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HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH

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Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research

About the Journal

Overview

Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (JHSSR) is an **open-access academic journal** published by BP Services, independently owned, dependent upon contributions and run on a non-profit basis for the benefit of the world-wide social science community. It neither accepts nor commissions third party content. It is an online scientific journal and does not impose any publication or page fee on authors intending to publish in the journal. It publishes the scientific outputs.

Recognized internationally as a leading peer-reviewed scholarly journal devoted to the publication of original papers, it serves as a forum for practical approaches to improving quality in issues pertaining to social and as well as the humanities.

JHSSR is currently a **bi-annual** (*July* and *December*) periodical that considers for publication original articles as per its scope. The journal publishes in **English** and it is open to authors around the world regardless of the nationality.

The Journal is available world-wide online.

Aim and scope

Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research aims to develop as a pioneer journal for the social sciences with a focus on emerging issues pertaining to the social sciences as well as the humanities.

JHSSR is a principal outlet for scholarly articles. The journal provides a unique forum for theoretical debates and empirical analyses that move away from narrow disciplinary focus. It is committed to comparative research and articles that speak to cases beyond the traditional concerns of area and single-country studies. JHSSR strongly encourages transdisciplinary analysis of contemporary and historical social change particularly in Asia, or beyond by offering a meeting space for international scholars across the social sciences.

Scope of the journal includes HUMANITIES– Field of Languages, Linguistics, Literature, and Education. SOCIAL SCIENCES–Anthropology, Economics, Law, psychology, Political Sciences, sociology, music, sport, and Technology Management.

History and Background

A premier journal in its field, JHSSR was established in 2019, and has been in circulation continuously since then. Horizon is an open access scholarly journal that currently publishes *semi-annually.* The journal uses a stringent yet relatively rapid **double-blind peer-review process,** which translates to benefits such as timeliness of publication, widespread dissemination, high visibility, and likelihood of high citations and broader impacts. JHSSR follows code of conduct stipulated by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

It primarily publishes for dissemination of academic research meant for scholars and scientists worldwide. We seek to present the cutting-edge innovations and/or latest insights and strive to maintain the highest standards of excellence for JHSSR. The journal publishes on a non-profitable basis and does not have any income from subscription or other sources. It does not impose any publication or page fee on authors intending to publish in JHSSR.

JHSSR is distributed worldwide to more than 1000 institutions via *e-alerts*, in addition to authors upon request. To provide expert evaluation of the various segments of the broad spectrum of Humanities and Social Sciences research, the editorial office is assisted by scholars who serve as Associate Editors, editorial board members, Emeritus editors and international advisory board members from academic institutions across 35 countries, and ad-hoc reviewers chosen for their expertise. They provide constructive evaluation and, fair and rapid editorial processing. The frequency of citations to articles published in JHSSR by scientists, students, and others increases each year.

To facilitate review, the Editor-in-Chief and the Chief Executive Editor previews all submitted manuscripts and independently or in consultation with an Associate Editor, decides if a manuscript is appropriate for review by members of JHSSR's editorial board and/or *adhoc* reviewers. Manuscripts outside of the scope of JHSSR or those articles in poor English are returned without the delay of a full review, generally within a week of submission. Authors may contact the Chief Executive Editor in advance to inquire about the potential suitability of their research topic for review.

Manuscript submissions and inquiries are encouraged. Manuscript style and formatting are described in the **"Instructions to Authors"**. Manuscript submissions should be made using JHSSR online manuscript submission system, or manuscripts should be mailed through email to the Chief Executive Editor. Direct inquiries to CEE.horizon@gmail.com

Goal

Our goal is to bring the highest quality research to the widest possible audience. Our objective is **"Today's research, tomorrow's impact"**.

Quality

We aim for excellence, sustained by a responsible and professional approach to journal publishing. Submissions are guaranteed to receive a decision within 14 weeks. The elapsed time from submission to publication for the articles averages 3-4 months.

