. The model was used in the context of this study to provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences faced by the waste workers of Barangay Tandang Sora, Quezon City through situating their lived realities to the structural roots influencing the waste work sector.

In analyzing the findings through a layered perspective from micro to meso to macro-level analysis, this study contributes not only to the sociology of work but also to environmental and urban studies by demonstrating how waste work is embedded in overlapping structures of health, governance, and social inequality. The study contributes empirically by synthesizing the lived realities of the waste workers of Barangay Tandang Sora

through field-based evidence through ethnographic immersion (*pakikipamuhay*) with structural inequalities embedded in the sector of waste work.

Table 1. Waste Worker's Profile

Participant	Age	Gender	Educational Attainment	Civil Status	Family Background
1	50	M	High School Level	Married	Father of 2
2	40	F	College Level	Single, but living with a partner	Mother of 2
3	46	F	High School Graduate	Separated	Living with Extended Family, Mother of 3
4	31	F	High School Level	Single, but living with a partner	Mother of 5
5	49	F	High School Graduate	Married	Living with Extended Family, Mother of 4
6	36	F	High School Graduate	Married	Mother of 4
7	76	F	Elementary Graduate	Widowed	Living with Extended Family
8	33	F	High School Level	Single, but living with a partner	Same-sex gender identifying individual
9	56	F	Elementary Graduate	Separated	Living with Extended Family, Mother of 5

The study was conducted in Barangay Tandang Sora, Quezon City, Philippines, in coordination with the barangay-level local government unit, specifically its Clean and Green Department. A total of ten (10) participants were interviewed, with one (1) being the Team Leader of the Department, categorically as a barangay worker, and nine (9) waste workers.

To capture the profile of the waste workers, the Team Leader was interviewed and it was found that she oversees 30 waste workers under this department. The waste worker's employment status or category was through a Job Order (JO) which is a temporary status that is being renewed for a specific period or duration every six (6) months. The waste workers net salary is PHP 9,500 monthly and their shift is flexible between the schedules of Monday to Saturday.

Amongst the 30 waste workers under the department, nine (9) willingly participated in the one-on-one interview, as shown in the table 1 above. The participants ranged in age from

their early thirties to mid-seventies, reflecting a mix of younger and older individuals engaged in waste work. The group was predominantly female, with eight (8) women and only one (1) male participant. In terms of educational attainment, most had reached the high school level, either as graduates or undergraduates, while two (2) had completed only elementary education and only one (1) had some college experience but eventually dropped out. Civil status varied, including married, separated, widowed, and single but in a cohabiting arrangements, indicating diverse household structures while their family backgrounds revealed that several participants were mothers supporting multiple children, and many lived with extended families, suggesting strong kinship ties and shared domestic responsibilities that influence their social and economic conditions. Notably, three (3) out of nine (9) waste workers stated that it is not enough to support their needs with one particularly advocating for a salary increase. All the waste workers interviewed were unable to indicate any existing programs or medical or health insurance created particularly for their job. Despite this, nine (9) waste workers noted the importance of safety and sanitary equipment, and five (5) mentioned they resort to prayer in seeking guidance and protection against diseases and accidents.

Meanwhile, The data gathering strategy employed was through the following; (1) semi-structured interview with the waste workers; and (2) immersion (*pakikipamuhay*) wherein the researchers were exposed and experienced the day-to-day realities of the waste workers for two (2) weeks; and (3) site visits and transect walks, to observe the physical and social conditions of the workplace, as well as transect walks that allowed for systematic direct observation of daily routines, hazards, and coping practices. These methods were employed to provide a holistic account of waste workers' realities, integrating both collective cultural insights and individual life histories.

Consistent with the study's qualitative design, the data analysis integrates methods that allow both micro-level and macro-level insights to emerge from the field.

Firstly, in order to understand the nuances in their experience, each participant's lived experiences were treated as a separate case study and provided contextualized accounts of individual workers' intersecting identities and vulnerabilities.

Secondly, thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns across interviews and observations (cf. Gustaffson 2017) wherein the responses of the participants from the semi-structured interview were coded until the main themes emerge focusing on the challenges experienced by the waste workers. To further structure and interpret the findings, planning tools such as situational, objective, and alternative analyses were applied, alongside the PESTEL framework (Aguilar 1967) to situate experiences within broader external forces. Stakeholder analysis complemented these methods by mapping the roles and risks of key actors in the sector. To identify the root causes and effects of challenges within the waste work sector, the researchers concentrated on a single priority problem selected from the range of issues faced by workers. This priority concern was determined using the Problem Ranking Tool, which enabled systematic comparison and evaluation of the most pressing

problems. From this process, nine root causes were identified through critical analysis of the waste workers' central difficulties. Coding was conducted inductively, with themes emerging from repeated patterns in interview transcripts and field notes. Examples of themes included "lack of protective equipment," "gendered division of labor," and "uncertainty of employment status." Validation was ensured through triangulation of data sources (interviews, immersion, site visits), peer debriefing among researchers, and comparison of worker-identified problems with macro-level analyses. Afterwards, the PESTEL framework was applied to situate workers' micro-level experiences within broader macro-level contexts, identifying political neglect, economic precarity, social invisibility, technological limitations, environmental hazards, and weak legal protections.

Lastly, the Iceberg Model was then used to interpret the difference between the results of the problem-ranking tool identified by the waste workers and the PESTEL analysis. While the problem-ranking captured workers' immediate perceptions, the Iceberg Model revealed deeper systemic forces that remain invisible in daily life. Together, these frameworks provided a layered understanding of how occupational hazards are embedded in structural and cultural dynamics.

Reflexivity was central to the research process. The researchers critically reflected on their positionality, cultural background, and the influence of immersion (*pakikipamuhay*) on data collection and interpretation. Direct engagement with waste workers in their natural work environment fostered relational understanding but also required awareness of potential biases in interpreting lived experiences. Reflexive journaling and team discussions were used to mitigate these biases and ensure that findings authentically represented participants' voices.

To maintain its integrity, this study adhered to established ethical standards in qualitative research to ensure the dignity, safety, and rights of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all waste workers prior to participation, with clear explanations of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by securing interview transcripts and removing identifying details from case narratives. Given the sensitivity of lived experiences and intersecting identities, the researchers practiced respectful engagement during immersion (*pakikipamuhay*), site visits, and interviews, ensuring that participants were not exposed to harm or undue pressure. Reflexivity was emphasized, with researchers critically reflecting on their positionality and potential biases throughout the data collection and analysis process. Moreover, the study followed the principle of beneficence, aiming to contribute positively by informing policy reforms and community development initiatives that uphold the fundamental rights of waste workers as members of the labor force and a marginalized sector.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study adhered to criteria of credibility and reliability. Credibility was strengthened through the use of multiple data gathering tools, including one-on-one interviews, immersion, site visits, and transect walks. Reliability was ensured by

employing both Situation Analysis, which reflected workers' own perceptions of their problems, and PESTEL analysis, which revealed underlying systemic forces. Comparing and contrasting these perspectives allowed for a more rigorous interpretation of findings. Dependability was supported through documentation of analytic procedures, while confirmability was addressed by maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions and analytic memos.

3. RESULTS

The results of the study revealed several major themes that emerged from the data gathered through interviews and observations. These include: (1) the individual experiences and challenges faced by the Barangay Tandang Sora waste workers; (2) the working environment and conditions encountered at the community level; and (3) the overarching themes that shape the realities of waste workers through the lens of the PESTEL Framework.

3.1. *Experiences & Challenges faced by the Waste Workers*

A total of nine waste workers were interviewed, and each participant's narrative was treated as an individual case. Their intersectional identities were analyzed using Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework. The thematic analysis revealed overlapping identities, such as gender, age, civil status, and educational background that shaped distinct vulnerabilities and coping strategies. Across cases, recurring themes included precarious employment, health risks, and feelings of uncertainty. However, these experiences varied depending on intersecting factors; for instance, women with dependent children emphasized the burden of balancing domestic responsibilities with hazardous work, while older workers highlighted physical strain and lack of social protection.

The experiences and challenges faced by the waste workers revealed eight major themes:

a. Gender-based Issues

Participants described how their roles as workers often overlapped with their responsibilities as parents. Female participants, in particular, experienced multiple burdens of performing household chores alongside their paid work. Many also cared for aging parents, grandchildren, or other dependents, reinforcing gender stereotypes that expect women to manage domestic duties despite employment. Male participants, by contrast, did not report similar dual burdens.

Notably, one of the respondents also highlighted that she worked as a waste worker after she had to separate from her partner due his drug addiction which caused the participant to experience domestic abuse. In order to remove herself from this situation, this participant left her partner and had to work as a waste worker to sustain herself.

b. Teenage Pregnancy

A recurring theme among participants was teenage pregnancy, which disrupted educational attainment and contributed to intergenerational cycles of poverty. One participant noted that her daughter also became a teenage mother, forcing her to care for both her child and grandchild. Instead of retiring, she continued working as a waste worker to sustain her family.

c. Educational Attainment

Low educational attainment emerged as a major barrier to employment mobility. Several participants attributed their entry into waste work to limited schooling and lack of formal qualifications. One respondent, previously employed as a saleslady, left her job due to pregnancy and later joined the waste work sector to contribute to household expenses while raising her children.

d. Socioeconomic Status

All participants identified low socioeconomic status as their primary challenge. They expressed dissatisfaction with low wages, job insecurity, and lack of health or retirement benefits. Financial distress was a constant concern, reflecting structural inequities in labor conditions for contractual workers.

e. Attitudes & Perceptions

Participants often expressed feelings of fear and low self-esteem associated with the stigmatized nature of waste work. Despite recognizing the environmental importance of their labor, they internalized negative social perceptions, referring to themselves as "merely" waste workers. This self-depreciating view highlights the social invisibility of their contribution to urban sanitation.

f. Health Concerns

Health issues were prevalent among participants due to the physical demands and exposure inherent in waste work. One participant described washing thoroughly before holding her infant grandchild to prevent infection. Another, a senior citizen, reported persistent physical strain but continued working because she could not afford to retire.

g. Religion

Participants discussed feelings of religious alienation stemming from the hardships of daily life. Although some expressed diminished faith, they maintained positive attitudes and moral resilience, viewing perseverance as a form of spiritual endurance.

h. Diskarte Mentality & Resilience Culture

All the participants emphasized their perseverance and resilience which is culturally referred to as having a '*diskarte'* mentality despite their unfortunate situation both in their personal challenges and in the challenges that intersect in their work as waste

workers. This resilience was a recurring theme amongst the participants regardless of any social characteristics such as gender, age, or educational attainment and their perceived being waste workers as part of their effort or *diskarte* to contribute to the sustenance of their family.

3.2. *Working Environment & Conditions faced by the Waste Workers*

The interview conducted with nine (9) waste workers aimed to elicit their lived experiences in the sector, specifically to gain a deeper understanding of their working environment and conditions, particularly, the challenge they faced at the community-level.

Major findings show that due to the nature of their work and their working environment, they encounter various difficulties. Two (2) waste workers noted road accidents as they were tasked to sweep along the main roads of Tandang Sora. While five (5) of them expressed concerns about health hazards as their work exposes them to hazardous waste, which may harm them as they come into contact with sharp objects or wastes possibly contaminated with chemicals, viruses, and diseases like the COVID-19 virus, especially during the pandemic. Furthermore, as their work involves unclogging blocked and polluted waterways, such as creeks, rivers, and canals, they are also exposed to infections that may lead to high-risk diseases such as typhoid fever, leptospirosis, etc. Due to the nature of waste work, workers also experience discrimination in the form of mockery and unjust treatment from others. In order to combat such hazards to their health and safety, all of the interviewed waste workers highlighted the importance of safety and sanitary equipment, such as gloves, masks, alcohol, and PPEs. On the other hand, five (5) mentioned how they resort to prayer for guidance and protection against risks associated with their work, such as diseases and accidents. When asked, the waste workers were not aware of any existing programs or medical or health insurance designed to protect their sector's welfare and security.

Meanwhile, the transect walk in Barangay Tandang Sora, conducted as part of ethnographic immersion (*pakikipamuhay*) and direct observation, allowed the researchers to follow the routes of street sweepers and document the physical conditions, hazards, and challenges they face in their daily work. The walk revealed that waste workers are exposed to multiple risks across street sweeping, creek cleaning, and garbage collection, including unsafe roads and sidewalks, dangling electrical cables, sharp debris, contaminated waste, heavy lifting, and traffic-related accidents. These findings demonstrate the multi-dimensional hazards inherent in waste work and emphasize the precariousness of the sector, underscoring the urgent need for stronger protective measures, improved infrastructure, and more responsive policy interventions to safeguard worker health and safety.

3.3. *Emerging Sectoral Issues faced by Waste Workers*

The results reveal that the most pressing concern among waste workers in Barangay Tandang Sora is their high exposure to health hazards, including diseases, illnesses, and accidents. This concern was the most frequently identified by the waste workers, followed by low salary, long working hours, and public discrimination. Waste workers reported that their frequent contact with waste materials and roadside work exposes them to infections and physical risks, which also affect their families' well-being. Interestingly, while low wages were acknowledged, most of the participants viewed their work as a voluntary means to supplement household income rather than their primary source of livelihood. These findings highlight that health and safety risks are the most significant and recurring challenges within the sector.

Furthermore, the participants identified being prone to illness and disease stems from several root causes, including low minimum wage, lack of health insurance, insufficient supply of personal protective equipment (PPEs), and absence of hazard pay. Other contributing factors include workplace health hazards, poor waste management practices, and lack of policies specific to the waste work sector. These conditions lead to severe effects such as poor living and health conditions, family vulnerability to diseases, and discrimination against waste workers. Overall, the results show that the sector's health and safety issues are deeply rooted in structural neglect and inadequate occupational protection.

4. DISCUSSION

In line with the aims of this study to understand the lived experiences of the waste workers of Barangay Tandang Sora, Quezon City through a micro, meso, and macro level, the study highlighted the following: (1) the individual realities of the waste workers through the intersectionality framework; (2) the community realities of the waste workers through the PESTEL framework; and lastly, (3) the sectoral realities of waste work through the Iceberg Model of Analysis. First, the major dimensions that emerged from the identified intersectionalities were the Gender, Socioeconomic Status, and Education.

In terms of Gender and Sexuality, the gendered composition of the sector adds a further dimension. Eight of the nine workers interviewed showed that despite being categorized as a type of physical labor work, women in fact dominate waste workers in Tandang Sora, Quezon City. However, the women are often tasked with sweeping or garbage collecting, while trucking (accompanying garbage trucks in collection) are assigned to men. This observation extends Nicanor et al.'s (2021) findings in Puerto Princesa, which documented gendered divisions of labor in waste management. It also expands Simpson et al.'s (2014) analysis of meaning-making in dirty work, which did not foreground gender. In this context, women's predominance in waste work intensifies vulnerability, as they face both occupational hazards and cultural devaluation of their labor.

While the participants highlighted their lack of educational attainment as the factor for engaging in waste work, it was also notable that they were unable to access education due to

various reasons including poverty, lack of parental guidance, and teenage pregnancy among others. This dynamic shows a cyclical relationship wherein their waste work was due to lack socioeconomic hardship leading to poor educational outcomes which in turn exacerbates their financial instability due to low wage and job insecurity. This is relative to the dimension of socioeconomic status, wherein the participants highlighted concerns including health, safety and security, and compensation. Workers interpret these struggles as personal problems, yet Mills' (1959) sociological imagination shows that such issues are embedded in larger social structures. The tendency to view inadequate PPEs or low wages as isolated misfortunes reflects how systemic neglect is internalized as individual hardship. This pattern resonates with the previous studies, wherein, Hermocilla (2025) documented wage insecurity and lack of benefits among waste workers in Cardona, while Estonanto (2024) highlighted similar vulnerabilities in Baguio City. By situating Quezon City within this broader pattern, the present study extends the geographic scope of Philippine labor scholarship. It demonstrates that waste workers across diverse urban contexts share common struggles, reinforcing the need for national policy attention.

Second, in terms of community realities, working environment and everyday conditions emerged as the main concern of the waste workers in Barangay Tandang Sora. Participants consistently identified the lack of personal protective equipment (PPEs) and exposure to health risks as their most pressing concerns. These concerns represent their immediate micro-reality, reflecting the daily risks they face in performing their tasks. The prioritization of PPEs and occupational safety underscores the workers' awareness of the tangible hazards that directly affect their well-being, such as exposure to illness, accidents, and unsafe working conditions. This micro-level perspective highlights the vulnerability of waste workers to health risks and the absence of sufficient employer-provided protections.

These findings confirm Hughes' (1958) and Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) concept of "dirty work," where stigma is not only symbolic but materially embodied in unsafe and hazardous tasks. The prioritization of PPEs underscores how stigma translates into tangible occupational risks, reinforcing the marginalization of workers. Moreover, economic precarity (i.e., being hired at a temporary position as job order), social invisibility (i.e., the low self-esteem and self-perception as waste workers), technological limitations (i.e., lack of protective equipment and funds for the department), environmental hazards, and weak legal protections (i.e., as job order hires, waste workers lack tenure security or socioeconomic benefits unlike permanent employees) collectively shape the sector. These findings echo Durkheim's (1982) insight that waste management is essential for social stability. Yet the neglect of waste workers undermines this function, creating a paradox where society depends on waste workers for public health and order, but simultaneously devalues and marginalizes them.

The apparent contrast between the waste worker's perception towards their lived experiences and the more institutional forces shaping their realities are highlighted through the PESTEL Framework (Aguilar 1967). To understand the broader issues faced by waste

workers, their lived realities must be situated within wider structural forces. While workers often identify immediate concerns such as inadequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and health risks, the PESTEL analysis reveals that these micro-level struggles are embedded in macro-level dynamics, including political neglect, economic precarity, social invisibility, technological gaps, environmental hazards, and weak legal protections. Applying this framework allows the study to move beyond individual accounts and highlight how systemic structures perpetuate vulnerability in the waste work sector.

Political

Waste workers are excluded from comprehensive labor protections despite the existence of laws such as the *Ecological Solid Waste Management Act (RA 9003)* and the *Occupational Safety and Health Law (RA 11058)*. While these policies mandate the provision of PPEs and safe working conditions, their coverage often excludes local government employees, leaving waste workers vulnerable. This political neglect reflects weak enforcement and a lack of accountability from government institutions.

Economic

Workers earn a fixed salary of ₱9,500 per month, which is below the minimum wage in Metro Manila. This income is insufficient to cover basic needs such as food, rent, utilities, and education, leaving no room for savings. The absence of hazard pay, despite exposure to risks during pandemics or natural disasters, further entrenches economic precarity. Waste work is perceived as "low-value" labor, reinforcing segmentation between "good" and "bad" jobs and limiting upward mobility.

Social

The sector is marked by internalized oppression and the romanticization of "Filipino resilience." Workers often normalize exploitation, expressing gratitude for employment despite unsafe conditions and inadequate compensation. Gender division of labor is also evident: women carry the dual burden of productive and reproductive work, while men are expected to lead in community roles. Issues such as domestic violence and paternal negligence further compound social vulnerabilities.

Technological

The lack of adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and mechanized support exposes workers to unnecessary risks. Tasks such as creek cleaning and garbage collection are performed with minimal tools, often relying on thin gloves that fail to protect against sharp or contaminated waste. This technological gap reflects the absence of investment in occupational safety innovations.

Environmental

Waste workers operate in hazardous environments, including polluted creeks, damaged roads, and unsafe intersections. They are exposed to chemical waste, sharp debris, and fast-moving vehicles, all of which heighten risks of injury and illness. Their role in maintaining

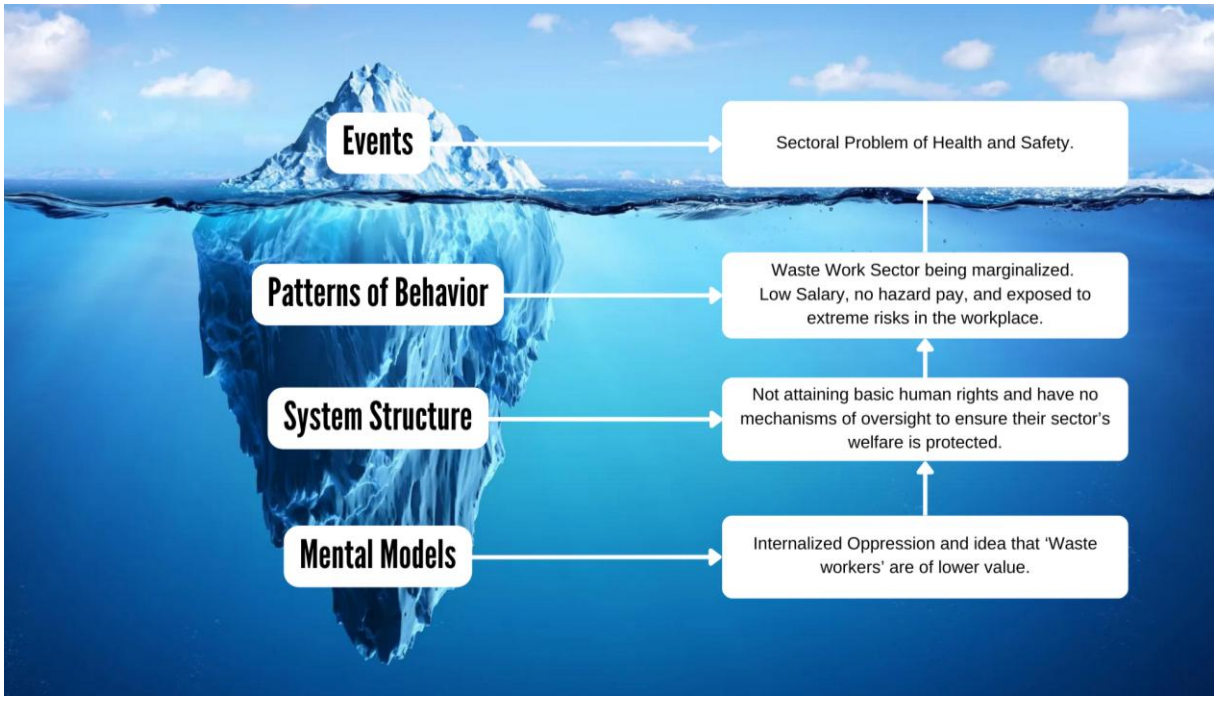
sanitation during disasters underscores their environmental importance, yet their safety remains compromised.

Legal

Despite international conventions such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)* and *CEDAW* affirming rights to fair wages, education, and protection against discrimination, waste workers remain deprived of these entitlements. Their lack of awareness of civil rights, combined with socioeconomic constraints, limits their ability to demand accountability. The legal framework thus fails to translate into tangible protections for this marginalized sector.

Overall, this showed that waste workers' immediate concerns, including low wages, lack of PPEs, and health risks, are inseparable from broader structural forces. Their experiences reflect Mills' (1959) concept of personal troubles embedded in public issues, showing how political neglect, economic precarity, social invisibility, technological gaps, environmental hazards, and weak legal protections converge to perpetuate systemic marginalization.

Figure 1. Iceberg Model Analysis of the Lived Experiences of Waste Workers in Brgy. Tandang Sora, Quezon City



Source: www.axenehp.com

Lastly, utilizing the Iceberg Model of Analysis, the most visible issue within the waste work sector is the prevalence of health and safety problems. However, beneath these surface-level concerns lie deeper root causes, including entrenched patterns of behavior, systemic structures that perpetuate vulnerability, and dominant societal mental models that normalize exploitation. Applying this analytical lens to the sector reveals that a prevailing mentality among waste workers is internalized oppression, reinforced by the perception that

their labor is of lower value in society. This mindset contributes to the denial of their basic human rights (United Nations 1948) and the absence of oversight mechanisms to safeguard their welfare. As a result, waste workers remain marginalized, earning wages below the minimum standard and lacking hazard pay despite daily exposure to extreme occupational risks. These conditions collectively manifest in the sectoral health and safety problems that are most apparent to external observers.

Overall, the findings suggest that the challenges faced by waste workers extend beyond what is immediately observable and are embedded in broader structural and cultural dynamics. While the present study does not claim to resolve these systemic issues, it aims to raise awareness of the intersectional vulnerabilities of the sector and to highlight the urgent need for prioritization. By documenting these realities, the research provides a foundation for future studies and policy interventions that can advance the welfare of waste workers and ensure that their contributions to public health and sanitation are recognized and protected.

5. CONCLUSION

This study directly responds to the absence of systematic inquiry into the lived experiences of waste workers in Quezon City, despite the city's scale, complexity, and centrality in the Philippines' urban landscape. Barangay Tandang Sora, as one of Quezon City's largest barangays, provides a critical site for examining how local governance structures, employment arrangements, and everyday working conditions intersect to shape occupational vulnerability. By employing ethnographic immersion and case study analysis, the research generated empirical evidence that foregrounds the voices of waste workers themselves, situating their narratives within broader sociological debates.

The findings revealed workers' immediate struggles such as lack of personal protective equipment (PPEs), exposure to health risks, and low wages, which cannot be understood in isolation. These micro-level realities are inseparable from systemic issues of political neglect, weak legal protections, and labor precarity. The study therefore advances the argument that intersectionality offers a critical lens for analyzing waste work, as overlapping identities and structural forces converge to produce compounded vulnerabilities.

Intersectionality, as articulated by Crenshaw (1989) and expanded by Collins (2015), emphasizes that social categories such as gender, class, and race do not operate independently but intersect to create unique forms of disadvantage. In the case of Barangay Tandang Sora, the predominance of women in waste work illustrates how gender intersects with economic precarity and social stigma. Women workers face not only occupational hazards but also cultural devaluation of their labor, reinforcing their invisibility within both policy frameworks and public discourse.

The ethnographic immersion revealed that waste workers internalize this marginalization, often perceiving their struggles as personal misfortunes rather than systemic injustices. Mills' (1959) concept of the sociological imagination is particularly

relevant here: workers interpret their lack of PPEs or low wages as individual problems, yet these are embedded in larger structures of governance, labor policy, and cultural attitudes. Intersectionality thus provides a framework for connecting these micro-level experiences to macro-level structures, demonstrating how vulnerability is produced at the intersection of gender, class, and institutional neglect.

By situating local evidence within global debates on dirty work, functionalism, and intersectionality, this study contributes empirically to both Philippine labor scholarship and international occupational sociology. Hughes (1958) first conceptualized "dirty work" as stigmatized labor involving tasks deemed unpleasant or degrading. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) later examined how workers construct positive identities despite stigma, while Simpson et al. (2014) highlighted meaning-making strategies in dirty work occupations. The Quezon City case extends these debates by showing how stigma is compounded by gendered divisions of labor and precarious employment arrangements under local government units.

Durkheim's (1982) insights into the role of waste management in sustaining social stability also resonate here. Waste is an inevitable byproduct of social and economic activity, and its proper management is essential for public health. Yet the neglect of waste workers undermines this function, revealing a paradox: society depends on waste workers for stability, but simultaneously devalues and marginalizes them. This contradiction underscores the need to reframe waste work not as peripheral or stigmatized labor, but as central to the functioning of urban life.

The evidence demonstrates that waste workers' marginalization is not simply a matter of inadequate equipment or wages. It is embedded in systemic governance failures and cultural mentalities that normalize exploitation. The PESTEL analysis revealed political neglect in the form of weak enforcement of labor protections, economic precarity due to low wages and insecure employment status, social invisibility reinforced by stigma, technological limitations in waste management systems, environmental hazards from unsafe disposal practices, and weak legal protections despite existing laws.

The Iceberg Model further illuminated how visible problems such as lack of PPEs are underpinned by deeper structures and mental models. Internalized oppression among workers reflects a cultural mentality that their labor is of lower value, contributing to the denial of basic rights. This mindset is reinforced by the absence of oversight mechanisms and the normalization of substandard working conditions. Addressing waste workers' struggles therefore requires not only material interventions but also cultural shifts that challenge societal devaluation of their labor.

Addressing these challenges requires both immediate interventions to improve occupational safety and broader policy reforms to secure labor rights. The study recommends three (3) key directions:

1. **Community-Based Interventions** – Targeted community development initiatives and wellness programs designed specifically for waste workers can

address immediate needs. These include provision of PPEs, health check-ups, and psychosocial support. Such interventions recognize waste workers as integral members of the community whose well-being directly impacts public health.

2. **Government Accountability Mechanisms** – Strengthening government accountability is essential to ensure compliance with existing labor and safety policies such as the *Ecological Solid Waste Management Act* (Republic Act No. 9003, 2000) and the *Occupational Safety and Health Law* (Republic Act No. 11058, 2018). Enforcement must go beyond formal legislation to include monitoring, sanctions for non-compliance, and participatory mechanisms that involve waste workers in decision-making.
3. **Comparative Academic Research** – For the academic community, conducting comparative research across cities and provinces can capture broader sectoral issues, particularly wage disparities and intersectional forms of discrimination. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of waste work in the Philippines, situating local evidence within global debates and advancing occupational sociology. Moreover, future research could move beyond descriptive accounts of neglect and engage critically with the structural forces that shape waste work. Specifically, studies can interrogate how the contractualization, outsourcing, and the erosion of social protection and how these produce precarious labor conditions for waste workers. Likewise, situating waste work within the political economy of waste highlights how capital accumulation, privatization of services, and uneven state responsibility perpetuate systemic inequalities. By embedding lived experiences within these broader frameworks, subsequent scholarship can illuminate both the moral dimensions of injustice but also the mechanisms of power that sustain it.

This study contributes empirically to Philippine labor scholarship by documenting the lived experiences of waste workers in Quezon City, a context previously overlooked. Existing studies in Puerto Princesa (Nicanor et al. 2021), Cardona (Hermocilla 2025), and Baguio City (Estonanto 2024) have highlighted occupational hazards and coping strategies, but their geographic scope is limited. By focusing on Quezon City, this research fills a critical gap and provides evidence that can inform both local policy and national debates on labor rights.

Moreover, the study advances intersectional analyses of marginalized work sectors in the Philippines. By highlighting how gender, class, and socioeconomic status intersect to shape vulnerability, it extends the scope of occupational studies beyond biomedical or functionalist perspectives. This contribution is particularly significant given the growing recognition of intersectionality as a framework for analyzing labor precarity in global contexts.

Beyond the Philippine context, the study contributes to international occupational sociology by extending debates on dirty work and labor precarity. It demonstrates that stigma and marginalization are not universal but are shaped by local governance structures, cultural attitudes, and employment arrangements. The predominance of women in waste work in Quezon City, for instance, challenges assumptions of male dominance in dirty work occupations and highlights the need for gender-sensitive analyses.

The study also underscores the importance of situating occupational hazards within broader systemic contexts. While lack of PPEs and low wages are immediate concerns, they are embedded in governance failures and cultural mentalities that normalize exploitation. This insight contributes to global debates on labor precarity, emphasizing that interventions must address both material conditions and structural inequalities.

In doing so, the study underscores the need to recognize waste workers not only as essential contributors to public health and sanitation, but also as a marginalized sector whose rights and dignity must be protected. Waste workers are indispensable to the functioning of urban life, yet their labor is devalued and their rights are neglected. Recognizing their contributions requires both symbolic and material interventions: symbolic recognition through public discourse and cultural shifts, and material recognition through improved wages, benefits, and protections.

This study addressed the research gap in Quezon City by providing empirical evidence on the lived experiences of waste workers in Barangay Tandang Sora. Through ethnographic immersion and case study analysis, the findings revealed that workers' immediate struggles with PPEs, health risks, and low wages are inseparable from broader systemic issues of political neglect, weak legal protections, and labor precarity. These results support the argument advanced in the introduction: that intersectionality provides a critical lens for understanding how overlapping identities and structural forces shape vulnerability in waste work.

By situating local evidence within global debates on dirty work, functionalism, and intersectionality, the study contributes empirically to both Philippine labor scholarship and international occupational sociology. The evidence demonstrates that waste workers' marginalization is not simply a matter of inadequate equipment or wages, but is embedded in systemic governance failures and cultural mentalities that devalue their labor. Addressing these challenges requires both immediate interventions to improve occupational safety and broader policy reforms to secure labor rights. In doing so, the study underscores the need to recognize waste workers not only as essential contributors to public health and sanitation, but also as a marginalized sector whose rights and dignity must be protected.

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ARTICLE

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BEYOND THE STATE: FRAGMENTED SOVEREIGNTY AND INFORMAL GOVERNANCE IN POST-CONFLICT NEPAL

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Abstract

Post-conflict societies frequently resist state-centric notions of governance and sovereignty as authoritative capacity often extends across and beyond the state across a range of formal and informal actors. This book addresses fragmented sovereignty and informal governance in post-conflict Nepal by examining Nepal as the principal focus of the study, rather than merely one more country used to illustrate governance debates. Post Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2006) Nepal has experienced dramatic political change, including its transformation from monarchy to federal democratic republic, major institutional restructuring and an engagement with perennial questions of inclusion and state legitimacy. Even so, governance in Nepal is defined by competing power brokers between and beyond the state which include, amongst others: state institutions, political parties, local elites, ethnic movements, civil society and external development agents, and international relations. Building on literature on governance, Political Economy, and Post-Conflict State building, I conceptualise fragmented sovereignty, and propose and test a Fragmented Sovereignty Model (FSM). By using a qualitative, single case-study based on the review of policy documents, institution reports and secondary literature I argue that the governance of contemporary Nepal, like other post-conflict states, cannot be accounted for using traditional state-centric perspectives. This book expands and enriches understanding of governance by viewing sovereignty not as a static concept but one which is continually renegotiated and negotiated in a complex, historically-attuned analytical framework.

Keywords

Fragmented Sovereignty; Informal Governance; Post-Conflict Nepal; Hybrid Governance; State Transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Governing in a 'complex political environment': informal authority and sovereignty in post-conflict Nepal, have increasingly undermined the traditional model of the state as a unified, territorially sovereign actor in many post-conflict countries. In such cases, a focus on the formal implementation of peace agreements and institutional change has failed to produce cohesive and stable systems of governance. Instead, authority and legitimate power are widely diffused amongst a host of state and non-state actors leading to overlapping systems of governance and competing sources of legitimacy (Mac Ginty, 2011; Richmond, 2014; Risse, 2011). Correspondingly, in many post-conflict states, scholars are moving away from state-centric approaches in favor of analyzing how hybrid political orders and negotiated authorities are negotiated.

As a key post-conflict case, Nepal has been one of the most dramatic political and governance transformations seen in South Asia after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2006 following over a decade of civil war. The monarchy was abolished and Nepal became a federal democratic republic as part of broader institutional changes. This transition process also saw political integration of former Maoist combatants, promulgation of a new constitution in 2015 and development of federal governance systems-these changes were aimed at addressing exclusion, increasing political representation and fostering democratic governance (Lawoti, 2010; Muni, 2014; Upreti, 2014). The post-conflict transformation in Nepal however did not result in the consolidation of singular and contested state sovereignty. Nepal continues to experience governing process characterized by political bargaining between parties, bureaucracy, local governments, ethnic and regional groups, development agencies, businesses and external forces.

While formal state capacity expanded, informal processes based on patronage and mediation continue to be key drivers of governance outcomes (Adhikari, 2014; Nightingale & Ojha, 2021). Many forms of influence and power therefore operate across informal channels that circumvent governmental structures. The continuation of informal governance does not simply reflect state failure; it points to a deeper process in the organization and deployment of political power that is found in many post-conflict states and which often serves crucial functions in political bargains, resource allocation, and conflict mediation when formal institutions are unable to do so effectively (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; Meagher, de Herdt, & Titeca, 2014).

As such, an analytic approach must take seriously this co-production of formal and informal authority in Nepal's post-conflict governance context. New understandings of sovereignty reject this bounded concept and consider it as relational, distributed and contested among multiple actors in different arenas (Krasner, 1999; Lund, 2016). This framework is especially helpful in analysing a post-conflict country like Nepal where

sovereignty is politically negotiated between various actors at various levels, ranging from the local government up to federal, as well as non-state actors including identity-based movements, development actors and regional geopolitical context.

1.2 Nepal Governance Literature and Research Gap

Numerous scholarly works have analyzed Nepal's post-conflict transition in various ways. One set of literature focuses on peacebuilding and conflict transformation, looking at how political violence is managed, how the country reconstructs after conflict, and how it builds democracy (Upreti, 2014; Thapa & Ramsbotham, 2017). This research has informed our understanding of how it was possible to transition Nepal from violent conflict to competitive, democratic politics.

A second strand of research explores federalism, inclusion, and state restructuring, analyzing how political reform, ethnic movements, and changes in government structures-the federal restructurings-attempted to respond to persistent inequalities and the demands of previously excluded groups for political inclusion (Lawoti, 2010; Hachhethu, 2014; Muni, 2014).

The restructuring of the state has reshaped Nepali governance, to be sure, these scholars say. A third vein of research focuses on political settlements, negotiations among political elites, and democratic governance. Studies show that Nepal's formal institutions still do not reflect actual governance-politics happens in parallel, informal structures negotiated by political parties and elites (Adhikari, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2021). We still observe patterns of patronage, elite bargaining and coalitional politics that shape Nepal's governance.

A fourth set of research examines local governance and community-level institutions, showing that local actors perform many governance functions traditionally the purview of the state.

Studies of local development initiatives, community- forestry projects, and participatory governance find authority to be increasingly diffuse and often collaboratively negotiated among state agencies, local communities, donors, and civil society organizations (Nightingale & Ojha, 2021). In sum, we have developed sophisticated research on various aspects of post-conflict transformation in Nepal-peacebuilding and conflict transformation; federalism, state restructuring and inclusion; political settlements, elite bargaining and democratic politics; and local governance. Yet, a critical research gap remains: Our research, like other work in the field, does not address the analytical relationship among these different processes or consider these dynamics through the lens of fragmented sovereignty.

Most existing studies analyze the various forms and processes of governance-such as, political settlements, state restructuring, informal institutions, and local governance-separately. They provide excellent accounts of how political actors attempt to govern in specific issue areas or how governance is mediated by formal state structures and/or informal

agreements; but they do not, typically, engage the theoretical question of how these numerous actors and institutions-formal and informal-share, negotiate and dispute sovereign authority in Nepal. While the literature has certainly begun to describe how state and non-state actors are involved in shared governance processes in Nepal, it generally overlooks the theoretical implication: this shared engagement results in a fragmented sovereign space.

In short, then, there is little scholarship on how politics of fragmented sovereignty has made these diverse governances possible in post-conflict Nepal.

1.3 Problem Statement

Though the governance landscape of Nepal has been subjected to institutional reform and reconstruction in the context of the transition in the post-2006 political system; competing sources of authority, multi-level and overlapping systems of governance, and continuations of political patronage through informal political networks continue to inform Nepal's governance arrangements. Contemporary state-centred models still lack the analytical capacity to account for these issues; for it presumes concentrated and authoritative rule located exclusively in state institutions alone, when in reality, governance arrangements respond to interactions between the political system, the state bureaucracy, local governance actors, social and political movements, development agencies, the private sector, and geopolitical actors. This gap between the presuppositions of governance frameworks and actual governance arrangements raises an analytical puzzle. Post-conflict models in Nepal may succeed to illuminate several dimensions of governance arrangements but fail to address how numerous actors in tandem wield their respective powers to shape Nepal's' emerging governance systems, raising demand for alternative governance models to better understand the governance in conditions of dispersed and contested power-based relationships.

1.4 Research Question

Our guiding research question is: What does fragmented sovereignty mean for governance in post-conflict Nepal? In answering this main question, this study also addresses three related subquestions:

(1) Which factors – institutional, political, social and international – explain the emergence of fragmented sovereignty in post-conflict Nepal?

(2) How is sovereignty negotiated between formal and informal political and non-state actors and their respective roles in authority creation and in the policy-making process?

(3) Under what conditions can we understand fragmented sovereignty as an analytical concept for post-conflict governance?

1.5 Research Objectives

This study addresses these research questions and seeks to:

(1) identify and explore the various institutional, political, social, and international sources of fractured sovereignty in Nepal's post-conflict context;

(2) to unpack and discuss the dynamics of interaction between the formal, state-based political order and various other non-state, local, and informal actors involved in the provision of governance, or a shadow of that governance.

(3) to develop and put into practice the Fragmented Sovereignty Model (FSM), as a useful framework for conceptualizing the relationship between the two different domains of authority; (4) to contribute to a wider theoretical understanding of how sovereignty, political order, and state transformation work within the context of fragile states post-conflict conditions.

1.6 Justification for the Fragmented Sovereignty Model (FSM)

In this study, I propose the FSM to address the limitations of existing theoretical models of governance. Existing analyses of state-building, political settlements, or the political economy of fragile states provide valuable insights on specific aspects of political order, but fail to adequately capture the complexities and multi-centric nature of authority and policy-making within hybrid governance systems. FSM, presented and defined in the subsequent chapter, conceives of sovereignty not as an inalienable, indivisible attribute of the state but as a dynamic and contested process that operates across informal and formal networks and institutions.

It identifies and conceptualises the various informal and formal networks of power and authority in a given territory and shows how and where sovereign claims are contested, distributed and/or made exclusive of others through complex social, political and institutional interactions between state, party and non-state actors (both legal and informal).

The proposed FSM thus uses the case of Nepal to identify how this notion works out in the practice of government in specific historical, social, and political context of a post-conflict society, making of Nepal the 'subject' rather than object of its analysis and placing the understanding of informality into the centre of the analysis.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study makes a novel contribution to the ongoing debates on governance. It aims at:(1) bringing fragmented sovereignty as an analytical framework for the study of post-conflict states and governance systems, (2) integrating disparate conceptual andempirical literatures on Nepal – peace, federalism, political settlements, civil society andinformality – into a new

framework for analysis and (3) offering insights that willbe useful for scholars, policy-makers and development practitioners. My overall argument is that state-based conceptualizations of governance alone cannot account for the intricacies of political process in post-conflict Nepal; an FSM is needed to understand how authority is fragmented across formal and informal structures of governance and by how various state and non-state actors engage with such processes in making and producing a given post-conflictpolitical order.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Global Literature: Fragile States, Hybrid Governance, Political Settlements, and Sovereignty

The state-building implications of post-conflict settings have also led to a lively debate about the nature of state authority, sovereignty and institutional legitimacy. State-building theorisation tends to assume that there must be central authority to organise politics and society in the defined territory of the state (Weber, 1978; Fukuyama, 2004).

From this perspective, the reason why such states are fragile is that they do not have sufficient state-level capacity to provide public goods or to enforce rules effectively.1 Many, though, are concerned that this framing does not adequately represent post-conflict realities, in which a number of forms of governance that involve state institutions, but also tribal institutions, religious authorities, civil society and political actors and external international actors coexist with the state to ensure some form of public provision or stability (North et al., 2009; Risse, 2011).

Governance arises through the interplay of manyactorsrather than solely through the authority of the state. This was the impetus for theory aroundhybrid governance and hybrid political orders(Boege et al. 2009; Mac Ginty, 2011). This literature highlights how governance takes place in a mix of formal, state institutions and informal, customary, religious and community level political authorities,and how those mixed, informal arrangementsare not to be seen as an interim phase in a process of constructing state governance, but a durable and important part of political order.

A related line of scholarship, the political settlement perspective, focuses on elite bargains and power-sharing arrangements as the drivers of political development.

A political settlement is described as a formal or informal agreement among a society's dominant elites that distributes resources and establishes conditions of access to and exclusion of the population from those resources (Khan, 2010). A number of scholars have found that the durability of politics has less to do with the strength of formal institutions and more to do with the nature of political settlements. Recent debates about sovereignty have also increasingly problematized the idea of state sovereignty.

Sovereignty is no longer conceived as unified and territorial, but is seen as fragmented, relational and negotiated (Krasner, 1999; Lund, 2016). This notion of sovereignty exists

through multiple layers of overlapping networks that include state institutions, but also other non-state actors both locally and internationally.