Editorial and International Advisory Board

The editorial and the advisory board of the Horizon has a presence of an international base of renowned scholars from various disciplines of research with diverse geographical background.

Our editorial team is engaged with **universities in 35 countries across the world** including **Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Fiji, Finland, Germany, India, Iran, Jordon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA,** and **Vietnam.**

Abstracting and indexing of *Horizon*

As is the case with any new journal, indexing in all prestigious relevant databases takes some time, and is heavily dependent upon citations the articles generate.

The Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (Online ISSN 2682-9096) is a *high-quality, peer-reviewed* academic journal in its field.

It is a Open Access journal and indexed in major academic databases to maximize article discoverability and citation. The journal follows best practices on publication ethics outlined in the COPE Code of Conduct. Editors work to ensure timely decisions after initial submission, as well as prompt publication online if a manuscript is accepted for publication.

Upon publication, articles are immediately and freely available to the public. The final version of articles can immediately be posted to an institutional repository or to the author's own website as long as the article includes a link back to the original article posted on JHSSR. All published articles are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

The journal has been indexed and abstracted in: SSRN, CrossRef, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, ProQuest. The journal has been listed in: CiteFactor, Cornel University Library, CrossCheck, DRJI, Journalseek, openaccessarticles.com, Open Access Library, Rubrig, Scirus, Ulrichs. In addition, the journal has been archived in: Academia.edu, National Library of Malaysia, and Malaysian Citation Index (MyCite).

The journal editors and the publisher continue to do their best for this journal to be included in the top abstracting and bibliographic databases around the world; however, for the journal to be indexed in any indexing body is beyond the Journal's direct control. Nevertheless, the journal ensures that the papers published are of high quality. The publisher from time to time recommends the journal to the indexing and abstracting bodies.

The authors must also ensure that the manuscripts they submit to JHSSR are of top quality and are innovative.

Citing journal articles

The abbreviation for *Horizon* Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research is ***Horizon J. Hum. Soc. Sci. Res.***

Publication policy

Horizon publishes original work and its policy prohibits an author from submitting the same manuscript for concurrent consideration by two or more publications, and is not under concurrent consideration elsewhere at the time of submitting it to Horizon. It prohibits as well publication of any manuscript that has already been published either in whole or substantial part elsewhere in any language. It also does not permit publication of manuscript that has been published **in full** in Proceedings.

Originality

The author must ensure that when a manuscript is submitted to Horizon, the manuscript is an original work. The author should check the manuscript for any possible plagiarism using any software such as **TurnItIn, i-Thenticate** or any other similar program before submitting the manuscripts to the Horizon journal.

All submitted manuscripts must be in the Journal's acceptable **similarity index range:**
< 25%– PASS; **30-35%–** RESUBMIT MS; **> 35%– REJECT.**

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The author/s must declare the use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Tools in Figures, Images, and Artwork. For further details, please refer to: https://horizon-jhssr.com/publishing-policies.php.

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In case of any queries, contact the Journal's Editorial office via email to info.JHSSR@gmail.com

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Horizon JHSSR **does not impose** any submission fees, publication fees or page charges for those intending to publish their research in this journal. However, as JHSSR is an open access journal, in norms with all open access journals, the journal imposes an Article Processing Charge (APC). To publish in JHSSR, authors are currently required to pay an APC of **USD100 per article** *(subject to revision).* A waiver to this available for academics with a heavily subsidized fee of USD50 per accepted manuscript.

In addition, this journal offers discount on Article Processing Charges to authors based in any of the countries which were classified by the World Bank as Low-income economies or Lower-middle-income economies. All requests can be sent directly to the journal's Chief Executive Editor.

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However, in case of a print version, if it is necessary for the figures to be reproduced in color, a charge of USD50 per figure will apply.

International Standard Serial Number (ISSN)

An ISSN is an 8-digit code used to identify periodicals such as journals of all kinds and on all media–*print and electronic*. All Horizon journals have an e-ISSN.

Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research: **e-ISSN 2682-9096.**

Lag time

A decision on acceptance or rejection of a manuscript is reached in 3 to 4 months (average 12 weeks). The elapsed time from submission to publication for the articles averages 4-5 months.

Authorship

Authors are not permitted to add or remove any names from the authorship provided at the time of initial submission without the consent of the Journal's Chief Executive Editor. Requests for changes to authorship must be directed to the journal's chief executive editor. Changes in authorship will only be permitted where valid reasons are provided and all authors are in agreement with the change. Post-publication changes to authorship will typically be made via a published correction and authors may be charged for this additional service.

One author will need to be identified as the corresponding author, with their email address normally displayed in the article. Authors' affiliations are the affiliations where the research was conducted. If any of the named co-authors moves affiliation during the peer-review process, the new affiliation can be given as a footnote. Please note that no changes to affiliation can be made after your paper is accepted.

Manuscript preparation

Refer to Horizon's **INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS** at the back of this journal or visit
https://horizon-jhssr.com/manuscript-prepparation.php



A well-formatted manuscript follows all journal instruction. All elements of the manuscript are printed in English with 1-inch margins at top, bottom, and sides. Right margins are unjustified. Horizon journals accept manuscript submissions which uses any consistent text— Format-free Submission! This saves you time and ensures you can focus on your priority: the research.

However, citations/ references must be formatted by you as per APA format.

Checklist for Manuscript Submission

- Cover letter
- Declaration form
- Referral form
- Manuscript structure

(Title, Author details and affiliation, Abstract, Keywords, etc. using the **IMRAD** style).

Each submission must fulfil the following criteria and documents listed below must be submitted along with the manuscript for intended publication.

1) Cover letter

Your cover letter should be complete and make a strong pitch. The cover letter should include all these details:

- Author(s): Full contact details (email, institutional address, telephone number, etc.) of all authors listed including who the corresponding author will be [full name(s) written as First Name then Last Name]. Understand the differences between lead author and co-author(s). Lead-author: who has done most of the research and writing; Co-author: Has collaborated with the lead author and contributed some parts.
- A brief explanation of your article's relevance and impact.
- Disclosure of whether you have published this study previously elsewhere or if it is in consideration by another journal.
- Disclosure of any commercial or financial relationship that may be viewed as any potential conflict of interest.
- A brief statement explaining why the journal should publish your study.

(Refer to sample available at https://horizon-jhssr.com/download.php).

2) Declaration form

Do not forget to complete the declaration form and submit it along with your manuscript. Sign the declaration that your manuscript is original, you have NOT published this study previously elsewhere in any language and is not under concurrent consideration elsewhere at the time of submitting it to Horizon.

3) Referral form

The authors are strongly recommended to complete the "Reviewers Suggestion" form along with the manuscript during submission. Authors should suggest up to 3 names of potential reviewers experts in the subject area of the manuscript, and are not the co-authors listed in the manuscript submitted. The suggested reviewers may be from any part of the world. The journal is not, however, bound by these suggestions.

4) Language and flow

A well-written manuscript has greater chances of acceptance. Some tips:

- Avoid long, complicated sentences; keep it simple. Your sentences should be understandable.
- Your ideas should flow smoothly.
- Use correct terminology, avoid excessive jargon and grandiose language.
- Make sure there are no grammatical mistakes.
- It is highly recommended to approach an editing service for help with polishing your manuscript. The journal has a long-term proven affiliation with a good certified editor at Beyond Proofreading Services PLC.

You may contact **Dr. Brown at Beyond Proofreading,** beyondproofreading@gmail.com at your own discretion.

Language Accuracy

JHSSR **emphasizes** on the linguistic accuracy of every manuscript published. Articles must be in **English** and they must be competently written and argued in clear and concise grammatical English. Contributors are strongly advised to have the manuscript checked by a colleague with ample experience in writing English manuscripts or a competent English language editor.

Author(s) **should provide a certificate** confirming that their manuscripts have been adequately edited. A proof from a certified editing service should be submitted together with the cover letter at the time of submitting a manuscript to Horizon**.**

All editing costs must be borne by the author(s). This step, taken by authors before submission, will greatly facilitate reviewing, and thus publication if the content is acceptable.