2.2 South Asian Literature: Governance and Authority in Nepal

Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India South Asia offers an excellent research location for exploring fragmented sovereignty and post-conflict governance because of the number of countries in the region that have experienced civil conflict, state restructuring and challenges to their sovereignty.

Afghanistan scholars argue that state institutions co-exist alongside tribal authorities, religious leaders, warlords and international actors in a complex governance system that frequently operates through informal channels as much as it does through formal state institutions (Barfield, 2010; Suhrke, 2011).

The legacy of Sri Lanka's civil conflict still shapes the country's post-war governance, which is marked by persistent tension between state authority, ethno-nationalist mobilisation, inclusion and accountability (Goodhand et al. 2011). Governance has not become less fractured since the end of the war. The political system in Pakistan is dominated by interaction among political and military institutions,religious authorities, tribal leaders and political networks of patronage; informality plays a critical role in how politics and governance operate (Jalal, 2014).

Studies of Indian governance document how federalism, but also political parties, patronage politics,caste networks and local governments shape authority arrangements (Chandra, 2004).

Indeed, it might even be argued that governance has always taken place through a variety of informal networks. Among the countries in South Asia, Nepal combines many of the features common across these countries: post-conflict transformation, federal re-organization, ethnic Mobilization and the impact of identity movements and external intervention. Critically, unlike the majority of these case studies, the experience of Nepal's military transition was by negotiation and resulted in democratic transition rather than extended military rule, thus making operation of fragmented sovereignty in post-conflict Nepal appear more like mainstream democracy in compared to both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

2.3 Literature on the Nepali case

Post-Comprehensive Peace Agreement 2006 A considerable proportion of the literature pertains to post-Comprehensive Peace Accord process of transition and peace-making following the conclusion of the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006. The analysis of how conflict transited into political participation and democratic reforms, the process of conflict

transformation etc. Appears common across a range of studies such as Upreti 2014 and Thapa and Ramsbotham 2017.

Federal Restructuring and State Transformation Many researchers provide accounts of the federal re-organization of Nepal. They argue that federalism aimed to address past exclusion and increase political participation.

However, studies also point to many challenges, such as co-ordination between central, regional and local levels and equitable distribution of resources. Local Governance with Increased role of municipalities Local government, in particular municipalities, has an important role to play after the 2006 CPA process. Researchers have shown the increased role of municipalities in development planning, democratic participation, and service delivery (e.g. Shrestha, 2020).

The impact of federalism varies significantly across the different regions of the country, however. Informal Institutions Formal governance practices are heavily supplemented by a range of informal political practices. From community forestry to dispute resolution and local civic organizations, there are a variety of informal institutions that often facilitate, shape and even substitute for formal governance practices (e.g. Nightingale and Ojha, 2021).

Patronage Politics and Elite Capture The operation of networks of patronage and the influence of elite groups in political decision-making are common features in Nepalese politics, involving political actors, bureaucracy and business interests (Adhikari, 2014). Indeed, the literature stresses how patronage,elite capture of state and local institutions impacts development, public service provision and accountability. Ethnic Mobilization and Identity Politics The period after the 2006 CPA saw numerous ethnic and regional mobilization initiatives, notably among the Janajati, Madhesi and Tharu ethnic groups and those associated with the identity-based political movement.

These movements have played a significant role in constitution making and the federal process and has influenced political decision-making and authority throughout Nepal (Lawoti, 2010).

While the above categories cover many important themes regarding Nepal, it remains rare for these themes to be combined in analysis of how fragmented sovereignty has been enacted and exercised

2.4 Critical Synthesis of Existing Literature

Author(s)	Focus	Key Findings	Limitation
Krasner (1999)	Sovereignty	Sovereignty is frequently contested and violated	Limited post-conflict application
Risse (2011)	Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood	Governance can occur beyond state institutions	Limited focus on Nepal

Author(s)	Focus	Key Findings	Limitation
Mac Ginty (2011)	Hybrid Governance	Formal and informal institutions coexist	Insufficient sovereignty analysis
Khan (2010)	Political Settlements	Elite bargains shape governance outcomes	Limited engagement with local governance
Lawoti (2010)	Federalism and Inclusion in Nepal	Identity politics reshaped state structures	Limited analysis of informal authority
Upreti (2014)	Nepal Peace Process	Peacebuilding transformed political institutions	Limited sovereignty perspective
Adhikari (2014)	Political Settlements in Nepal	Informal networks influence governance	Focused primarily on elite actors
Nightingale & Ojha (2021)	Informal Institutions	Community actors shape governance outcomes	Limited integration with sovereignty debates

The comparative review reveals that existing scholarship contributes valuable insights into individual dimensions of governance but lacks a comprehensive framework capable of integrating sovereignty, informal governance, and post-conflict transformation.

2.5 Research Gap and Need for the Fragmented Sovereignty Model (FSM)

In the following review of the literature, I will highlight three significant deficiencies. First, studies on global sovereignty demonstrate how states acquire, or lose, authority, yet offer little insight into how informal institutions contribute to governance decisions and results. Second, research into informal governance offers rich descriptions of the politics of patron-client networks, of local political order, and community power, without linking these to arguments about state sovereignty or transformation.

Third, the specialized scholarship of Nepal has offered significant insights on peace, federation, political settlement, local governance,elite power and identitypolitics, but typically has treated these themes independently of how they intersect in terms of authority relations.

Consequently, scholars have not produced an integrated model of authority with which to analyze the ways a variety of actors have sought to gain, exercise and manage governance responsibilities in post-conflict Nepal. The questions about authority were never what kind, if any, was vested in different entities in Nepal during the post-conflict period, but how the interplay between, interalia, formal institutions, informal structures, political elites, community representatives, identity-based political and civil society actors, international donors, and geopolitical actors has been contributing to governance decisions and the political outcomes. I have therefore constructed a set of the 18 months in question of a model of fragmented sovereignty. My intention was, however, to have built and to apply a concept

of "fragmented sovereignty" within which the post-war experiences in Nepal are not so much illustrative of a model, as they are foundational to its elaboration and application.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Core Theoretical Foundations

Explaining post-conflict fragmented sovereignty in Nepal necessitates an analytical frame which can make sense of how structural inequalities, dispersed powers and contested legitimacies play themselves out. Drawing not upon one particular theoretical perspective but from the analytical resources of Marxist political economy, Foucauldian governmentality and Gramscian hegemony, and in light of debates about political settlements, informal institutions and post-conflict governance in South Asia, this analysis uses the following set of analytical tools to develop an account of the making, negotiation and struggle over authority in formal and informal space.

Marxist Political Economy: Power, Class, and Political Settlements

Marxist political economy is that political power cannot be disembedded from the underlying economic basis and the distribution of resources (Harvey, 2010). They are not in view of the state as a neutral body but that structures of governance tend to reflect the interests of dominant societal and economic groups.In post conflict settings, restructuring of economy creates space for new power elite consolidation. And political settlements scholarship further extends this by pointing out that the outcome of governance is shaped by bargains between a political elite that controls access to resources and institutions (Khan, 2010). These settlements are frequently at both formal and informal levels.

Post-conflict governance has been significantly shaped by political settlements among significant parties, economic elites and state structures. After the CPA in 2006, although democratic transition has ended authoritarian rule, political elites have not lost their influence, and the form of governance has merely transformed, with patronage–clientage networks being prevalent through which political positions, procurement and other services are awarded, and development projects and other resources are allocated, creating fragmented sovereignty due not just to fragmentation but also the unequal division of economic power and political clout. This can help account for how such reforms to formal institution have not yielded inclusive governance, and the concentration of authority in the hands of networks of elites which can continue to exercise power at both constitutional and non-constitutional levels resulting in a form of negotiated sovereignty instead of centralized sovereignty.

Foucault: Governmentality, Diffused Power, and Informal Governance

Although Marxism describes structural inequality, Foucauldian thought analyzes distributed and relative power relationships. He believed that no single locus of power has dominance but rather flows across all relationships-discourses, practices, institutions, and knowledge systems (Foucault, 1980). Governance therefore transcends the government.

There are myriad ways in which populations are rendered as governable. The concept of governmentality proves to be helpful for analyzing governance following conflict. Governmentality includes practices, technologies, and rationalities through which particular populations are managed. Governance often involves the collaboration of governments, international bodies, NGOs, community-based organizations, and development actors (Dean, 2010). The political economy of post conflict governance in Nepal shows how numerous players – government, donors, NGOs, community-based organizations – were all shaping how the populace were rendered governable. Community based governance analyses shows that governance relationships are mediated through arrangements where boundaries between state and society may become indistinct (Nightingale & Ojha, 2021). Distributed sovereignty arises because so many actors participate in the same governmental relationships. Power is exerted by means of development agendas, administrative procedures, community level associations, expert committees, intellectual discourses and policies. There is a field of governing practices in which numerous entities interact simultaneously in governing population groups.

Gramsci: Hegemony, Legitimacy, and Ethnic Politics

Gramsci's concept of hegemony goes beyond the previous notions by incorporating consent, ideology and legitimacy (Gramsci, 1971). Not only relies on coercion for maintaining its position, but also depends on the creation and maintenance of social consensus regarding legitimate order. In post conflict societies there is usually competition for developing alternative projects to redefine meaning of citizenship, representation, development and nationhood. Hence governance always entails contest over legitimacy along with the contest over institution building (Lawoti, 2010). Post conflict situation of Nepal displays such context where ethnicity, Janajati movements, Madhesi community, various parties and civil society actors contest against each other to mould meaning of federalism, representation and transformation of state in the country. Debates around constitution in Nepal after 2006 have shown competing ideologies about visions of nation and whose will prevail. From the viewpoint of Gramsci, fragmented sovereignty is also ideological and fragmentation comes in the shape of different sources of legitimacy-election result, ethnicity, past experience, development discourse or social consensus within community. Therefore, authority is being negotiated rather than monopolised by any single actor of society, let alone, the state.

3.2 South Asian Perspectives on Governance and Authority

While Marx, Foucault, and Gramsci offer useful theoretical frameworks, their notions need modification to adequately explain the reality of governance in South Asia. Research in the region has repeatedly shown governance in South Asia largely operating through informal institutions, political settlements, patronage, and contested authority in ways that often transcend or circumvent the formal machinery of the state.135 Evidence from India shows how patronage relations, caste politics, and local brokers[brokers] mediate governance outputs (Chandra, 2004); studies of Pakistan show how official institutions are undermined or complimented by military, religious, and tribal spheres of authority (Jalal, 2014); in Afghanistan work underscores how hybrid arrangements involve state apparatus, tribal linkages, customary authorities, and international powers(Barfield,2010). Therefore, most if not all governance arrangements in South Asia feature some kind of overlap in authority and informal linkages for political negotiations. Like many other South Asian Countries Nepal too represents the overlapping of these powers while having special peculiarities to do with its peace process, federalization, and identity politics.

3.3 Conceptual Definitions

Fragmented Sovereignty

Fragmented sovereignty is where sovereignty is no longer considered the monopoly power of the state, and instead it is located amongst a range of actors, institutions, and sites of governance. Sovereignty is thus imagined as a contested process between competing claims to legitimacy and authority.

Informal Governance

Informal governance describes networks, practices, and institutions beyond formal laws that nevertheless shape policy choices, resource allocation, and governance results. Examples include informal patronage, elite negotiations, local negotiation councils and community systems.

Hybrid Authority

A 'Hybrid authority' therefore is governance arrangements that arise out of the negotiations among state authorities and informal powerholders. It is through a process of consultation and negotiation, conducted between various actors of governance, rather than exclusively on the state's behalf that authority arises.

3.4 Application of Theory to Nepal

The holistic theoretical framework that we construct provides an analytical narrative of governance in post-conflict Nepal. From a Marxist- political economy standpoint we highlight how patron-client and informal political settlements can explain how elites persist in positions of power in the face of the formal reforms that we study. Elites are able to harness

resources and organizational structures from their parties and their alliances to access and distribute state and public resources. The Foucaultian lens allows us to consider a broader definition of the state, including for example development agencies, NGOs, community groups and local networks in addition to formal institutions in the study of governance and authority which are spread across multiple channels of power. The Gramscian analysis helps us to analyse the constant process of struggle over legitimacy that goes on between parties, ethnic groups, civil society organisations and state institutions. These are reflected in different competing and coexisting concepts of inclusion, federalism, or what it means to be a nation. Taken together these can tell us, for example, why governance in Nepal is not primarily a question of the state, why it cannot be understood purely in terms of the state, or where authority lies in the political, economic and social spheres. This gives us the basis for an alternative framework in which patronage politics, political settlements, informality, ethnic mobilization and international intervention work in tandem together to produce a situation of 'fragmented sovereignty'.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

We use a qualitative interpretive case study and conceptual theory-building analytical approach, rather than seeking to test causal claims statistically, but aims to offer theoretically underpinned explanatory insights into fractured sovereignty and informal governance in Nepal's post conflict landscape, so it combines conceptual analysis and systematic study of secondary empirical data. Qualitative case study has many advantages, as governance issues in many countries are far more complicated than can be addressed by the hypotheses and tests for the statistically minded (Yin, 2018); it is suitable for the exploration of processes and how political power is exercised in varying arenas with many, if often intersecting institutions, and in contexts of complex power relationships. Nepal provides a prime example via which to study wider debates around sovereignty, governance and the reshaping of post-conflict statehood.

In applying interpretive analysis, we acknowledge that governability is not only created by formal institutions but also by meaning, practices, relationship and forms of legitimacy as they shape how individuals and organizations exercise and negotiate power with state and non-state actors.

Nepal is chosen not as an interesting illustrative example, but as a theoretically relevant case through which to create wider understandings of fragmented sovereignty. Based on the empirics of Nepal we therefore developed the Fragmented Sovereignty Model (FSM) as outlined in this research.

4.2 Case Selection: Why Nepal?

Case selection is based on three interrelated criteria that make Nepal a theoretically valuable case for examining fragmented sovereignty.

Post-Conflict Transition

Nepal underwent a 10-year armed conflict from 1996-2006 which concluded with a negotiated peace agreement – The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) – in 2006. This process both introduced new formal political institutions, while many of the informal power structures remained. This makes it a very useful site from which to explore reconstruction of authority after conflict.

Federal Restructuring

Federalization in accordance with the 2015 Constitution reshaped the structure of Nepal's governance system. A process of decentralizing the state powers between the federal government, six provincial governments and 753 local units was designed with increased prospects for political participation, however entangling with intergovernmental relationships and interaction complexities. Political restructuring thus is a crucial set to context for an inquiry on the fragmentation and decentralization of political power.

Hybrid Governance Environment

Governance in Nepal is shaped by interactions among formal state institutions, political parties, local governments, civil society organizations, ethnic movements, development partners, community institutions, and geopolitical actors. This coexistence of formal and informal governance mechanisms makes Nepal an ideal case for examining hybrid authority and fragmented sovereignty.

Taken together, these characteristics make Nepal a critical case for understanding how governance operates under conditions of overlapping authority and contested legitimacy.

4.3 Data Sources

The study relies on multiple sources of secondary qualitative data to ensure analytical rigor and triangulation.

Academic Literature

The study rests on a theoretical and empirically-oriented body of literature composed of articles published in peer-reviewed journals, books, edited volumes and doctoral

dissertations. Emphasis will be placed on the literatures of sovereignty, governance, political settlement, federalism, post-conflict reconstruction, informal institutions, and Nepali politics.

Government Documents

Formal institutions and state-building are investigated by drawing from government reports, constitution, policy documents, federal governance legislation, parliamentary proceedings, and planning papers.

Key sources include:

- Constitution of Nepal (2015)
- National Planning Commission reports
- Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration reports
- Government policy and governance documents

International Organization Reports

International organizations provide extensive documentation of governance reforms, institutional performance, and post-conflict development.

These include:

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports
- World Bank governance assessments
- OECD governance and state-building reports
- United Nations reports on peacebuilding and democratic governance

Policy and Think-Tank Reports

Independent assessments offer valuable insights into governance dynamics, political settlements, and institutional challenges.

Key sources include:

- International Crisis Group reports
- International IDEA publications
- Asia Foundation reports
- Governance and peacebuilding policy analyses

Civil Society and Development Reports

Reports of NGOs, community-based organisations and development partners document local governance issues, practices, participation and accountability mechanisms and informal institutional arrangements.

4.4 Evidence Selection Strategy

To strengthen analytical validity, evidence was selected according to four criteria:

Relevance

Sources were included only when directly related to post-conflict governance, sovereignty, federalism, informal institutions, political settlements, or governance reforms in Nepal.

Credibility

Priority was given to peer-reviewed academic publications, official government documents, internationally recognized policy reports, and publications produced by reputable international organizations.

Theoretical Contribution

Sources were selected based on their ability to contribute to understanding authority, legitimacy, governance processes, and state transformation.

Temporal Coverage

The study primarily focuses on the post-2006 period following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, while also incorporating historical sources where necessary to explain long-term institutional developments.

4.5 Analytical Strategy

The analysis proceeds through three interconnected stages.

Stage 1: Thematic Literature Analysis
The first stage involves reviewing and categorizing literature into major themes, including sovereignty, hybrid governance, political settlements, informal institutions, federal restructuring, ethnic mobilization, and post-conflict governance.

Stage 2: Comparative Interpretation

The second stage compares insights from global governance literature with evidence from Nepal. This process identifies areas of convergence, divergence, and conceptual limitations within existing theoretical frameworks.

Stage 3: Theory Development

The final stage synthesizes theoretical and empirical insights to develop the Fragmented Sovereignty Model (FSM). The model explains how formal institutions, informal networks, political elites, social movements, local actors, and international influences interact to shape governance outcomes in post-conflict Nepal.

4.6 Analytical Assumptions

The study is based on four key assumptions:

The State Is Not a Unitary Actor

State institutions contain multiple actors, interests, and competing agendas. Governance therefore emerges from interactions both within and beyond the state.

Authority Is Relational

Authority is produced through relationships and interactions rather than being possessed exclusively by any single actor.

Governance Extends Beyond Formal Institutions

Political authority is exercised through both formal governmental structures and informal governance arrangements.

Sovereignty Is Dynamic and Negotiated

Sovereignty is not fixed or indivisible but continuously negotiated among multiple actors operating at different levels of governance.

4.7 Scope and Limitations

The scope of the research concentrates on the post-conflict phase in Nepal from 2006 until the current day and explores governance aspects related to the process of federal restructuring, informal institutions, political settlements and power decentralization. As the research is a qualitative conceptual case study, it does not draw on any original, empirical data such as surveys, interviews or field work. The findings should thus be regarded as theoretical and analytical, not as statistically generalizable.

The multiple data used, combined with a structured triangulation approach, enhances the validity of the analysis.

Fragmented Sovereignty Model (FSM) It is a case specific conceptual model designed for analytic purposes, not a global, universal theory. It should, in due course, facilitate the comparative analysis of governance in other post-conflict and similar settings with overlapping authority systems.

5. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

5.1 Fragmented Sovereignty in Nepal

Such a fragmented sovereignty is manifested in the fragmented allocation of power in political institutions, administrative sectors and security governance bodies. These fragments do not exist in isolation; they mutually interact to form complex centres of fragmented, sometimes even contesting authority.

Political Fragmentation

Distributed Political Power through Volatile Coalitions and Party Factions Within parties, leadership struggles and factions divide policy agendas, and coalition bargains weaken long-term policy coherence between the post-2006 era of changing governments. Party elites engage in competitive coalitions where political negotiations over ministerial appointments, policy priorities and state assets dominate the formal program or policy focus of governments, limiting the administrative sphere and the autonomy of the bureaucracy, as well as reinforcing the politics of the short-run. Internal party organizations function with systems of patronage as leadership blocs decide which candidates are fielded for office and who receives party assignments and subsequent state jobs. While the introduction of federalism was a means to redistribute state power, the intersection of provincial and local level governance creates uncertainty over the jurisdiction of different levels and fosters dependence of locals on federal transfers to their provinces, while limiting provincial administrative autonomy and control.

Administrative Fragmentation

The administrative capacity of states differs across national and sub-national tiers. Local governments with greater financial strength and greater capacity in technical skills or the possession of technically competent staff have a greater ability to implement programs whereas rural local government remains reliance on transfers from national to provincial to local levels, supported by aid projects. These differences in administrative capacity therefore generate different patterns of governance in which, as can be seen in planning, education, health coordination and public works development, access to essential services is determined largely by how competent or strong local administration is, not by what universal standards national standards may mandate. Local level bureaucratic cooperation between different

levels of state government is patchy and, especially during the planning and procurement stages, results in time delays, duplication of responsibilities and a fragmentation of the state in actual operation.

Security Fragmentation

Authority over Security Governance: A Fractured and Distributed Phenomenon Nepal has no widespread civil war, though the localized security governance still highlights features of an informal arrangement of power through the struggles on border management, irregular cross-border business and sporadic criminal networks in border areas. On cross-border governance, particularly with India's open borders has also made economic mobility possible as well as the management problem with border related challenges that include both the established criminal and informal economies, which has resulted to informal regulatory spaces which is not wholly regulated by state actor/agents. Thus the interconnections of Nepal's political instability, administrative disparities and the existing phenomenon of security pluralism imply that this concept of 'sovereignty is not one homogeneous entity'.

5.2 International Actors and External Sovereignty Influence

External actors play a structural role in shaping Nepal's sovereignty through financial dependence, infrastructure investment, and policy conditionalities.

India: Political and Structural Influence

Nepal's geographical proximity, open border regime and shared economic ties with India, have made New Delhi a critical external influence on Kathmandu's internal governance. Political leverage has been built through the negotiation and execution of constitution-building processes, notably the 2015 Constitution. Influence has been exercised on discussions around issues of federal boundaries, electoral systems and constitutional guarantees to promote inclusive governance through both diplomatic pressure and indirect channels.

Border politics is another aspect that underscores New Delhi's proximity influence. The open border system facilitating easy movement of labour and goods has given India a strong economic leverage over Nepal for fuel, consumer goods and access to sea through Indian ports and thereby increasing Kathmandu's economic dependence on the Indian market for its needs and transit facilities. India remains an essential structural component for Nepal's external dependence through its role as a primary destination of Nepali workers for employment and its control over the remittance corridor, fuel imports and supply routes.

China: Infrastructure-Driven Engagement

In terms of how its influence is exerted, this mainly takes place in the context of infra investment and engagement within the framework of BRI. China has become more visible through its role in building Nepal's infra in terms of roads and connectivity and powering it through its own projects. The infrastructure-based form of Chinese engagement may be quite different to the kind of embedded political ties India has had over long periods. While Beijing engages politically high-level diplomacy and state level engagement, it promotes a notion of non-interference and its infra engagement could result in long-term dependency of Nepal through the need for maintenance, financial obligations and debt.

International Organizations

The UN system, World Bank, ADB and UNDP as major multilateral agencies shape governance reforms and institutional change, especially through loan conditionality and technical assistance. The WB and ADB guide the priorities of public finance, allocation of resources to infrastructure, and institutional changes through their policy-related conditions for loans and their technical assistance in this area. The UN system also builds peace and contributes to processes like transition, reconciliation and electoral assistance which affects legitimacy during the transitional period of an institution.

UNDP in its assistance on decentralization strengthens capacity at the local level, affecting administrative bodies, as well as government policies as a part of it. Together these agents transfer decision-making powers to international institutions and create transnational networks.

5.3 Elite Capture and Resource Control

Elite capture in Nepal occurs at the intersection of state resource control, political appointment of officials and the distribution of development projects. National political elites influence both cabinet composition and bureaucratic appointment, often placing their supporters in administrative posts irrespective of merit, impacting the consistency of implementation of policies and the autonomy of public bureaucracy. At subnational and local level politics, allocations are mediated through private deal making between contractors and political elites. Infrastructure contracts - such as road building and urban municipal development projects- tend to be captured by a politically linked pool of contractors.

At the local level, captured municipalities' purchasing procedures can grant influence to elected officials in determining the contracting of projects, which is particularly manifest in rural municipalites with poor supervision structures and uneven outcomes. Even internationally funded projects fall into the nexus of elite networks with intermediary local actors mediating access to project funding, and therefore perpetuating rather than narrowing the gap between rich and poor. These dynamics reveal that elite capture is not a

series of discrete events but a structural dimension of governance reinforcing distributed forms of sovereignty across the state.

5.4 Ethnic Mobilization and Identity-Based Sovereignty Claims

Ethnic mobilization has been a central force in reshaping sovereignty debates in post-conflict Nepal.

Madhesh Movement

Movement in Madhesh-a significant challenge to centralized sovereignty- which called for proportional representation, federal restructuring and the acceptance of regional identity, have come in waves and have often been a key feature of the constitution drafting process through political negotiation and public protest which reveal underlying struggles for territorial control and social inclusion. The impact has partially re-ordered sovereign powers within a federal system of provinces but has failed to definitively settle issues around borders and power shares, suggesting an incomplete dispersal of sovereignty.

Janajati Mobilization

Indigenous Janajati peoples have called for an identity-based federalism, seeking recognition of their distinctiveness. The groups highlight language rights, representation in governmental institutions, and autonomy in the administration of local areas. Though some constitutional rights in relation to multiculturalism are in place, there are perceived disjunctions in the practice that generate struggle for both administrative and symbolic inclusion.

Federal Restructuring Debates

The federal restructuration has also institutionalized claims on identity within the state form and generated new conflicts between territorial and ethnic models of authority. It can be used to demonstrate that, in addition to its decentralization, sovereignty can be reconfigured through clashing claims about identity, generating layers of legitimation.

5.5 Informal Governance and Hybrid Authority Systems

Informal governance mechanisms remain central to how sovereignty is exercised in practice.

Patronage Networks

Patronage networks involve political elites, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, contractors, and subaltern intermediaries. The former networks affect recruitment processes, tendering for projects and the supply of services. Political loyalties and local ties can affect entry into contracts for municipal construction projects rather than through formal competition for the bid process.

Informal Dispute Resolution

Land dispute, family and minor criminal cases are often mediated through widely applied community mediation systems in rural and semi-urban areas.The systems have the advantage of providing accessible justice, but it is functioning independently without legal controls, leading to varied standards in processes from place to place.

Party-Based Governance

The politics of party system during periods of coalition instability also represents an informal parallel government: Party cadres play a role in influencing local governance and mobilization of state resources for the benefit of supporters, and distribution of the welfare goods. Such blurred state-territory as a consequence of influence on the state by party may be interpreted in different ways.

Local Power Brokers

Local intermediaries become gate-keepers of public institutions and of citizenship. This influence rests on personal loyalty to the state, on the ownership of capital and, on a range of networks and connections. They represent important facilitators, to public service but also concentrates decision making in their hands by producing a formal dependence relationship between them and the citizen.

Table 1. FSM Actor Influence Matrix

Actor Type	Influence Level	Criteria	Justification
State Institutions	High	Constitutional authority + coercive capacity + fiscal control	Core authority in formal governance systems (Ostrom, 2010; World Bank, 2022)
Political Parties	High	Government formation + legislative control + appointment power	Central role in political settlement and elite bargaining (Zürcher, 2022)

Actor Type	Influence Level	Criteria	Justification
Local Elites	High	Resource mediation + procurement control + informal authority	Embedded elite capture in hybrid governance systems (Meagher et al., 2021; Goodhand et al., 2022)
Civil Society Groups	Medium	Advocacy + monitoring + agenda influence	Influence through accountability and participation mechanisms (Helmke & Levitsky, 2020)
International Actors	High	Funding conditionality + policy transfer + institutional shaping	External governance influence via aid and norm diffusion (Sending et al., 2020; World Bank, 2022)
Community Organizations	Medium	Local dispute resolution + service mediation	Hybrid local governance authority in post-conflict systems (Lund, 2022)
Citizens	Variable	Electoral participation + protest capacity + legitimacy formation	Context-dependent influence in hybrid political orders (Ostrom, 2010; Zürcher, 2022)

6. FRAGMENTED SOVEREIGNTY MODEL (FSM): NEPAL-BASED OPERATIONALIZATION

Here, the FSM was implemented as an analytical structure, relating structural factors, mediation by governance and outcome factors. Furthermore, rather than purely theoretical models, this chapter applies the FSM to Nepal's post-conflict governance setting to reflect empirical reality. In line with literature on hybrid governance, informal institutions and negotiated authority, this study conceives of power distributed between the informal and formal networks (Helmke & Levitsky 2020; Meagher et al. 2021; Zrcher 2022).

6.1 Operational Definitions

Fragmented Sovereignty (FS):

A condition in which authority over governance functions (policy, resources, security, legitimacy) is distributed across overlapping formal and informal actors, resulting in non-monopolized state control (Lund, 2022).

Input Structures:

Structural conditions shaping governance distribution, including political instability, social cleavages, and external dependency.

Governance Processes:

Mechanisms through which authority is exercised, including patronage, informal networks, and hybrid institutional arrangements.

Outcomes:

Observable governance effects such as weakened institutional coherence, uneven service delivery, and contested legitimacy.

6.2 FSM Causal Pathways (Nepal Empirical Anchoring)

1. Political Pathway

Coalition Instability + Party Factionalism (Input)
↓
Informal Bargaining + Patronage Allocation (Process)
↓
Weak Policy Continuity + Institutional Overlap (Outcome)
↓
Fragmented Sovereign Authority

Political settlements in post-conflict systems often produce negotiated rather than institutionalized authority structures (Zürcher, 2022). In Nepal, frequent coalition shifts reinforce informal bargaining over formal rule adherence.

2. Economic Pathway

Weak Regulatory Enforcement + Informal Economy Expansion (Input)
↓
Elite Capture + Contractor Networks (Process)
↓
Uneven Resource Distribution (Outcome)
↓
Economic Fragmentation of Sovereignty

Hybrid governance literature emphasizes that informal economies are embedded within political structures rather than external to them (Meagher et al., 2021; Goodhand et al., 2022).

3. Administrative Pathway

Uneven Federal Capacity + Bureaucratic Coordination Gaps (Input)
↓
Local Mediation by Power Brokers (Process)
↓
Inconsistent Service Delivery (Outcome)
↓
Administrative Fragmentation

Decentralized governance systems often produce uneven institutional capacity across territorial units (World Bank, 2022; Ostrom, 2010).

4. Social-Identity Pathway

Ethnic Diversity + Post-Conflict Inclusion Demands (Input)
↓
Identity-Based Mobilization (Process)
↓
Federal Contestation + Competing Legitimacies (Outcome)
↓
Sociopolitical Fragmentation of Sovereignty

Identity-based mobilization reshapes state legitimacy and territorial governance arrangements in post-conflict transitions (Lund, 2022).

5. External Governance Pathway

Aid Dependency + Geopolitical Engagement (Input)
↓
Policy Conditionality + Infrastructure Influence (Process)
↓
Shared Decision-Making with External Actors (Outcome)
↓
Transnational Fragmentation of Sovereignty

External actors shape domestic governance through financial and normative influence, dispersing authority beyond national institutions (Sending et al., 2020; World Bank, 2022).

6.3 FSM Integrated Causal Model (Text Diagram)

Fragmented Sovereignty Model (FSM): Nepal Application

INPUT STRUCTURES

Political instability
Economic informality
Administrative unevenness
Ethnic mobilization
External dependency

↓

GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

Patronage networks
Elite capture mechanisms
Informal dispute resolution
Identity-based bargaining
Transnational policy influence

↓

INTERMEDIATE DYNAMICS

Hybrid institutions
Parallel authority systems
Weak bureaucratic autonomy
Negotiated legitimacy

↓

OUTCOMES

Fragmented sovereignty
Uneven service delivery
Overlapping authority systems
Contested state legitimacy

6.4 Empirical Validation Logic (Nepal Case Alignment)

FSM gains empirical support through observable governance patterns in Nepal:

- Coalition instability → repeated cabinet reshuffles → disrupted policy cycles
- Informal economy expansion → contractor-based procurement → uneven development
- Federal transition → capacity gaps across municipalities → service inconsistency
- Madhesh and Janajati mobilization → competing constitutional claims → legitimacy fragmentation
- Donor-driven governance reforms → external conditionality → partial policy autonomy

These patterns collectively demonstrate that sovereignty is not unitary but distributed across interacting governance domains.

6.5 Theoretical Positioning

FSM aligns with three established theoretical traditions:

- **Hybrid governance theory** (Meagher et al., 2021; Helmke & Levitsky, 2020)
- **Relational sovereignty frameworks** (Lund, 2022)
- **Multi-level governance systems** (Ostrom, 2010; World Bank, 2022)

However, FSM extends these frameworks by explicitly integrating causal pathways linking structural inputs to fragmented sovereignty outcomes in a post-conflict federal setting.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper revisits the concept of sovereignty through the Lens of Fragmented Sovereignty Model (FSM) by studying how sovereignty is actually practiced in the post-conflict situation of Nepal. The paper shows that sovereignty in Nepal is neither centrally accumulated but is spread over multiple institutions (political, administrative, economic, social and international). In practice, governmentality is characterized by interweaving of (sometimes contradictory) authorities both informal networks as well as the formal state institutions as well as external factors. In this sense, state exercise of control is partial, negotiate, mediated and conditional rather than an absolute one.

FSM reveals that the politics is the most important and visible site for fragmentation in Nepal, for instance coalition governments are fragile and the politics of party fragmentation as well as factional negotiations influences political processes to the large extent which determines the policy orientation than institutional continuity. Further administrative fragmentation occurs between federal, regional and local bodies; various local levels possess unequal strength which gives variations for its capability and effectiveness. In Nepal, there exists an economic fragmentation through informal mechanisms, elite captured

arrangements in service delivery and infrastructure development as well as unequal distribution of opportunity and access in terms of the political connection or network influence over the access of opportunity. Similarly, mobilization of identity-based groups (Madhesis and Janajadies etc.) re configure the patterns of politics and challenge the centralized system. The participation of external forces such as India, China and multinational agencies like WB, ADB, UN have a tendency to disperse the powers and influence over governance in Nepal so sovereignty gets also fragmented to them.

This work theorizes FSM as an structured approach to study post-conflict governance and sovereignty that go beyond conventional approach of state centered concept of sovereignty. Furthermore, FSM contributes for the understanding on how authority is actualized in the complex post conflict politics of Nepal and offers policy suggestion to enhance the capacity building for coordination between various institutions, improve institutional capacity, minimize political networking and reduceinformality, and improve local administrative mechanism.

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ARTICLE

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FAITH HEALING PRACTICES IN TANZANIA: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION IN RELATION TO POVERTY AND WELL-BEING

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Abstract

Faith healing practices have long been part of Tanzania's religious and cultural landscape. Across different periods—pre-colonial, colonial, post-independence, Ujamaa socialism, and neoliberal reforms—faith healing has evolved in form, meaning, and institutional organization. Despite the role played by Faith healing in shaping spiritual, social, and economic well-being in Tanzania, yet its historical evolution in relation to poverty and well-being remain underexplored. This systematic literature review traces the evolution of faith healing practices from indigenous spiritual traditions to contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in relation to poverty and well-being. Using 62 studies identified through Mendeley and screened via the PRISMA framework, the review highlights six historical phases: indigenous spiritual healing, mission Christianity and popular healing, African Independent Churches, mainline church healing movements, Pentecostal and Charismatic expansion, and contemporary mass healing and institutional programs. Across these phases, faith healing as an institution has provided holistic interventions that address both spiritual and material dimensions of poverty and well-being, offering social support, economic empowerment, and community resilience. The review demonstrates that faith healing is not only a religious practice but also a context-sensitive social institution with practical implications for poverty reduction and human well-being. Findings of this study underscore the potential for collaborating between faith healing ministries and development initiatives to enhance socio-economic development in Tanzania.

Keywords

Faith Healing; Poverty; Well-being; Tanzania; Pentecostalism; African Independent Churches; Spirituality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty and human well-being remain major development challenges in the global, where a considerable proportion of the population continues to experience multidimensional deprivation, including limited access to income, healthcare, education, and social protection (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008; UNDP & OPHI, 2022). In this backdrop, poverty reduction has been, and still is, a development challenge in the world (General Assembly Economic and Social Council, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Despite the fact that various government initiatives and development programs that have been implemented globally have contributed to poverty reduction, formal institutional mechanisms have often been insufficient to address the complex and interconnected nature of economic vulnerability and social insecurity. In this context, religious institutions have emerged as important actors in providing spiritual, social, and material support to communities (Clarke & Jennings, 2008; Green, 2008; Deneulin & Bano, 2009). Among these institutions, faith healing ministries have gained increasing prominence, particularly within Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian movements (Freeman, 2012, 2015).

Faith healing broadly can be understood as the use of prayer, spiritual rituals, and religious practices to address physical, psychological, social, and spiritual challenges (Bishop et al., 2010). These practices in specific and religion in general have an influence on poverty and well-being (Green, 2008), and have a deep historical root across Africa and Tanzania in particular. Its evolution reflects a dynamic interaction between African indigenous healing traditions, missionary Christianity, and contemporary global Pentecostal influences (Kalu, 2008; Ranger, 2007). Over time, these faith healing practices have expanded their focus beyond illness and spiritual afflictions to engage with broader livelihood concerns such as unemployment, business failure, family instability, and economic hardship. Within these religious contexts, poverty is often interpreted not only as material deprivation but also as a spiritual condition associated with curses, demonic oppression, or lack of faith, requiring divine intervention and moral transformation (Gifford, 2004; Helminiak, 2019).

The rapid growth of Pentecostal and faith healing ministries in Tanzania, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas, has been closely linked to wider socio-economic transformations, including economic liberalization, rural–urban migration, unemployment, and the weakening of extended family and state welfare systems (Hasu, 2009; Lindhardt, 2015). In situations characterized by economic uncertainty and limited opportunities, faith healing spaces often function as alternative support systems that provide hope, counseling, social networks, and, in some cases, direct material assistance, skills training, or business guidance (Freeman, 2012; Lindhardt, 2018; Nyanto, 2019). These ministries therefore play a significant role in shaping people's coping strategies, aspirations, and perceptions of well-being.

Despite their growing social and economic relevance, scholarly literature on faith healing in Tanzania remains fragmented. Existing studies have largely focused on theological

interpretations, spiritual practices, health outcomes, or the broader rise of Pentecostalism, with limited attention to the historical evolution of faith healing practices in relation to poverty and human well-being. Furthermore, there is a lack of systematic synthesis of empirical evidence that traces how faith healing ministries have adapted to changing socio-economic contexts and how their roles in addressing poverty have developed over time (Lindhardt, 2015).

This paper addresses this gap by conducting a systematic literature review to trace the historical development of faith healing practices and examine their relationship with poverty and people's well-being in Tanzania. Specifically, the review seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How have faith healing practices evolved historically in Tanzania? and (2) In what ways have these practices engaged with issues of poverty and human well-being? By synthesizing existing studies using a systematic and transparent approach, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the changing roles of faith healing ministries and their implications for development policy and research.

The study contributes to the broader literature on religion and development by highlighting the role of faith healing ministries as an informal welfare provider and socio-spiritual resources within contexts of economic vulnerability. Understanding the historical and socio-economic dimensions of faith healing is essential for informing more context-sensitive and inclusive approaches to poverty reduction and well- being promotion in Tanzania.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH GAP

Despite sustained economic growth over the past two decades, poverty and vulnerability remain significant challenges in Tanzania. A substantial proportion of the population continues to experience income insecurity, unemployment, limited access to quality social services, and exposure to economic shocks (UNDP, 2023; URT, 2022, 2023, 2025; World Bank, 2024). Moreover, poverty in Tanzania is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses not only material deprivation but also social exclusion, psychological distress, and limited life opportunities (Mbilinyi & Nyoni, 2000). Formal poverty reduction strategies), including social protection programs and development interventions (Ayoo, 2022), have made important contributions but have not fully addressed the everyday coping needs and well-being concerns of many communities, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas.

In response to these gaps, religious institutions have become critical informal support systems that provide spiritual guidance, emotional care, social networks, and, in some cases, material assistance (Freeman, 2015; Hasu, 2009, 2012; Lindhardt, 2012). Among these, faith healing ministries—especially within Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity—have experienced rapid growth across Tanzania. These ministries attract large numbers of

followers seeking solutions to a wide range of problems, including illness, unemployment, business failure, family conflicts, and persistent poverty (Hasu, 2009; Lindhardt, 2015). Within faith healing contexts, economic hardship is often interpreted through spiritual frameworks, and religious practices such as prayer, deliverance, and prophetic counseling are presented as pathways to improved well-being and economic breakthrough (Gifford, 1992).

Although the social influence of faith healing ministries has expanded considerably, scholarly understanding of their role in relation to poverty and well-being remains limited and fragmented. Existing research has largely focused on the theology of healing, prosperity teachings, religious experiences, or the broader rise of Pentecostalism in Africa. While some studies have examined the socio-economic implications of Pentecostalism, few have systematically analyzed how faith healing practices have historically evolved in response to changing economic conditions or how they engage with the everyday realities of poverty in the Tanzanian context.

Furthermore, the available literature is dispersed across disciplines—including anthropology, sociology, theology, and development studies—making it difficult to develop a coherent understanding of the historical trajectories and developmental implications of faith healing. There is also limited synthesis of empirical evidence on the extent to which faith healing ministries function as informal welfare providers, sources of resilience, or mechanisms for social and economic mobility. At the same time, critical concerns such as the commercialization of healing, financial demands on followers, and the potential reinforcement of individualistic explanations of poverty have not been systematically examined within a historical and developmental framework (Lindhardt, 2015).

This study addresses these gaps by providing a systematic review of the literature that traces the historical development of faith healing practices and examines their relationship with poverty and people's well- being in Tanzania. By synthesizing existing evidence across time and disciplinary perspectives, the study seeks to generate a more comprehensive understanding of how faith healing ministries have evolved and how they contribute to, or shape, socio-economic coping strategies and well-being outcomes. Such an analysis is important for informing debates on religion and development and for identifying opportunities and challenges for engaging faith healing ministries in particular and religion in general in poverty reduction and social welfare initiatives.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK; SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY

This study is informed by Social Capital Theory, which emphasizes the value of social relationships, networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity in facilitating individual and collective action. Social capital refers to the resources embedded in social relationships that individuals can mobilize to access support, information, and opportunities (Claridge, 2018; Darrow et al., 2003; Egbonu, n.d.; Schmid & Robison, 1995; Yongjian Xu & Liqun Xu, 2016).

The theory identifies different forms of social capital. Bonding social capital refers to close relationships among individuals who share similar social identities and provide emotional and material support. Bridging social capital refers to connections across diverse social groups that facilitate access to new information and opportunities (Claridge, 2018). Linking social capital describes relationships between individuals and institutions or persons with authority and influence, enabling access to resources and services that may otherwise be inaccessible (Claridge, 2018; Yongjian Xu & Liqun Xu, 2016).

Social Capital Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the role of faith healing ministries in poverty and well-being in urban Tanzania. Faith healing ministries often create networks of belonging through prayer groups, fellowship activities, and collective worship, which foster trust, mutual assistance, and emotional support among followers (Dilger, 2015; Hasu, 2009). These networks may provide both material and non-material resources that help individuals cope with illness, economic hardship, and social exclusion (Lindhardt, 2010, 2018).

At the same time, the theory also offers a critical lens for examining the limitations of these networks. While social ties within faith healing ministries can generate support and resilience, they may also reinforce dependence on religious communities and leaders, shape expectations regarding healing and prosperity, and influence followers' interpretations of poverty and suffering (Williams, 2022). Thus, Social Capital Theory enables an examination of both the empowering and constraining dimensions of participation in faith healing ministries and their implications for poverty and well-being.

4. TOOLS AND METHODS

4.1 Study Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize existing research on the historical development of faith healing practices in addressing poverty and people's well-being in Tanzania. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure transparency, rigor, and replicability in the identification, screening, and selection of relevant studies. A systematic approach was considered appropriate because the available literature on faith healing is fragmented across multiple disciplines, including theology, anthropology, sociology, and development studies.

4.2 Search strategy and Eligibility Criteria

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple electronic databases to identify relevant studies. The primary databases included Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and African Journals Online (AJOL). In order to capture both historical and contemporary

periods, the search covered publications from 1960 to 2025, a period corresponding with the rapid expansion of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Tanzania.

Search terms were developed using Boolean operators and combinations of keywords such as "faith healing," "divine healing," "spiritual healing," "Pentecostal healing," "poverty," "livelihood," "well- being," and "Tanzania." Reference lists of key articles were also examined to identify additional relevant studies through backward and forward citation tracking.

The review adopted predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and quality of the evidence. Studies were included if they: (i) examined faith healing, divine healing, Pentecostalism, or Charismatic Christianity in relation to socio-economic issues such as poverty, livelihoods, or well-being; (ii) focused on Tanzania or provided insights from sub-Saharan Africa that were relevant to the Tanzanian context; (iii) were published between 1960 and 2025; and (iv) consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters, theses, dissertations, and credible institutional reports published in English.

Studies were excluded if they: (i) focused exclusively on biomedical or traditional healing practices without reference to faith healing ministries; (ii) addressed Pentecostal or Charismatic movements without considering socio-economic dimensions relevant to poverty and well-being; (iii) were duplicate records; or (iv) lacked sufficient methodological or contextual information to contribute meaningfully to the review objectives.

In addition, supplementary literature was identified through both electronic and manual searches conducted within the East Africana Collection Unit of the University of Dar es Salaam Library.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Study Selection

Study selection involves four stages involving various processes of identifying relevant resources. The first stage was to search various resources related to the topic under study. By using developed Boolean operators and combinations of keywords, the database search yielded a total of 485 (420 databases and 65 other sources) records from electronic sources, including Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, AJOL, and the East African Collection of the University of Dar es Salaam Library.

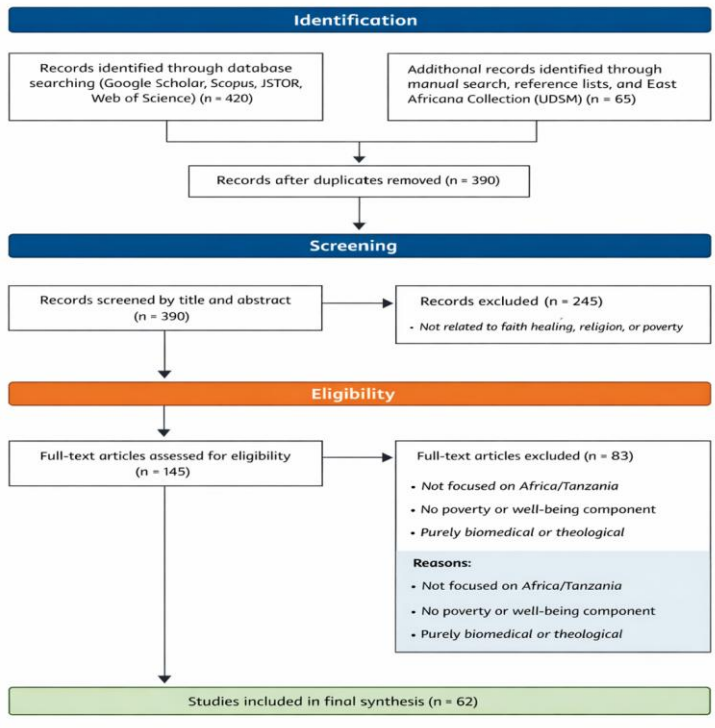
By using exclusive criteria, some resources (n=95) were found to be duplicates hence removed. After removing duplicates (n = 95), a total of 390 records remained for title and abstract screening. The title and abstract screening process was conducted to assess the relevance of studies to the review topic, focusing on: Faith healing or spiritual healing practices; Tanzania or Sub-Saharan African context (with preference for Tanzania); Links to poverty, wellbeing, health, or socio-economic outcomes; and Academic or credible institutional publications.

This second stage process of title and abstract screening led to removing of 245 records from 390 records that were not related to faith healing, religion or poverty and remained with 145 records.

The 145 records qualify for full text article assessment for eligibility. In this third stage which is the process of full text articles screening, 83 records were excluded due to some reasons as follows: Not related to faith healing or spiritual healing practices (n=25); Purely on biomedical treatment without religious or spiritual dimension (n=12); No connection to poverty, wellbeing, livelihoods, or socio-economic (n=15); Outside geographical scope (not Tanzania or Sub-Saharan Africa) (n=14); Opinion pieces, sermons, news articles, or non-academic sources (n=9); Conference abstracts without full study information (n=5); and Duplicates missed in earlier stage or incomplete records (n=3).

The last fourth stage is final qualitative synthesis, where 62 records qualify. Following the eligibility assessment, 62 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final qualitative synthesis. The study selection process is presented in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram used for the identification, screening, and selection of relevant studies



Source: Authors' own elaboration

5.2 *Data Extraction Procedure*

Data from the included studies (n=62) were systematically extracted using a standardized data extraction form (Appendix A). The form captured key information relevant to the

objectives of the review, including bibliographic details, study context, methodology, focus of faith healing practices, and reported outcomes related to poverty and wellbeing. The extraction process aimed to ensure consistency and facilitate thematic synthesis across studies. The following variables were extracted:

(i) Author(s) and year of publication
(ii) Country/Study location
(iii) Study design and methodology
(iv) Type of faith healing or religious practice
(v) Target population
(vi) Link to poverty or livelihood outcomes
(vii) Wellbeing outcomes (physical, psychological, social, or spiritual)

Key findings

Data extraction was conducted for all 62 included studies. Information extracted included

(i) author and year,
(ii) study location,
(iii) research design,
(iv) participant characteristics,
(v) type of faith healing ministry,
(vi) dimensions of poverty or wellbeing addressed, and
(vii) key findings.

The majority of studies employed qualitative designs such as ethnography, case studies, and interviews, while a smaller proportion used quantitative or mixed methods. The full data extraction table is presented in **Appendix A**.

5.3 *Results*

Through a historical and thematic analysis of the literature reviewed, six phases of faith healing practices were generated. In this regard, relevant publications were examined

chronologically to identify significant shifts in the organization, theology, practices, and socio-political contexts of faith healing practices in Tanzania. Recurring patterns and turning points in the development of faith healing ministries were coded and grouped into distinct historical periods. These classifications of phases were guided by evidence on changes in religious actors, modes of faith healing practices, theological emphases, and the broader socio-economic and political environments in which these practices emerged. Consequently, six phases emerged that represent analytically constructed historical periods that synthesis development reported across multiple sources rather than rigid or mutually exclusive categories. These six phases of faith healing practices associated with poverty and people's well-being in Tanzania were identified as follows:

i) Phase 1: Indigenous Spiritual Healing (Pre-colonial)
ii) Phase 2: Mission Christianity & Popular Healing (Colonial & early post-colonial)
iii) Phase 3: African Independent Churches (Post-independence)
iv) Phase 4: Mainline Church Healing Movements (Late 20th century)
v) Phase 5: Pentecostal & Charismatic Expansion (1980s–present)
vi) Phase 6: Contemporary Mass Healing & Institutional Programs (2000s–present)

Table 1, presents these epochs of faith healing practices in relation to poverty and well-being of people in Tanzania.

Table1. Historical Phases of Faith Healing practices in dealing with Poverty and well-being of people in Tanzania

Phase	Period / Context	Key Features	Role in Poverty & Well-being	Representative Studies
1. Indigenous Spiritual Healing	Pre-colonial	Belief in High God and spirits; traditional healers and rituals	Addressed illness, social harmony, and economic misfortune	Omari (1971, 1972); Luig (1999)
2. Mission Christianity & Popular Healing	Colonial & early post-colonial	Integration of Christian prayer with local beliefs; emergence of revival groups	Offered accessible health and spiritual support; helped communities cope with poverty	Green (2003); Mlahagwa (1999)
3. African Independent Churches (AICs)	Post-independence	Africanized churches, prophecy, exorcism, communal rituals	Provided holistic support, social networks, and informal poverty relief	Omari (1999); Ayiemba et al. (2015)
4. Mainline Church Healing Movements	Late 20th century	Charismatic renewal within Catholic and	Facilitated mass healing, spiritual wellbeing, and	Kilian (2006); Sivalon & Comoro (1999)

		Protestant churches; Marian pilgrimages	psychosocial support	
5. Pentecostal & Charismatic Expansion	1980s – present	Emphasis on prosperity, deliverance, miracle healing; growth of megachurches	Linked spiritual healing to economic empowerment; provided social safety nets	Hasu (2006, 2009); Lindhardt (2012); Schliesser (2014)
6. Contemporary Mass Healing & Institutional Programs	2000s – present	National healing campaigns, vocational training, social aid programs	Addressed structural poverty; combined spiritual, social, and economic interventions	Mlahagwa (1999)

Source: Authors construct

The next section of the paper will discuss in detail each of the phases.

6. DISCUSSIONS: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF FAITH HEALING PRACTICES IN RELATION TO POVERTY AND WELL-BEING OF PEOPLE IN TANZANIA

The review of 62 studies reveals that faith healing in Tanzania has evolved through distinct historical phases shaped by socio-cultural change, economic conditions, and religious transformation. Across these phases, faith healing has consistently functioned not only as a response to illness but also as a spiritual, social, and economic resource for coping with poverty and improving well-being.

6.1 Indigenous Foundations of Spiritual Healing

The historical roots of faith healing in Tanzania can be traced to indigenous religious systems, where health, misfortune, and poverty were understood within a spiritual framework. Early studies indicate that communities believed in a supreme deity and various spiritual forces that influenced human well-being (Omari, 1971; 1972; 1976; Mareale, 1947; Mbiti, 1969). Illness, economic hardship, and social instability were often interpreted as consequences of spiritual imbalance, witchcraft, or broken relationships with the spiritual world (Lindhardt, 2010, 2018; Sivalon & Comoro, 1999).

Traditional healers, diviners, and ritual specialists played a central role in restoring both physical health and social harmony (Mareale, 1947). Healing practices addressed not only bodily illness but also psychological distress, family conflict, and livelihood challenges. This holistic understanding established a cultural foundation in which spiritual intervention became a legitimate and expected response to both suffering and material deprivation.

6.2 Mission Christianity and the Emergence of Popular Healing Practices

During the colonial and early post-colonial periods, Christian mission churches introduced biomedical services alongside religious teachings. However, studies show that African converts reinterpreted Christianity through existing spiritual worldviews (Green, 2003; Kibira, 1974). As a result, popular Christianity increasingly incorporated prayer, deliverance, and divine healing as responses to illness and misfortune (Lugazia, 2011; 2016). The persistence of beliefs in spiritual causation of suffering contributed to the growth of prayer groups, revival fellowships, and informal healing ministries (Mlahagwa, 1999).

These practices reflected local efforts to address the limitations of both biomedical services and formal church structures, particularly among economically vulnerable populations (Kibira, 1974; Lugazia, 2016; 2011). Faith healing during this period functioned as an accessible alternative for communities facing poverty, limited healthcare access, and social insecurity.

6.3 African Independent Churches and the Africanization of Healing

The emergence of African Independent Churches (AICs) marked a significant shift toward the institutionalization of culturally relevant healing practices. Initially, faith healing practices were culturally informal. These churches emphasized prophecy, exorcism, and spiritual protection, responding directly to African concerns about witchcraft, misfortune, and economic hardship (Lindhardt, 2012; Mlahagwa, 1999; Omari, 1999; Sivalon & Comoro, 1999).

By integrating Christian teachings with indigenous spiritual concepts, AICs provided holistic support systems that addressed both spiritual and material needs. Healing services, communal prayer, and mutual support networks helped followers cope with unemployment, family crises, and other poverty-related challenges (Hasu, 2009; Lindhardt, 2012). This phase represents the localization and expansion of faith healing as a community-based welfare mechanism.

6.4 Healing Movements within Mainline Churches

Faith Healing practices within Tanzania's mainline churches should not be understood as a recent phenomenon. Since the missionary period, both Catholic and Protestant churches have incorporated prayers for the sick, exorcism, anointing, and other forms of spiritual healing into their pastoral ministries. However, from the late twentieth century onwards, these practices assumed renewed prominence and visibility through charismatic renewal movements that placed greater emphasis on divine healing, spiritual gifts, and experiential forms of worship (Mlahagwa, 1999).

Evidence from Marian healing ministries in the Catholic Church, healing crusades and revival meetings within Protestant denominations, and the Kikombe cha Babu phenomenon,

which attracted followers from different religious backgrounds including Lutherans, demonstrates the growing public significance of healing-centred religious activities in Tanzania (Acquaviva, 2018; Kilian, 2006; Mlahagwa, 1999; Sivalon & Comoro, 1999). These movements drew the attention of large numbers of participants seeking spiritual and practical responses to chronic illnesses, infertility, unemployment, and economic hardships (Mlahagwa, 1999).

From the late twentieth century, healing practices also expanded within mainline denominations, particularly through charismatic renewal movements (Mlahagwa, 1999). Studies on Marian healing ministries within the Catholic Church and the *Kikombe cha Babu* movement within the Lutheran Church and intra-denominational crusades services highlight the widespread appeal of mass healing services and pilgrimage-based spiritual interventions (Acquaviva, 2018; Kilian, 2006; Mlahagwa, 1999; Sivalon & Comoro, 1999).

The expansion of charismatic healing initiatives in Tanzania also generated debates within mainline churches concerning theological legitimacy, ecclesiastical authority, and the regulation of healing practices (Mlahagwa, 1999; Lugazia, 2011, 2016). In some cases, tensions emerged between church authorities and charismatic leaders over issues of doctrinal oversight and the appropriate place of healing ministries within established church structures (Kilian, 2006; Mlahagwa, 1999). Nevertheless, these developments contributed to the increased visibility of faith healing within institutional Christianity and reflected broader transformations in the religious landscape of Tanzania.

6.5 *Pentecostal- Charismatic Expansion and Prosperity Orientation*

Since the 1980s and 1990s, the rapid growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches has transformed the landscape of faith healing in Tanzania. Studies highlight the centrality of divine healing, deliverance, and spiritual warfare in Pentecostal practice (Hasu, 2009; Lindhardt, 2012).

A key development during this phase is the integration of healing with prosperity teachings. Poverty is often framed as a spiritual condition that can be overcome through faith, prayer, and financial giving (Hasu, 2006; Schliesser, 2014). Healing services promise not only physical restoration but also employment opportunities, business success, and financial breakthrough.

These churches also function as informal social support systems, providing counseling, mutual aid, and opportunities for social networking (Dilger, 2007; Hasu, 2009). In contexts of economic uncertainty and limited state welfare, Pentecostal ministries have become important sites of hope, resilience, and community belonging (Nyanto, 2019; 2024).

6.6 *Contemporary Mass Healing and Institutional Engagement in Poverty*

Recent developments include large-scale prophetic movements and national healing campaigns, such as the Loliondo phenomenon, which attracted mass participation during

periods of health and economic crisis (Acquaviva, 2018; Vähäkangas, 2015). Such events demonstrate the continued public significance of faith healing in times of collective uncertainty.

At the institutional level, some Pentecostal organizations have expanded their role beyond spiritual services to include economic empowerment initiatives, vocational training, and social assistance (Kesanta, 2024). These activities reflect a growing recognition of the need to address the structural dimensions of poverty alongside spiritual interventions.

6.7 Synthesis of Historical Trends

Across these six phases, several key trends emerged: the continuity of spiritual interpretations of illness and poverty from indigenous religious traditions to contemporary Christianity; the increasing institutionalization of practices, moving from informal rituals to organized, church-based healing ministries; the expansion of focus, with healing shifting from primarily health-related interventions to broader concerns about economic well-being and social stability; and the growing integration of spiritual and material support, particularly within Pentecostal and Charismatic contexts.

Overall, the historical trajectory shows that faith healing in Tanzania has evolved from culturally embedded spiritual practices into a significant religious and social institution that shapes how individuals and communities understand and respond to poverty and well-being.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic literature review reveal that faith healing in Tanzania has undergone a dynamic historical evolution, shaped by indigenous spirituality, missionary Christianity, African independent churches, mainline charismatic movements, and contemporary Pentecostal expansion. This evolution reflects not only religious transformation but also adaptive responses to persistent socio-economic challenges, particularly poverty and limited access to formal health and social welfare systems. In this section, I will discuss this evolution of the historical development of faith healing in relation to poverty and well-being of the people in Tanzania.

7.1 Indigenous and Missionary Roots

Before the introduction of foreign religions in Tanzania, Tanzanians—and Africans more broadly—were deeply religious. Kibira (1974, p. 11), in his study of the introduction and acceptance of Christianity among the Bahaya-Banyambo of northwestern Tanzania, observes that the people practiced a highly religious and magico-religious system. Their social background and cultural life were strongly rooted in, and closely connected to, their indigenous religious traditions (Kibira, 1974, p. 11). Based on these findings, it can be

concluded that prior to the arrival of foreign influences, African societies were not spiritually empty; rather, they possessed rich religious traditions, distinct cultures, and established systems of worship (Kibira, 1974, p. 11).

The transition from indigenous healing practices to early mission Christianity reflects a persistent cultural logic that connects spiritual causation with health and material well-being (Lugazia, 2016; Omari, 1971; 1972; Green, 2003). Indigenous belief systems offered interpretive frameworks for understanding misfortune and poverty, which were subsequently reinterpreted and incorporated into Christian teachings (Mareale, 1947).

Mission churches facilitated the formalization of spiritual healing while simultaneously introducing Western biomedical concepts. However, the persistence of local healing practices indicates that communities actively negotiated between spiritual and medical explanations, thereby creating hybrid forms of health care and social support. This finding aligns with cultural adaptation theories (Luig, 1999), which suggest that religious innovations are shaped by preexisting socio-cultural structures.

7.2 *African Independent Churches and Localized Spiritual Responses*

African Independent Churches (AICs) emerged as sites where faith healing became deeply contextualized to local socio-economic realities (Omari, 1999; Mlahagwa, 1999). The emphasis on prophecy, exorcism, and communal rituals allowed followers to address both spiritual and material dimensions of poverty, including unemployment, economic instability, and social exclusion.

This supports the view that faith healing ministries in Africa often act as informal social safety nets, providing both psychological and practical resources for marginalized communities (Ayiemba et al., 2015; Thiongo, 2019). It also illustrates the social capital function of religious networks, whereby communal relationships and spiritual trust enhance collective resilience against poverty (Claridge, 2018).

7.3 *Charismatic and Pentecostal Expansion: Prosperity, Healing, and Well-being*

The rise of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches introduced a new ideological orientation: linking faith healing explicitly with material prosperity (Hasu, 2006; Lindhardt, 2012; Schliesser, 2014). Here, poverty is framed not only as a structural challenge but also as a spiritual condition amenable to divine intervention.

This perspective expands the role of faith healing ministries beyond health, creating holistic interventions that combine prayer, financial giving, counseling, and economic empowerment. By promoting both spiritual and material well-being, these churches address multiple dimensions of poverty simultaneously. This aligns with the multidimensional poverty framework (UNDP & OPHI, 2022; Santos, 2010), highlighting how faith healing can contribute to improving living conditions, social cohesion, and subjective wellbeing.

7.4 *Contemporary Mass Healing and Institutional Engagement*

Recent mass healing events, such as the Loliondo movement, and institutionalized poverty alleviation programs underscore the expanding social and political influence of faith healing ministries (Vähäkangas, 2015; Kesanta, 2024). Ministries increasingly act as mediators of social welfare, providing both material and symbolic support to communities.

These developments suggest that faith healing is not only a spiritual response but also a pragmatic strategy for social protection in contexts where government interventions are limited. The review shows that faith healing ministries have adapted to the structural realities of poverty while maintaining spiritual legitimacy—a dual function critical for understanding the broader social role of religion in Tanzania.

7.5 *Commercialization of Religion*

The findings suggest that some faith healing ministries increasingly operate within a religious marketplace in which spiritual services are presented in ways that resemble economic transactions. Prayers, anointing oils, holy water, deliverance sessions, and special healing programs are often associated with monetary contributions, voluntary donations, or prescribed offerings. This tendency reflects broader transformations within contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, where religious activities increasingly adopt market-oriented practices and entrepreneurial forms of leadership. In such contexts, spiritual resources become symbolic commodities that are exchanged with the expectation of obtaining healing, prosperity, and social advancement.

The commercialization of religion does not necessarily negate the sincerity of religious beliefs or experiences. Rather, it highlights the complex ways in which spiritual practices are embedded within broader economic processes. However, when access to spiritual interventions becomes closely associated with financial contributions, concerns emerge regarding the ethical boundaries between religious ministry and economic enterprise, particularly in contexts characterized by widespread poverty and social vulnerability.

7.6 *Exploitations of Vulnerable Believers*

The findings further indicate that individuals facing chronic illness, unemployment, financial hardship, and family crises are particularly attracted to faith healing ministries. Their search for solutions to pressing socio-economic problems may render them vulnerable to manipulation and unrealistic promises of miraculous transformation. Some followers invest substantial financial, emotional, and social resources in healing programmes because they perceive these ministries as offering one of the few available pathways for overcoming their difficulties.

This vulnerability may create asymmetrical relationships between religious leaders and followers. The authority attributed to charismatic leaders often enables them to shape followers' decisions, behaviours, and expectations. In some cases, believers may become dependent on continuous spiritual interventions and repeatedly seek prayers, deliverance sessions, or prophetic guidance in anticipation of miraculous change. Consequently, faith healing practices may unintentionally reproduce forms of dependency and reinforce existing vulnerabilities rather than addressing their structural causes.

7.7 *Financial Pressure through Offerings*

The study also reveals that the culture of giving within some faith healing ministries can create financial pressures for followers. Offerings, seed sowing, thanksgiving contributions, and donations for healing services are frequently presented as expressions of faith and obedience to God. While religious giving is a longstanding feature of Christian practice, some followers experience implicit or explicit pressure to contribute financially, even when they face severe economic constraints.

For economically disadvantaged believers, repeated financial contributions may further strain already limited household resources. The expectation that generous giving will result in divine blessings, healing, or financial breakthroughs may encourage followers to make sacrifices that exceed their economic capacities. This dynamic is particularly significant in urban contexts marked by unemployment, precarious livelihoods, and widening socio-economic inequalities. Thus, religious giving becomes both a spiritual practice and an economic burden that may intensify the very hardships believers seek to overcome.

7.8 *Individualization of Poverty*

Another important finding concerns the tendency of faith healing teachings to individualize poverty. Poverty is frequently interpreted as a consequence of insufficient faith, spiritual attacks, curses, demonic oppression, or personal disobedience to divine principles. Such explanations frame poverty primarily as an individual spiritual problem requiring personal transformation, repentance, or increased religious commitment.

Although these interpretations provide meaning and hope to believers, they may obscure the structural and systemic dimensions of poverty, including unemployment, unequal access to education, inadequate social protection, and broader political-economic inequalities. By locating the causes of poverty primarily within the individual and spiritual realm, faith healing narratives risk shifting attention away from collective and institutional responses necessary for sustainable poverty reduction. Consequently, followers may become preoccupied with seeking spiritual solutions while the structural determinants of their socio-economic conditions remain largely unaddressed.

7.9 *Failed Healing Expectations*

The findings also demonstrate that not all healing expectations are realized. Some followers continue to experience illness, unemployment, financial difficulties, or family problems despite prolonged participation in healing activities. The failure to achieve anticipated miracles may generate disappointment, confusion, and emotional distress among believers.

In many instances, unsuccessful healing outcomes are interpreted through theological explanations that attribute failure to inadequate faith, unresolved sin, insufficient giving, or divine timing. While such explanations may preserve belief in the efficacy of faith healing, they may also lead followers to internalize blame for circumstances beyond their control. This process can produce feelings of guilt and spiritual inadequacy and may intensify psychological suffering among individuals who are already facing significant socio-economic challenges.

Overall, these findings suggest that faith healing ministries represent a complex religious phenomenon that simultaneously provides hope, meaning, and social support while also generating tensions related to economic practices, power relations, and interpretations of suffering and poverty. Understanding these dynamics requires moving beyond simplistic assessments of faith healing as either entirely beneficial or entirely exploitative and recognizing the multifaceted ways in which religious practices intersect with socio-economic realities in contemporary urban Tanzania.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY PRACTICE

In this review, four implications for theory and practices can be drowned as follows:

1. **Religion as Social Capital:** Faith healing ministries create networks of trust, reciprocity, and mutual aid that strengthen communal resilience to poverty (Claridge, 2018; Dilger, 2015; Hasu, 2012; Lindhardt, 2010, 2015).
2. **Spirituality and Economic Agency:** Prosperity-oriented faith healing links spiritual practice to economic strategies, reflecting an integrated approach to human well-being (Hasu, 2006; Lindhardt, 2012).
3. **Adaptive Religious Institutions:** The evolution from indigenous practices to modern Pentecostalism demonstrates that religious institutions adapt strategically to social and economic pressures (Nyanto, 2019; 2024).
4. **Policy Relevance:** Recognizing the role of faith healing ministries in poverty reduction and social support could inform **community-based development interventions** that collaborate with religious institutions (Schliesser, 2014, 2023).

8.1 *Limitations of the Evidence*

While the review provides comprehensive historical insight, several limitations exist as follows:

- Some studies are descriptive or anecdotal, limiting generalizability.
- There is a regional bias toward southern and coastal Tanzania, leaving some areas underrepresented.
- Many studies focus on Pentecostalism, with less emphasis on mainline or traditional healing practices.

Despite these limitations, the evidence consistently supports the conclusion that faith healing ministries have played a significant role in enhancing spiritual, social, and economic well-being throughout Tanzanian history.

8.2 Conclusion of the Discussion

The discussion highlights that faith healing in Tanzania has evolved from culturally embedded spiritual practices to organized ministries addressing health, poverty, and social welfare. By linking spiritual, social, and economic dimensions, faith healing ministries contribute uniquely to community resilience, offering both practical and symbolic resources for coping with poverty and promoting human well-being.

9. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review has traced the historical development of faith healing practices in Tanzania and their relationship to poverty and human well-being. The evidence demonstrates that faith healing has evolved through six interconnected phases: indigenous spiritual healing, mission Christianity and popular healing, African Independent Churches, mainline church healing movements, Pentecostal and Charismatic expansion, and contemporary mass healing and institutional programs. Across these phases, faith healing has not only provided spiritual interventions but has also contributed to social cohesion, economic empowerment, and community resilience.

The review highlights several key insights. First, faith healing has consistently addressed both spiritual and material dimensions of poverty, offering a holistic response to individual and community needs. Second, religious institutions have acted as informal social safety nets, providing psychological support, communal networks, and practical assistance to economically vulnerable populations. Third, the expansion of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements illustrates the integration of prosperity-oriented teachings with healing practices, linking faith directly to economic agency and well-being. Finally, contemporary faith healing ministries have institutionalized these functions, extending their role to vocational training, social programs, and large-scale mass healing events.

The historical trajectory outlined in this review underscores the adaptive and context-sensitive nature of faith healing in Tanzania. By evolving in response to social, economic, and spiritual challenges, faith healing ministries have become an important component of community development and poverty alleviation. These findings have practical implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and faith-based organizations, suggesting that collaborations with religious institutions could enhance the effectiveness of poverty reduction strategies while respecting local cultural and spiritual practices.

Future research should explore underrepresented regions and the long-term socioeconomic impacts of faith healing ministries, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized populations. Additionally, comparative studies across East Africa could further illuminate the interplay between religion, poverty, and well-being in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

In conclusion, faith healing in Tanzania represents a dynamic, historically grounded, and socially embedded phenomenon that continues to shape how individuals and communities understand, respond to, and overcome poverty. Its integration of spiritual, social, and economic interventions demonstrates the enduring significance of religion in promoting human well-being.

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Appendix A: Data Extraction Table of Included Studies (n = 62)

(Systematic Literature Review on Faith Healing, Poverty, and Well-being)

S/n	Author (Year)	Location	Study Design	Population	Faith Healing Tradition	Poverty/ Well-being Dimension	Key Findings
1	Acquaviva (2018)	Tanzania	Qualitative	Church members	Pentecostal	Health, Spiritual	Faith healing enhanced hope and perceived wellbeing.
2	Dilger (2009)	Tanzania	Ethnographic	HIV patients	Pentecostal	Health, Social	Churches provided emotional and social support for chronic illness.
3	Gifford (2004)	Africa	Conceptual		Pentecostal/Charismatic	Economic, Psychological	Prosperity teachings link faith with economic improvement.
4	Freeman (2012)	Africa	Mixed	Pentecostal followers	Charismatic	Economic	Churches promote entrepreneurship and self-reliance.
5	Meyer (1998)	Ghana/Africa	Qualitative	Church members	Pentecostal	Psychological, Spiritual	Healing rituals address fear and insecurity.
6	Kalu (2008)	Africa	Historical		Spiritual, Social	Psychological, Spiritual	Healing central to church growth and community cohesion.
7	Anderson (2013)	Africa	Review		Pentecostal	Health, Spiritual	Divine healing central to African Pentecostal theology
8	Marshall (2009)	Nigeria/Africa	Qualitative	Church members	Charismatic	Economic, Psychological	Faith practices encourage discipline and economic aspiration.
9	Burgess (2008)	Tanzania	Qualitative	Urban Pentecostals	Pentecostal	Economic, Social	Churches support business networks and social mobility.
10	Lindhardt (2010)	Tanzania	Ethnographic	Pentecostal converts	Pentecostal	Economic, Spiritual	Conversion linked to lifestyle change and economic hope.
11	Dilger & Luig (2010)	Tanzania	Qualitative	Faith communities	Pentecostal	Health, Social	Religious networks support care during illness.
12	Parsitau	Africa	Qualitative	Women	Charismatic	Economic,	Faith healing

	(2011)			believers		Psychological	empowers women economically and emotionally.
13	Freeman & Audia (2006)	Africa	Quantitative	Entrepreneurs	Pentecostal	Economic	Religious participation associated with business growth.
14	Bompani (2015)	Africa	Qualitative	Church leaders	Pentecostal	Social, Economic	Churches act as informal welfare providers.
15	Haynes (2017)	Africa	Review	—	Pentecostal	Economic, Social	Religion fills gaps left by weak state services.
16	Olivier & Wodon (2012)	Africa	Mixed	Faith institutions	Christian	Social, Health	Faith-based organizations deliver social services.
17	De Kadt (2009)	Africa	Review	—	Christian	Social	Religious groups contribute to community development.
18	Mashindano (2011)	Tanzania	Qualitative	Communities	Christian	Economic, Social	Faith actors involved in poverty alleviation initiatives.
19	Mbiti (1990)	Africa	Conceptual	—	African Christianity	Spiritual, Social	Religion central to wellbeing and communal support.
20	Gathogo (2017)	Africa	Historical	—	Christian	Social, Spiritual	Healing ministries linked to social transformation.
21	Ranger (1986)	Africa	Historical	—	Independent churches	Spiritual	Healing movements emerged in response to social crisis.
22	Daneel (2001)	Africa	Qualitative	Church members	Independent churches	Social, Spiritual	Healing churches promote community solidarity.
23	Kalu & Low (2008)	Africa	Review	—	Pentecostal	Health, Spiritual	Healing practices attract marginalized populations.
24	Freeman (2015)	Africa	Qualitative	Pentecostal members	Charismatic	Economic	Faith teachings encourage savings and investment.
25	Heuser (2016)	Africa	Qualitative	Urban believers	Pentecostal	Psychological	Faith healing improves resilience and optimism.

26	Adogame (2013)	Africa	Review	—	Pentecostal	Social, Economic	Churches create transnational support networks.
27	Ter Haar (2011)	Africa	Conceptual	—	Christian	Spiritual, Social	Religion contributes to human security and wellbeing.
28	Ellis & Ter Haar (2004)	Africa	Conceptual	—	Christian	Political, Social	Religion influences development processes.
29	Clarke (2013)	Africa	Review	—	Faith-based	Social	Faith actors important partners in development.
30	Wepener (2015)	Africa	Qualitative	Worshippers	Charismatic	Psychological, Spiritual	Ritual healing enhances emotional wellbeing.
31	Biri (2012)	Africa	Qualitative	Church members	Pentecostal	Economic	Prosperity messages shape financial behaviour.
32	Ukah (2007)	Africa	Qualitative	Pentecostal followers	Charismatic	Economic, Psychological	Wealth theology motivates economic ambition.
33	Asamoah-Gyadu (2005)	Africa	Qualitative	Pentecostal members	Pentecostal	Health, Spiritual	Healing addresses physical and spiritual problems.
34	Asamoah-Gyadu (2013)	Africa	Review	—	Pentecostal	Social, Spiritual	Healing ministries strengthen community identity.
35	Maxwell (2006)	Africa	Qualitative	Converts	Pentecostal	Economic, Social	Religious discipline linked to improved livelihoods.
36	Lindhardt (2015)	Tanzania	Qualitative	Pentecostal youth	Pentecostal	Economic, Psychological	Faith encourages future-oriented economic behaviour.
37	Dilger (2015)	Tanzania	Ethnographic	HIV communities	Pentecostal	Health, Social	Faith healing complements biomedical treatment.
38	Pfeiffer (2004)	Africa	Qualitative	Church members	Pentecostal	Health	Healing churches influence health-seeking behaviour.
39	Trinitapoli (2009)	Africa	Quantitative	Religious members	Christian	Health	Religious participation associated with health

							outcomes.
40	Agadjanian (2010)	Africa	Quantitative	Church members	Christian	Health, Social	Churches support HIV prevention and care.
41	Garner (2000)	Africa	Review	—	Pentecostal	Economic	Pentecostalism associated with upward mobility aspirations.
42	Martin (2002)	Global/Africa	Conceptual	—	Pentecostal	Economic, Social	Pentecostalism promotes modernization values.
43	Jenkins (2006)	Global	Review	—	Pentecostal	Social, Spiritual	Growth driven by healing and spiritual services.
44	Huntington (2000)	Global	Conceptual	—	Religion	Social	Religion shapes social development patterns.
45	Kim (2007)	Global	Review	—	Pentecostal	Economic	Faith linked to economic ethics and discipline.
46	Brady (2019)	Global	Review	—	Religion	Social	Faith participation improves wellbeing indicators.
47	Claridge (2018)	Global	Conceptual	—	Religion	Social	ans from religious networks reduces poverty risk.
48	Helliwell et al. (2025)	Global	Quantitative	Survey data	Religion	Psychological	Religious belonging linked to life satisfaction.
49	Beyers (2014)	Africa	Conceptual	—	Religion	Social	Religion contributes to social cohesion.
50	Fast (2011)	Africa	Qualitative	Church members	Pentecostal	Health, Spiritual	Healing practices address trauma and suffering.
51	Kilian (2006)	Africa	Qualitative	Congregants	Pentecostal	Psychological	Faith healing reduces anxiety and fear.
52	Lopez-Claros & Perotti (2014)	Global	Quantitative	Cross-country data	Religion	Economic	Religious values associated with development outcomes.
53	Mackenrodt (2007)	Africa	Qualitative	Pentecostal members	Charismatic	Social	Churches provide informal welfare systems.
54	Robert & Brown (2010)	Global	Quantitative	Survey	Religion	Social	Religious participation increases social support.

55	Editor (2025)	Africa	Review	—	Pentecostal	Health	Healing ministries expanding in urban areas.
56	Osmer (2008)	Global	Conceptual	—	Christian	Social	Practical theology framework for social engagement.
57	Swart (2012)	Africa	Review	—	Faith-based	Social, Economic	Churches contribute to community development.
58	Magezi (2016)	Africa	Conceptual	—	Pentecostal	Social	Pastoral care addresses poverty-related distress.
59	Chitando (2013)	Africa	Qualitative	Church members	Pentecostal	Gender, Economic	Faith healing empowers vulnerable groups.
60	Njoroge (2018)	Africa	Qualitative	Women believers	Charismatic	Economic, Social	Church programs support income activities.
61	Togarasei (2015)	Africa	Review	—	Pentecostal	Social	Churches fill welfare gaps in urban areas.
62	Wodon (2016)	Global	Quantitative	Faith institutions	Christian	Social, Health	Faith-based services improve well

ARTICLE

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EXPLORING BARRIERS AND DRIVERS OF RESEARCH INTEREST AMONG PUBLIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Research plays a pivotal role in expanding knowledge, strengthening educational institutions, and advancing national development. This study aims to identify the current state of research practice and explore the specific factors that either motivate or impede students from engaging in research activities. This study employed a quantitative survey to collect data from 237 undergraduates and postgraduates across various faculties at public universities in Bangladesh. Though 78.5% of students expressed keen interest in participating in research activities, only 40.1% were provided the opportunity to participate in research. Networking opportunities, a desire to contribute to society and a passion for innovation were identified as the primary Drivers. Conversely, major barriers include heavy academic workloads and a lack of technical skills. Multiple linear regression analysis further confirmed that intrinsic motivation was the strongest positive predictor of research interest ($\beta = .426$, $p < .001$). Interestingly, factors like supervision and institutional funding did not significantly influence a student's initial interest in participating in research. This study provides a roadmap for universities to improve their policies and support systems by highlighting both drivers and obstacles.

Keywords

Research; Barriers; Drivers; Undergraduate; Bangladesh

1. INTRODUCTION

The involvement in research enriches the learning experience, supports professional development, and increases interest in postgraduate education (Lopatto, 2004). Furthermore, research functions as a major driving force for the advancement of education, scientific innovation and overall national progress (Jubair et al., 2025). Additionally, research provides compelling evidence, which enables various stakeholders to make informed educational decisions while simultaneously having a wider societal impact on teaching methods (Majumder, 2004). Similarly, there is an integral relationship between academic training and scientific inquiry (Moraes et al., 2016). Notably, research opportunities at the undergraduate level not only impart students with the competencies to conduct research, but also augment their problem-solving abilities, as evidenced by a survey of medical graduates of Bangladesh, where 96.7% respondents acknowledge that research is beneficial because it cultivates critical thinking and facilitates implementing policies (Ferdoush et al., 2021). Consequently, research training is also of paramount importance from an institutional perspective. Indeed, the incorporation of research training in the medical curriculum is essential (Amin et al., 2012). Likewise, acquiring research experience at the nascent stages of medical education amplifies the interest of future physicians in joining a research-based profession (Sheikh et al., 2013). Research experience has a substantial impact on career choices and skill development, especially when there is access to effective mentoring (Zydney et al., 2002). Moreover, research involvement has been correlated with students' overall well-being (Walkington & Ommering, 2022), while self-efficacy has been identified as a predominant determinant of interest in research (Lambie et al., 2014).

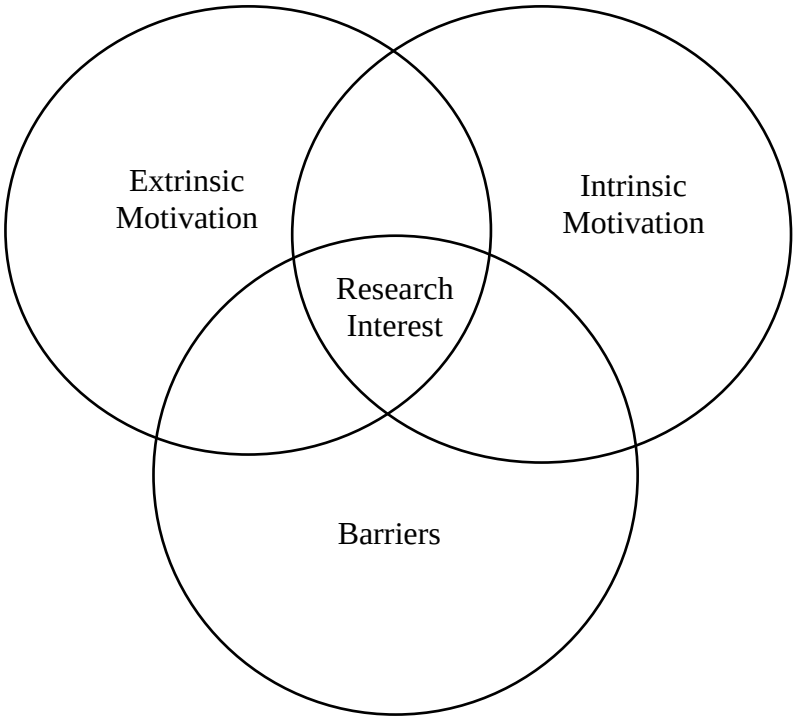
Studies suggest that students often express a research interest, but this does not necessarily translate into active participation. For instance, despite a high level of interest in participating in research (81.7%), formal training is given low priority (Moraes et al., 2016). Furthermore, an increase in positive attitude and a decrease in anxiety after research training has been observed (Wishkoski et al., 2022). However, there is a discrepancy between teachers' expectations and students' actual experiences, where students focus more on performing tasks than creating knowledge (Zou et al., 2024). On the other hand, confidence in research and the expected outcome act as important motivational factors influencing students' participation (Bard et al., 2000). In developing-country contexts, students generally display a positive attitude toward research, but they face significant structural and educational barriers. Despite a high level of familiarity with research methods, only a moderate interest in participation has been observed (Ferdoush et al., 2021). Similarly, in the context of Arab universities, students display a positive attitude but have low levels of knowledge, indicating a clear gap between motivation and participation (Amin et al., 2012). In addition, the limited institutional emphasis on research in Asia, compared to developed countries, makes the research culture relatively weak (Majumder, 2004).

The research environment in Bangladesh is characterized by limited infrastructure, inadequate mentoring, and weak institutional support. Low student participation rates have been highlighted and emphasize the need for national policy coordination. (Hasan et al., 2025). Common challenges include lack of funding, lack of mentorship and guidance, heavy institutional workload, low research familiarity, time constraints, inadequate infrastructure and resources, weak supervision, and limited methodological and statistical expertise (Ferdoush et al., 2021; Jubair et al., 2025; Majumder, 2004; Matin & Khan, 2017; Sheikh et al., 2013). Despite existing research, the number of studies that specifically examine the barriers and drivers of research interest among students in public universities in Bangladesh is limited. Previous studies often focus only on attitude or participation, without encompassing both motivational and barrier-related factors (Ferdoush et al., 2021; Matin & Khan, 2017; Zou et al., 2024). This study addresses these gaps by examining both barriers and drivers of interest in pursuing research, providing insights to inform policy and institutional strategy.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The human propensity to assimilate and explore is universal, yet the transition from a personal passion for innovation to active research is frequently blocked by a landscape of perceived obstacles.

Figure 1 – Determinants of Research Interest



Source: Authors (2026)

Intrinsic motivation is defined as the inherent tendency to engage in an activity for its own internal satisfaction, fun or challenge rather than for any separable consequence or external reward (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this study, it is operationalized through factors such as a personal passion for innovation, the desire to make a social contribution, and the pursuit of networking opportunities. This type of motivation is often described as a 'natural wellspring' of learning and achievement that reflects the human propensity to assimilate and explore (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation refers to the driver to perform an activity in order to attain a separable outcome or instrumental value, such as a reward or the avoidance of a penalty (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this study, extrinsic drivers include awards and recognition, access to research resources, and faculty supervision. The absence of a structured research framework within Bangladesh's secondary and higher education system deprives students of foundational training, access to scientific literature and mentorship opportunities typically provided in developed nations (Jubair & Mehenaz, 2024). In this study, Barriers are conceptually defined as perceived obstacles that hinder a student's motivation and research productivity, including Institutional funding, excessive workload, lack of training, limited technical skills, social expectations, and gender challenges.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study employs a quantitative research approach to rigorously analyze research engagement among public university students in Bangladesh and find out the key drivers and challenges that influence their interest in participation in research. A quantitative approach implies the collection of large-scale, generalized data and supports objectives, analysis and statistical differences across a diverse student population (Creswell, 2014).

Table 1. Analytical Variable

Variables	Description	Sources
Drivers	Intrinsic Motivation refers to the inherent tendency to engage in a task solely for its own satisfaction, regardless of external outcomes. In this study, it was operationalized through networking opportunities, passion for research and contributions to society.	(Ryan & Deci, 2000)

	Extrinsic motivation refers to the tendency to engage in an activity for the purpose of achieving a specific and distinct outcome. In this study, it was identified through the opportunity for reward, research resources and faculty supervision.	
Barriers	In this study, barriers are defined as perceived obstacles that hinder researchers' motivation and productivity. Institutional funding refers to the inadequacy of financial support allocated to research activities. Excessive workload refers to excessive institutional demands that reduce the time allocated to research. Lack of training refers to the lack of formal preparation for research, while limited technical skills reflect insufficient competence in research materials and methods. Social expectations refer to the external social pressures that discourage research participation and gender challenges refer to the systematic inequalities that disproportionately limit participation in research by certain groups.	Author

Source: Authors (2026)

3.2 Sampling

In particular, this study targets undergraduate and postgraduate students from multiple public universities across Bangladesh. Due to logistic constraints, limited funding, and the exploratory nature of this study, a convenience sampling technique was employed to recruit participants from the selected public universities in Bangladesh. While convenience sampling allows for efficient data collection from accessible student populations, it poses limitations regarding generalizability. To mitigate this risk and enhance sample diversity, data were collected across various academic years and diverse faculties. Convenience sampling was chosen for the data collection method to collect the data of those who are either experienced or express their eagerness in research activities, thus enhancing the study's relevance and validity (Memon et al., 2025).

3.3 *Data collection*

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of sections on demographic, motivational and barrier factors and research engagement indicators. This instrument employed a five-point Likert-scale (from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") to measure respondents' agreement with statements regarding interest in participating in research (Likert, 1932). To ensure the validity of the survey instrument, a multi-step validation process was adopted. First, content and face validity were established through a rigorous review by a panel of academic experts in higher education research, ensuring that the questionnaire items accurately reflected the study's objectives. Second, a pilot test was conducted with a small cohort of university students (n=30) to evaluate the clarity, readability, and formatting of the questions. Then, minor stylistic adjustments were made based on their feedback. Finally, the construct (Intrinsic & Extrinsic Drivers) validation was empirically supported by evaluating internal consistency via Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded strong reliability coefficients.

The measurement scale demonstrated strong reliability, well exceeding the universally accepted threshold of 0.70. Specifically, the Intrinsic Motivation construct (comprising 3 items measuring student passion, networking interest, and societal contribution) demonstrated an alpha value of 0.784. Meanwhile, the Extrinsic Motivation construct (comprising 5 items assessing faculty guidance, environment, and institutional awards) showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.846 and the barriers construct demonstrated a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.686. These results confirm that the scales used are highly reliable and suitable for subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Reliability test of scales

Scale	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha(α)
Intrinsic Motivation	3	0.784
Extrinsic Motivation	5	0.846
Barriers	8	0.686

Source: Authors' Survey (2026)

3.4 *Data Analysis Strategy*

For data analysis, a two-tier statistical strategy was adopted. First, Chi-square tests of Independence were conducted as an exploratory measure to assess the bivariate associations between demographic characteristics and students' interest in participating in research. Karl Pearson's chi-square test is among the most widely employed statistical techniques for investigating association and differences among categorical variables (Franke et al., 2012). However, to overcome the limitations of bivariate analysis and to evaluate the relative influence of different drivers and barriers, a multiple linear regression analysis was

subsequently performed. In this model, students' future interest in participating in research served as the dependent variable, while intrinsic and extrinsic factors functioned as the independent predictors.

To prepare the continuous predictors for the regression model, composite scores for both Intrinsic and Extrinsic Drivers were generated by calculating the mean values of their respective Likert-scale items. Furthermore, to ensure logical directionality and ease of interpretation within the regression framework, the binary dependent variables- students' future interest in pursuing research- were reverse-coded (where 1 = No and 2 = Yes). In this finalized model, the reverse-coded interest to research variable served as the dependent variable, while the computed mean scores of intrinsic and extrinsic factors functioned as the independent predictors.

4. RESULTS

The results section of this study is presented in three different segments: the demographic profile of the respondents, the drivers for research involvement, and the barriers hindering research activities among public university students.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of the Respondents

Character	Frequency		
		n	Percentage
Gender	Male	130	54.9
	Female	107	45.1
Study Year	2nd	52	21.9
	3rd	89	37.6
	4th	78	32.9
	Masters	18	7.6
CGPA	3	22	9.3
	3.25	67	28.3
	3.5	102	43
	3.75	46	19.4
Faculty	Science	43	18.1
	Business	54	22.8
	Social Science	105	44.3
	Arts	35	14.8
Living Condition	Hall	184	77.6
	Mess	45	19
	Own-House/With Family	8	3.4
Participated in research	Yes	95	40.1
	No	142	59.9

Interest in participating in research	Yes	186	78.5
	No	51	21.5

Source: Authors' Survey (2026)

The study surveyed 237 students from different faculties of public universities in Bangladesh. The gender distribution is relatively balanced in this study. Among the participants, 54.9% (n=130) were male and 45.1% (n=107) were female. The majority of the participants were 3rd-year students (37.6%), followed by 4th-year students (32.9%). In terms of academic results, a remarkable proportion of the respondents (43%) maintained a CGPA of 3.5. Faculty-wise demographic information shows that the highest segment of the respondents belonged to the Social Science faculty (44.3%). Regarding research experience, although 78.5% expressed an interest in participating in research in the future, only 40.1% of the respondents got the opportunity to actively participate in research activities.

4.1 Drivers

This study identified several intrinsic and extrinsic factors that motivate students to participate in research activities. Chi-square tests were conducted to extract the relationships between these factors and actual research engagement.

Table 4. Intrinsic factors influencing research engagement

		Yes	No	P Value
Networking Benefits	Strongly Disagree	8	6	<0.001
	Disagree	12	4	
	Neutral	28	21	
	Agree	108	18	
	Strongly Agree	30	2	
Passionate about Research	Strongly Disagree	9	6	<0.001
	Disagree	3	13	
	Neutral	39	16	
	Agree	100	16	
	Strongly Agree	35	0	
Social Contribution	Strongly Disagree	7	5	<0.001
	Disagree	6	4	
	Neutral	32	22	
	Agree	105	20	

	Strongly Agree	36	0

Source: Authors' Survey (2026)

Table 4 displays the intrinsic factors. All three factors – Networking Benefits, Passion for Research, and Social Contribution – demonstrated statistically significant association with research interest ($p < 0.001$ for all). Among the 186 respondents expressing an interest in participating in research, 138 (74.2%) 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that networking was a driver, 135 (72.6%) expressed a passion for research, and 141 (75.8%) identified social contribution as a motivator.

Table 5. Extrinsic factors influence research

		Yes	No	P Value
Awards and Recognition	Strongly Disagree	7	4	0.002
	Disagree	14	5	
	Neutral	28	17	
	Agree	94	23	
	Strongly Agree	43	2	
Research Resources	Strongly Disagree	9	5	0.005
	Disagree	11	4	
	Neutral	24	16	
	Agree	97	21	
	Strongly Agree	45	5	
Faculty supervision	Strongly Disagree	7	3	0.897
	Disagree	13	5	
	Neutral	37	10	
	Agree	94	25	
	Strongly Agree	35	8	

Source: Authors' Survey (2026)

Among the extrinsic factors, only 'Awards and Recognition' of their work ($p=0.002$) and availability of 'Research Resources' ($p=0.005$) showed statistically significant relationships with the research interest. However, no statistically significant association was observed between Faculty Supervision and research interest ($p =0.897$).

4.2 Barrier Factors

This section presents the findings of the Chi-square tests of independence conducted to identify the relationship between selected barrier factors and students' interest in participating in research (Yes/No). A total of six barrier factors were analyzed, including

institutional funding, heavy workload, lack of training, lack of technical skills, social expectations, and gender specific challenges.

Table 6. Barriers hindering research Participation

		Yes	No	P Value
Institutional Funding	Strongly Disagree	12	2	0.685
	Disagree	19	3	
	Neutral	31	7	
	Agree	66	19	
	Strongly Agree	58	20	
Heavy Workload	Strongly Disagree	5	6	<0.001
	Disagree	31	3	
	Neutral	47	25	
	Agree	72	11	
	Strongly Agree	31	6	
Lack of Training	Strongly Disagree	11	3	0.731
	Disagree	18	2	
	Neutral	39	13	
	Agree	85	23	
	Strongly Agree	33	10	
Limited Technical Skills	Strongly Disagree	28	5	<0.001
	Disagree	27	3	
	Neutral	42	13	
	Agree	75	14	
	Strongly Agree	14	16	
Social Expectations	Strongly Disagree	14	4	0.053
	Disagree	45	3	
	Neutral	53	21	
	Agree	59	17	
	Strongly Agree	15	6	
Gender-specific challenges	Strongly Disagree	16	8	0.182
	Disagree	43	6	
	Neutral	42	13	
	Agree	61	14	
	Strongly Agree	24	10	

Source: Authors' Survey (2026)

Table 6 represents the bivariate relationship analysis between six perceived barriers and research interest. No statistically significant associations were found for Institutional Funding ($p = 0.685$), Lack of Training ($p = 0.731$), Social Expectations ($p = 0.053$), and Gender-specific

Challenges (p = 0.182). In these instances, this distribution of responses was similar between those who were interested in participating in research and those who were not.

However, two barrier factors had a statistically significant association with research interest. Heavy Workload demonstrated a significant association (p< 0.001), where the highest frequency of 'Agree' responses n=72 was observed among students expressing an interest in engaging in research. Additionally, Limited Technical Skills showed a significant association with research interest(p<0.001). Notably, among the 51 respondents who were not interested in participating in research, 31.4% (n =16) 'Strongly Agreed' that technical skills were a barrier, compared to 7.5% (n = 14) of the 186 students who were interested in participating.

4.3 Multivariate Predictors of Research Interest

To evaluate the relative influence of drivers and barriers simultaneously, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 233) = 16.538$, $p < .001$, accounting for 17.6% of the total variance in students' interest in research ($R^2 = .176$, Adjusted $R^2 = .165$).

Table 7 – Predictors of Research Interest

						95% CI	
Variables	**b**	**SE**	**β**	**t**	**p**	**Lower**	**Upper**
(Constant)	1.389	.156		8.885	< .001	1.081	1.697
Intrinsic Motivation	.211	.038	.426	5.549	< .001	.136	.286
Extrinsic Motivation	-.009	.04	-.018	-.229	.819	-.087	.069
Barriers	-.099	.039	-0.16	-2.545	.012	-.176	.022
R= 419, R^2 = .176, Adjusted R^2 = .165, $F(3,233)$ = 16.538, p = < .001							
Note: b = Unstandardized Coefficient, SE = Standard Error, β = Standardized Beta, CI = Confidence Interval							

Source: Authors' Survey (2026)

As shown in Table 7, intrinsic motivation emerged as the strongest positive predictor of research interest ($\beta = .426$, $t = 5.549$, $p < .001$). Conversely, overall perceived barriers significantly and negatively influenced students' interest in research ($\beta = -.16$, $t = -2.545$, $p = .012$). Extrinsic motivation did not show any statistically significant multivariate relationship ($\beta = -.018$, $t = -.229$, $p < .819$)

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a noticeable 'participation gap' among public university students in Bangladesh. While 78.5% of respondents of this study expressed a clear interest in participating in research, only 40.1% had actively participated in research

activities. Though there is high intrinsic motivation, systematic barriers prevent students from translating interest into participation. The demographic information of this study indicates engagement rate is most abundant among 3rd year and 4th year students. This may be due to increasing academic maturity and exposure to specialized courses. Intrinsic factors appear to be the most influential drivers; networking opportunities, a passion for new invention, and the desire to make a contribution to society all have a statistically significant influence on interest in pursuing a research career. Among extrinsic factors recognition of their work and available resources appeared to be a significant estimator of the research participation interest. But faculty supervision was not found to be a primary driver of research interest ($p = .897$); rather, perceived faculty support may function as a tool for execution instead of a prerequisite for motivation. In other words, interest in participating in research is often self-generated before institutional support is sought. In addition, the lack of a significant association for institutional funding ($p = .685$) may indicate that students are willing to participate in research in spite of having financial constraints. Another reason for these unexpected findings, students may not yet fully grasp the financial requirements of advanced scholarly work. This is further statistically validated by the multiple regression model, where intrinsic motivation emerged as the dominant positive driver, confirming that autonomous factors like passion and social commitment are the core engines shaping students' interest toward research.

The findings of this study, particularly the 'interest-participation gap' align with recent studies. For instance, Hasan et al. (2025) in their study reported that 70.8% of medical students in Bangladesh were interested in volunteering in research activities, but the actual participation rate was much lower, with the rate of 21.5%. Similarly, the findings for heavy academic workload as a major barrier factor ($p < 0.001$) mirror the findings by Ferdoush et al. (2021), where 89.1% of students cited academic overloads as their primary obstacle. In some prior studies, males were found 1.5 times more likely to be involved(Hasan et al., 2025), in this study, there is no significant relationship found between gender and research participation interest. This finding suggests that, though the interests are pretty equal, male students may get more priority in terms of the execution of the study.

This study has some limitations. The sample size ($n=237$) of this study is relatively small. The use of convenience sampling also restricts the generalizability of the findings, as the respondents may be more or less research-inclined than the average student. Data were only focused on public universities, which may not represent the overall condition of research engagement of students, excluding private universities, or specialized colleges and institutions. In addition, the reliance on self-reported data regarding CGPA and research participation may have biases. The cross-sectional nature of this study captures a snapshot of students' sentiment, but can't track the long-term progression of students from 'Interest' to 'completion' of research projects. Future studies could measure whether providing or including mandatory training on digital research tools like statistical software, office tools, significantly increases their involvement in research participation rates, since limited

technical skills are a primary deterrent. Further study could also collect qualitative interviews to identify the underlying causes of unexpected findings, such as faculty support, and gender difference did not drive research interest.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the major factors that foster or demotivate students' interest in research participation across public universities of Bangladesh. Overall, the study aimed to fill a critical literature gap by investigating both motivational and obstructive factors to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current research environment. The study shows that students' interest is often self-generated before institutional support is sought. However, extrinsic factors like recognition and availability of resources also have an influence on students' interest in participating in research. Conversely, regarding obstacles, heavy academic workloads and lack of technical skills were identified as the most critical barriers. This research might be helpful for universities and policymakers to improve the research culture in Bangladesh. Policymakers and university administrations should include relevant technical skills in their curriculum, re-evaluate academic workloads, and improve accessibility to resources.

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FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: ENGLISH AND NEPALI SUBJECT TEACHERS' PERCEPTION AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Formative assessment is a feedback-oriented evaluation in teaching-learning processes. Though distinct, the other closely related concepts that are being used in the Nepalese classroom practice are internal assessment and continuous assessment system (CAS). Although these assessments are purposeful for improvement of learning in the academic institutions of Nepal, in general observation, neither the teachers have a good perception on it nor the students have a meaningful improvement in language learning. Thus, this paper explores the English and Nepali (the two dominantly used languages in the education system of Nepal) subjects teachers' perceptions and perspectives about formative assessment in the classroom practices. Based on qualitative narrative inquiry design, in-depth interviews were carried out with the purposefully and conveniently selected four (two English and two Nepali subjects) teachers for the collection of information. By analyzing the information from general inductive way, it was concluded that the teachers were terminologically taking the formative assessment, internal assessment, and continuous assessment system synonymously, which was not exactly true. Likewise, they were engaging their students in

assessment to fulfil the curriculum requirement; a kind of formality. Moreover, they observed that the students were active and regular in learning with the implication of formative assessment. In addition, they felt lack of updated input from the responsable authorities for the implementation of formative assessment in their teaching leaarning context. Thus, it required timely engagement to get knowledge of recent strategies for implementing formative assessment to make teaching -learning meaningful.

Keywords
formative assessment; language teaching-learning; improve; perception; perspectives

1. INTRODUCTION

In Etymology and common use, Sadler (1989) explained that 'formative' is *forming* or *moulding* something purposefully. So, in course of teaching-learning, the formative assessment is to make a judgement of the learners' performance, purposefully providing feedback, which helps to reach the goal of teaching-learning.

In this regard, by studying the history of formal ways of learning, we perceive that the behavioristic psychological theories heavily influenced teaching and learning during and before the 1940s. According to Komorowska (2019), the teaching-learning was influenced by the behavioristic thoughts until the late 1950s, i.e. language learning was not taken different than that of learning other general skills i.e. cycling, cooking etc. In this sense, the development of habit formation was regarded as learning skills, and language habit formation was taken the learning of language. Moreover, learning was not taken as the creativity, it was perceived as an outcome of a mechanical repetition that made learning possible, and individual differences was not counted for learning. As a consequence, the idea of evaluation was also influenced by the behavioristic concepts of testing, i.e., errors were not expected, thus the ways of correction and feedback were not valued in language learning. Moreover, final examination was implemented as the means of evaluation in learning, and alternative ways of the assessment were not illustrated during that time.

Likewise, before the 1960s, formative evaluation was understood under various terms. The terminology 'formative evaluation' was implemented in the early past in different names, 'developmental testing or tryout,' Similarly, after the 1960s, some theorists, for example, clarified the two different ideas of testing in terms of 'formative' and 'summative' evaluation (Lumsdaine, 1965; Scriven, 1967). The concept of formative evaluation was similar to the concept of the 'developmental' testing, i.e., to improve, not to prove the instructional procedures.

Later on, learner evaluation was conceptualized as a part of the performance improvement procedure (Markle, 1989). Keeping this essence, the idea used to refer to the procedures for instructional improvement was named variously - e.g., 'read-think-aloud,' or

'read-aloud-think-aloud' (Smith & Wedman, 1988), 'programmed instruction,' (Geis, 1989), 'learners verification,' (Komoski, 1974).

Moreover, Popham (2011) as cited in Remmi and Hashim (2021) explained that formative assessment as the process of teaching, and testing in which teacher improves instructions and provides non-evaluating feedback specific teaching and learning area to make the learners able to improve performance in learning. Further, it was conceptualized broadly i.e. teachers use formative assessment as an instrument to identify level of the students, monitor progress, give feedback, make instructional decisions, and planning more purposeful lesson (Olagunju, 2015).

Regarding the time and duration of formative assessment, various factors play role in determining it. Formative evaluation can take different time based on the nature of formality. The formal nature of formative evaluation can be carried out in a certain temporal gap, and informal formative evaluation can be conducted in any time. As Shavelson et al. (2008) explained, a continuum of formative assessment can range from informal to formal, and varies relative to specific pre-planning.

In this regard, the temporal gap can be different for the implementation of formative evaluation. There can be various perspectives based on practice; it is a continuous and iterative process during teaching and learning activities (McAlpine, 1992). Likewise, it is used during the stage of instruction and at the drafting stage of the program (Dick & Carey, 1990), it is continuous throughout teaching and learning processes i.e. to design, to verify, and to revise the instruction (Komoski & Woodward, 1985).

Similarly, Wiliam and Thompson (2007) explained the possible duration (short, medium, and long cycles) of the formative evaluation that can be implemented while teaching students in academic sessions. Here, short cycle was explained as the minute-by-minute, and/or day-by-day assessments. This cycle emphasizes on students' learning within, and between lessons. Likewise, medium cycle focuses on the assessment within and/or between instructional units within four weeks' time. It is mostly covering the measurement of the students' learning a 1- to 4-week sequence of instruction, which teaches and assesses the learners' achievement in a certain week's duration on a specific unit or content. Likewise, long cycle is the assessment of the learners' after four weeks' teaching-learning. It focuses on quarterly, semester, annual, or other longer time period progress. More specifically, this is the measurement of learners' progress over the 4 weeks to 1-year duration of instruction.

With this theoretical scrutiny, we have also audited empirical studies related to formative assessment in the context of Nepal. In this connection, the term formative assessment is a popular word than that of summative assessment in the context Nepalese education system in these days. Although, it is a buzz linguistic unit, studies based on the perception and perspectives of teachers are not well explained in the context of Nepalese school level education system. Moreover, we are convinced with Herman (2013), 'yet, despite its popularity, formative assessment remains an elusive concept'. Thus, we attempted to collect

the literature related to the formative assessment in the Nepali context, and analyzed to set a path for this particular study.

Most of the empirical studies are focusing on mathematics and geography learning rather than language learning in the context of Nepal. For example, Acharya (2023) concluded that the use of formative assessment plays an important motivating role in the ways of improving students' mathematics learning where experimental group excelled controlled group after the intervention. Similarly, Dahal (2019) explained from a survey study that formative assessment creates learning by doing situation and improves learners' performance in mathematics. Alike mathematics learning, the classroom-based assessment can be meaningful and effective when the teachers are specialized in that particular subject, here geography for an instance (Khatiwada, 2019). Likewise, Kafle and Neupane (2025) concluded though the teachers faced a lot of challenges in English language classroom, where the formative assessment positively impacted students' learning with the enhancement of students' engagement and individualized learning experiences.

Neither the teachers nor the students are satisfied with the use of summative kinds of assessment in the school level education system of Nepal, and realized a need of collaboration among the stakeholders for the better implement of formative assessment. In this regard, the existing pass and fail-oriented tests created some kinds of fear and hatred to the students (Sigdel & Sherpa, 2024). Moreover, the lack of trustworthiness, validity, and consistency in the traditionally existed examination, and suggested to design classroom activities in such a way that students' engagement is enhanced. Alike situation is explained in Neupane (2023), the students were not satisfied with summative assessment and favored project-based assessment. Moreover, they reported that these internal assessment activities provided the learners a lot of opportunities to learn from each other among the learners. Further, it was suggested to make policy and implement accordingly to balance between summative and formative assessment system. Further, it is realized a need of collaboration among the teachers, students, and guardians too for the meaningful implementation of the formative assessment in leaning. In this regard, Chongbang (2021) explored a need of collaboration of stakeholders for formulating assessment policy using teachers' expertise and professional disposition.

The university level teachers have various experiences and perceptions about the implementation of the formative assessment in the context of Nepal. In this connection, Adhikary (2023) remarked that the students' progress was observed in implementing the internal assessment. Moreover, the bias free process of internal assessment can increase the degree of satisfaction among the students. Likewise, teachers, first should have sufficient comprehension about different tools of assessment, specifically, formative assessment. As a result, they can better implement in teaching-learning process. The faculty members not only had a limited understanding of assessment for learning but also their practices were not sufficient for efficacious teaching-learning (Acharya & Poudel, 2025). In this study, they recommended to adopt formative assessment for improved learning.

As above explanation, the formative assessment was undoubtedly illustrated that it supports in practical and meaningful leaning. Thus, a requirement of a convenient policy for the balanced use of assessments for the purposeful teaching-learning. In this connection, Bhandari and Kshetree (2024) mentioned formative assessment significantly contributed to identify weakness, and motivate the students towards successful learning. Moreover, they pointed a need of good policy for the better practice of formative assessment. Likewise, Awofala and Olaniyi (2023) remarked, formative assessment plays a vital role for the better achievement in learning. Thus, they recommended education planners to make policy so that the teachers often use formative assessment, specifically continuous formative assessment as the tool to improve teaching and learning goals. Moreover, they suggested to use formative assessment as the feedback tool as well.

Almost all of the theoretical and empirical studies presented that the formative assessment in various terminologies (internal assessment, classroom assessment) plays a positive role in increasing the rate of learning. In fact, formative assessment has a valuable role in learning to take place, thus, it is termed as an 'assessment for learning' (Herman, 2013).

Although there are various studies that explored assessment related issues, from the observation and the study of previous literature, we were curious to what extent the studies are specifically related to the formative assessment perception and perspectives of secondary level English and Nepali language teachers. In this regard, when we analyze studies school level course-wise in the context of Nepal, it reflected that the studies were mostly carried out in mathematics classroom and very few in other subjects regarding the role of assessment in learning. It shows that very few studies in English and Nepali languages though they are dominant in use in the education system of Nepal. Thus, the need of carrying out study in language (Nepali and English) teaching and learning is necessary. Since teachers are the change agents, we eagerly engaged to explore their perception and perspectives about formative assessment. Though very few, the studies that were conducted in at school level shows that not only the students but also stakeholders were willing to make formative assessment more practical by requiring a reasonable policy so that the learning opportunity increased and assessment gets further validation in academia.

Regarding the studies related to perception and perspectives of teachers, no study is found in school level, only very few are identified at the university level. in this regard, an interesting notification from those university level studies reflected that even in the higher level of education, the teachers did not have sufficient understanding about internal assessment theoretically. As a consequence, there was lacking a better implementation in teaching-leaning. This made us to think seriously about the need of carrying out study in the context of school level.

On the one hand, the review of the related literature reflected that there have been various studies related to assessment, internal assessment, and summative assessment; but there is a lack of study on English and Nepali language teachers' perceptions and perspectives towards formative assessment specifically in the context of Nepal. On the other hand, very

little research has been done to explore the teachers' perception and perspective about formative assessment, which shows the unawareness of authorities from the teaching learning perspective. Similarly, not much this kind of research has been done in the context of Nepal and more specifically language teaching and learning. So, what the teachers do while carrying out formative assessment, and also what they do after formative assessment is area needs to be explored. This situation created a kind of curiosity to explain about the teachers' knowledge and their views on formative assessment in the context of Nepal. Moreover, we did not find any research regarding secondary level English and Nepali subject teachers' perception and perspective in the use of formative assessment. Thus, we realized a need to work in this area.

Thus, the major objective of this paper is to explore the English and Nepali subject (teaching at secondary level) teachers' perception and perspectives in the use of formative assessment. To achieve this objective, the research questions attempted to be answered are:

- How are the teachers (teaching Nepali subject, and English subject at secondary level in Nepal) perceiving about the formative assessment, internal assessment, and continuous assessment?
- To what extent the Nepali subject and English subject teachers are taking the role of formative assessment in teaching learning practices in their classroom?
- What do the selected teachers in this study have expectation from the authorities and colleagues?
- What barriers are the teachers experiencing while implementing formative assessment in teaching-learning processes?

2. METHODOLOGY

To explore the English and Nepali subject teachers' perceptions and perspectives in the use of formative assessment, qualitative approach was used which was based on the narrative inquiry. This design is suitable to the objectives of this study to understand the experiences of the participants. (Connelly & Clandinin 2016; Creswell, 2014; Tubey et al., 2015).

As Khatri (2024) illustrated interpretive perspective as the meaning making process from the participants' narratives, this study is based on interpretivism. In this connection, regarding the English and Nepali subject teaching and learning classroom context, we were interested in exploring the teachers' perceptions and perspectives about formative assessment, and interpret the meaning from their narratives. In this regard, we designed the methodology to interpret the teachers' perception and perspectives in terms of their thoughts, beliefs, values, and associated social norms (Taylor et al., 2012). As Scotland (2012) mentioned, to understand the participants' world view, we made meaning of the information collected from the participants' narratives.

Specifically, alike to Creswell (2014) explanation, we followed ethno-narrative of four teacher participants who were selected purposefully, and conveniently. For the collection of

information, in-depth interviews were carried out with those four teachers (two English subject and two Nepali subject teachers).

To analyze the collected information, we derived the findings from the general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). In this regard, we transcribed, read, coded, and categorized iteratively (Murray, & Moore, 2006) and made themes as the outcomes of the study.

Moreover, we maintained quality standard and trustworthiness by following Lincoln and Guba (1985) as cited in (Thomas, 2006) the four strategies for trustworthiness as credibility: we did peer debriefing, and cross-checked their statements, and our analysis, for transferability: we tried to generalize the result of this study with other literature from similar context, for dependability: we conducted the research audit i.e., compared the data, findings, and interpretations, and for the confirmability; we asked other colleague researchers to confirmed the processes and results aligned with objectives of the study. In this connection, we used the pseudonyms NT1 (Nepali Subject Teacher1), NT2 (Nepali Subject Teacher2), ET1 (English Subject Teacher1), and ET2 (English Subject Teacher2) in place of the real names for the ethical consideration. Further, as Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2016) suggested, all the interpreted text was read for the participant teachers and reconfirmed by them.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To explore the English and Nepali subject teachers' perceptions and perspectives on formative assessment, the in-depth interviews with the four participants were conducted to collect information. The narratives were recorded, and an iterative process was used to collect, transcribe, (re) read, code, categorize, and develop themes (Murray & Moore, 2006). Thus, a general inductive approach was used to analyze the information (Thomas, 2006). The results are presented on the following themes along with discussions:

3.1. *Teachers' Confusion and Misunderstanding of Formative, Internal, and Continuous Assessment*

The participant teachers were confused with the terminologies: internal assessment, formative assessment, and continuous assessment system (CAS), and conceptualized them identically. They understood all the differences in their use and purpose in a general sense, not specific implementation. The NT1, ET1, ET2, and NT2 expressed alike ET1's remarks:

> *I think the formative assessment, internal assessment, and continuous assessment are used synonymously. The purpose of all is the same, i.e., to evaluate the students. The students' all aspects of learning behavior are observed and formally kept as the record of the students. The overall record can also be used in the final exam to upgrade class.*

Formative assessment makes learning contextualized and effective in understanding the abstract concept (Dahal, 2019). Thus, the concept and use of the formative assessment should be made clear to the teachers. As a result, they can implement effectively in teaching and learning languages. Moreover, there should be compatible between curriculum guidelines, and clarity in the formative assessment. Likewise, a recent study by Acharya and Poudel (2025) reported that the teachers had limited understanding about formative assessment and its use in learning improvement, the teachers in this study also reflected thier findings. They had not sufficient knowledge about the formative assessment, internal assessment and continuous assessment.

3.2. A *Formality or a Tool for Learning?: Exploring Formative Assessment Practices*

The participant teachers reported that they use formative assessment to fulfil the formal requirement of curriculum. It is used because the curriculum requires, as ET1, expressed:

> *Formative assessment is carried out to keep a record of the students. It is a requirement of the curriculum. In the past, only final exams were taken to upgrade the students. But now there is a provision for the formative evaluation. It is compulsory these days. Yes, we are unbiased to implement the assessment but sometimes the students show dissatisfaction on the results.*

The teachers in this study did not use the formative assessment for improvement of learners' achievements. They did not perceive it as Sadler (1989) mentioned formative assessments are used to form the purposeful learning. But the teachers in this study used formative assessment for formality purpose. In fact, it should be used to improve procedures in learning (Markle, 1989). Moreover, it helps to verify the learners' performance (Komoski, 1974). Further, Popham (2011) as cited in Remmi and Hashim (2021) explained it is non-evaluating feedback for instructional improvement. It is used for planning lessons more purposefully (Olagunju, 2015). As Khatiwada (2019) mentioned the teachers are habituated on the formal assessment system that only records the progress, thus it should play a role to improve learning. Further, the teachers should be trained to use formative assessment for its genuine goal i.e., to improve both teaching and learning.

Moreover, the teachers in this study were not reporting their bias to the students' assessment but other similar research from the students' perspective reflected that the teachers are bias in marking the students' responses (Adhikary, 2023). Thus, it is necessary to triangulate the data from the teachers and students' perspectives. Moreover, the teachers did not suspect the consistency of the internal assessment, ET 1 said:

> *I know, we should not be bias to the students. We should treat them equally to their performance. I find it trustworthy. I find it fair.*

Sigdel and Sherpa (2014) carrying out the study from the students' perspectives mentioned that the internal examinations lacked trustworthiness, validity, and consistency. But this study from the teachers' perspectives did not reflect such a biased space in assessment.

3.3. *Formative Assessment: A Catalyst for Active Learning and Improvement*

When the teachers are implementing the formative assessment, the teachers in this study experienced that the students are active in learning and they are regularly attending classroom activities. Participants NT1s, NT2 and ET2s expressed similarly as ET1 remarked:

> *I see students are active in the classroom. They want to engage in the classroom because they believed that they will get good grades in the exam. After the use of the formative assessment, the presence of the students in the classroom is increased than the past. Moreover, formative assessment is used to improve the ways of teaching and learning, not to prove what has been learned. It gives space for feedback, achievement and progress in learning.*

More importantly, the participant teachers' explanation was to improve the learning; it does not prove processes of instruction (Lumsdaine, 1965; Scriven, 1967). Thus, formative assessment increased leaning. Moreover, it was similar to Acharya (2023), the formative assessment helped the learners to be motivated, active, and creative in learning. It was also similar to Kafle and Neupane (2025), the formative assessment enhances students' activeness, experiences and positivist in learning. Likewise, as Sigdel and Sherpa (2024) mentioned that the activeness of the learners' lead them to reach the desired purpose, the formative assessment makes the students active.

Further, as Bhandari and Kshetree (2024) mentioned the formative assessment recognizes the gap of learning, creates feedback, motivates learners and readjusts the teaching strategies for the progress of the learners. The formative assessment enhances the achievement in learning (Awofala and Olaniyi, 2023; Herman, 2013). This is somehow realized by teachers in this study which is good. Moreover, similar to Neupane (2023) students preferred the balanced use of formative assessment with summative evaluation as formative assessment provides opportunity to learn from each other and tested live engagement in the task which is observed in this study.

3.4. *Lack of Updated Input and Collaboration: Barriers to Effective Formative Assessment*

The participant teachers did not get updated information from the concerned authorities about meaningful implementation of the formative assessment. As others, NT1 expressed:

> *I am not getting any updates, better ways of implementation of formative assessment. Yes, there are training, but I have not experienced they are timely and updated. They are not sufficient opportunities for all the teachers. A few teachers get chance to take training. Most of the training are related to the teaching and very few about the assessment.*

Although there are various teacher training programs conducted, they are mostly focused on strategies in teaching to improve the teaching methods. But very few are focusing assessment improvement training programs.

Similar to Kafle and Neupane (2025) the teachers in this study also faced the challenge of limited resources for the updated information. Moreover, as Khatiwada (2019) reported, this study also reflects lacking properly trained teachers in the use of formative assessment. Like Acharya and Poudel (2025), the teachers in this study felt lack of suitable input related to policy, and capacity of faculty. Thus, formative assessment related update should be given to the teachers. Likewise, there should be stakeholders' collaboration for better use of formative assessment (Chongbang, 2021). But this was not found in this study, NT2 expressed as other participants:

> *I do not see the teachers are making rapport with guardians and other experts in terms of effective use of formative assessment in teaching-learning. Moreover, the guidance in the curriculum and time given to use in the classroom are not sufficient.*

Bhandari and Kshetree (2024) mentioned, this study also reflected not enough support from and among the stakeholders, policy, curriculum, and time to implement the formative assessment. It needs to make a good sharing among the teachers, guardians, students, and other experts about a better use of the formative assessment.

4. CONCLUSION

To explore the English and Nepali teachers' perceptions and perspectives in the use of formative assessment, a qualitative study based on narrative inquiry was used. From the in-depth interview of two English and two Nepali subject teachers who were teaching in secondary-level schools, the information was collected. With the objectives to evaluation process of analysis, it was concluded that the teachers conceptualized formative assessment, internal assessment, and continuous assessment system same way; they did not define them differently. In fact, they are not same. Although formative assessment is feedback oriented to improve teaching-learning, the teachers (in this study) were using formative assessment to fulfil the curriculum requirement rather than helping the progress of the students in learning. Further, the use of formative assessment makes students active in learning and regular in the classroom. We realized as Bhandari and Kshetree (2024) claimed formative assessment enhanced the students' achievement by identifying their learning gap and

encouraging the required feedback for learning improvement. Moreover, it is observable that the formative assessment strategies create self-regulated learning environment where the learners embraced a strong sense of self-efficacy, which supports the development of effective study habits: the learners themselves make plan and monitor their time and process; they can design a structure a productive work environment; and can use social resources effectively (Clark, 2012). As a consequence, effective teaching-learning takes place.

In a summary, the teachers were expecting recent inputs for the updated use of formative assessment, the concern authority should be aware of this fact and act accordingly. Thus, the training on teaching and processes of a better implementation of assessment should be taken simultaneously, not the training on teaching only but for assessment too. As Sigdel and Sherpa (2024), we concluded that the classroom activities in teaching-learning, and assessment should be designed in such a way that they support each other to reach the desired destination of leaning language via the comprehensible understanding and implementation of formative assessment in the formal educational system of Nepal.

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Governing The Contemporary Administrative State
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In the increasingly complex landscape of global governance, understanding the inner workings and organizational foundations of the administrative state is more pressing than ever. Jarle Trondal's *Governing the Contemporary Administrative State* emerges as an important contribution advancing a nuanced organizational theory approach that seeks to bridge longstanding gaps between political science, public administration, and international relations. This volume provides a comprehensive theoretical treatment and an empirically rich exploration of how organizational structures, dynamics, and reforms shape governance at multiple levels domestic, European, and international within a turbulent world.

At its core, Trondal's work challenges the traditional perception of the administrative state as a static and solely nationally bounded entity. Instead, he conceptualizes it as a fluid, multi-layered, and dynamically evolving system, where organizational features serve as the engine driving stability, adaptability, and reform. This perspective resonates with current scholarly debates emphasizing the importance of organizational capacity, networked governance, and institutional resilience in times of crisis. The volume's central argument is that the organizational architecture of public administration its structures, routines, and spatial arrangements fundamentally biases governance processes, influencing policy outcomes, bureaucratic autonomy, and accountability in both national and international contexts.

Trondal's methodology exemplifies a rigorous, mixed-methods approach that combines long-term large-N surveys, case studies, and conceptual modeling. The empirical backbone consists of nine large-scale surveys spanning over four decades (1976–2016), capturing perceptions, contact patterns, and participatory behaviors of thousands of civil servants within Norwegian ministries and agencies (Tables 3.1–3.7). This longitudinal data set is a unique asset, enabling the volume to analyze stability and change over time, particularly in response to reforms, European integration, and internationalization.

Complementing this quantitative analysis, the volume employs a detailed organizational framework, drawing on classic and contemporary organizational theories such as Weberian bureaucracy, bounded rationality, and institutionalist perspectives (Scott & Davis, 2016; Simon, 1965; Olsen, 2010). These are operationalized through variables like vertical and horizontal specialization, agency autonomy, and socialization processes, which are empirically tested across the different chapters. The combination of macro-level data with micro-level insights provides a comprehensive understanding of how organizational structures channel decision-making and adapt to turbulence.

Structurally, the book is divided into three parts: (I) Theorizing the Administrative State, (II) Outlooks on the Domestic Administrative State, and (III) Multilevel and International Dimensions. Each part meticulously examines the organizational underpinnings of governance, from stability in routine behavior (Chap. 3) to the impact of reforms and agency networks (Chaps. 4–7), and finally to the European and international levels (Chaps. 8–12). This division facilitates a layered understanding that underscores the multi-scalar and multi-institutional nature of contemporary governance.

One of the volume's most important contributions is its robust integration of organizational theory into the study of public administration and governance. Unlike traditional political science approaches that often treat bureaucracies as black boxes or formal institutions, Trondal emphasizes that organizational features such as capacity, specialization, and socialization are active drivers shaping policy processes and bureaucratic independence (Egeberg & Trondal, 2018). For example, Chapter 5 offers novel empirical evidence on how agency governance within integrated, multilevel systems such as the EU can be understood through organizational lenses, revealing how agencies' autonomy and influence are mediated by their structural positioning (Tables 5.4–5.8). Similarly, Chapter 12 demonstrates that international bureaucracies outside the EU, such as those in Africa, exhibit significant autonomy and behavioral patterns that are systematically biased toward their sectoral and epistemic orientations (Tables 12.2–12.4). These insights extend the literature on international public administration, providing a fresh perspective on actor autonomy and capacity building that had been largely neglected outside Western institutions. Nevertheless, the emphasis on organizational explanations occasionally risks underestimating the extent to which political contestation, ideology, and leadership dynamics may shape administrative behaviour independently of organizational design. Greater engagement with these

alternative explanatory factors would have strengthened the volume's broader theoretical reach.

Furthermore, the volume's emphasis on the resilience and stability of bureaucratic routines amidst turbulence sets a new agenda. It demonstrates that despite waves of reform, austerity, and globalization, core organizational routines such as contact patterns, participatory behaviors, and internal socialization remain remarkably stable over decades (Chap. 3, 4). This challenges the prevalent narrative of bureaucratic decay and suggests that organizational capacity and embedded routines serve as vital stabilizers in turbulent environments. At the same time, this emphasis on stability may somewhat understate situations in which administrative systems experience significant dysfunction, politicization, or institutional erosion. Future research may therefore benefit from examining more closely the conditions under which organizational resilience breaks down rather than persists.

While Trondal's organizational approach is highly innovative, some limitations emerge. First, the heavy reliance on Norwegian data, though empirically rich, raises questions about the universality of findings. The Norwegian civil service, characterized by high professionalism and relatively low politicization, may not fully capture dynamics in more polarized or less institutionalized contexts. Extending the analysis to diverse governance regimes would strengthen the volume's broader applicability.

Second, although the longitudinal data is a major strength, the volume could delve deeper into causal mechanisms linking organizational features to specific policy outcomes or accountability processes. For example, how do organizational routines influence responsiveness or legitimacy during crises? Incorporating case-based process tracing or experimental designs could enhance causal inference.

Third, the volume's focus on formal organizational structures somewhat underplays informal practices, culture, and power relations that are crucial in understanding bureaucratic behavior. While socialization is acknowledged, a more nuanced treatment of informal norms and elite networks would complement the structural analysis.

Finally, the volume's treatment of turbulence centers primarily on stability and resilience, with less emphasis on the dynamics of organizational decay or maladaptation. Incorporating insights from organizational ecology and institutional decay theories could provide a more comprehensive picture of organizational survival in adverse environments.

Trondal's volume significantly advances the literature on the organizational foundations of governance, bridging gaps between political science, public administration, and international relations. Its emphasis on organizational routines, capacity, and spatial arrangements aligns with recent calls for a practices turn in governance studies.

Moreover, by extending organizational analysis beyond the nation-state to multilevel (EU) and international bureaucracies, the volume contributes to a transnational turn, insisting that governance increasingly involves complex networks and border-crossing institutions. Its concentrates on actor autonomy and capacity-building resonates with emergent scholarship

on network governance and administrative capacity, especially in contexts of crisis and reform.

Furthermore, the volume emphasizes the importance of organizational design as a practical instrument for reform, aligning with recent scholarship advocating organizing for resilience in public sector institutions. Its integrative approach, combining empirical data with rigorous theory, sets a new standard for future research.

The volume's primary audiences include scholars and graduate students in public administration, political science, and European/international studies. It also offers valuable insights for policymakers, reformers, and organizational designers seeking to craft resilient, efficient, and accountable governance architectures. Its emphasis on organizational routines and capacity-building provides a practical toolkit for reform initiatives, especially in multilevel and international contexts where traditional command-and-control approaches falter.

Jarle Trondal's Governing the Contemporary Administrative State is a substantial contribution that advances our understanding of the organizational dimensions of modern governance. Its empirical rigor, theoretical innovation, and practical relevance make it an essential text for scholars and practitioners alike. By revealing the deep stability and subtle flexibility aembedded in organizational structures, the volume offers a compelling blueprint for building resilient governance systems capable of navigating turbulence in an uncertain world. While some questions remain regarding the transferability of its findings beyond highly institutionalized administrative contexts, the volume provides a valuable foundation for future comparative research on governance, organizational capacity, and administrative resilience. As governance challenges continue to mount globally, Trondal's organizational lens provides a vital compass for both understanding and shaping the future of the administrative state.

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