Refer to JHSSR's **Manuscript Format Guide** at https://horizon-jhssr.com/online-submission.php

Editorial process

Authors are notified with an acknowledgement containing a *Manuscript ID* upon receipt of a manuscript, and upon the editorial decision regarding publication.

JHSSR follows a **double-blind peer-review** process. Authors are encouraged to suggest names of at least three potential reviewers at the time of submission of their manuscript to Horizon using the **Referral form**. The editors are not, however, bound by these suggestions.

The Journal's peer-review

In the peer-review process, three referees independently evaluate the scientific quality of the submitted manuscripts.

Peer reviewers are experts chosen by journal editors to provide written assessment of the **strengths** and **weaknesses** of written research, with the aim of improving the reporting of research and identifying the most appropriate and highest quality material for the journal.

The Review process

What happens to a manuscript once it is submitted to *Horizon*? Typically, there are seven steps to the editorial review process:

1. The Journal's chief executive editor and the editorial board examine the paper to determine whether it is appropriate for the journal and should be reviewed. If not appropriate, the manuscript is rejected outright and the author is informed. Linguistically hopeless manuscripts will be rejected straightaway (e.g., when the language is so poor that one cannot be sure of what the authors really mean).

2. The chief executive editor sends the article-identifying information having been removed, to three reviewers. Typically, one of these is from the Journal's editorial board. Others are external specialists in the subject matter represented by the article. The chief executive editor requests them to complete the review in three weeks.

   Comments to authors are about the appropriateness and adequacy of the theoretical or conceptual framework, literature review, method, results and discussion, and conclusions. Reviewers often include suggestions for strengthening of the manuscript. Comments to the editor are in the nature of the significance of the work and its potential contribution to the literature.

3. The chief executive editor, in consultation with the Editor-in-Chief, examines the reviews and decides whether to reject the manuscript, invite the author(s) to revise and resubmit the manuscript, or seek additional reviews.

Final acceptance or rejection rests with the Editor-in-Chief, who reserves the right to refuse any material for publication. In rare instances, the manuscript is accepted with almost no revision. Almost without exception, reviewers' comments (to the author) are forwarded to the author. If a revision is indicated, the editor provides guidelines for attending to the reviewers' suggestions and perhaps additional advice about revising the manuscript.

4. The authors decide whether and how to address the reviewers' comments and criticisms and the editor's concerns. The authors return a revised version of the paper to the chief executive editor along with specific information describing how they have answered' the concerns of the reviewers and the editor, usually in a tabular form. The author(s) may also submit a rebuttal if there is a need especially when the author disagrees with certain comments provided by reviewer(s).

5. The chief executive editor sends the revised paper out for re-review. Typically, at least one of the original reviewers will be asked to examine the article.

6. When the reviewers have completed their work, the chief executive editor in consultation with the editorial board and the Editor-in-Chief examine their comments and decide whether the paper is ready to be published, needs another round of revisions, or should be rejected.

7. If the decision is to accept, an acceptance letter is sent to all the author(s), the paper is sent to the Press. The article should appear in print in approximately three months.

The Publisher ensures that the paper adheres to the correct style (in-text citations, the reference list, and tables are typical areas of concern, clarity, and grammar). The authors are asked to respond to any minor queries by the Publisher. Following these corrections, page proofs are mailed to the corresponding authors for their final approval. At this point, **only essential changes are accepted.** Finally, the article appears in the pages of the Journal and is posted on-line.

SUBMISSION OF MANUSCRIPTS

Owing to the volume of manuscripts we receive, we must insist that all submissions be made electronically using the **online submission system™**, a web-based portal. For more information, go to our web page and click **"Online Submission".**

Please do **not** submit manuscripts to the Editor-in-Chief or to any other office directly. All submissions or queries must be directed to the **Chief Executive Editor** via email to CEE.horizon@gmail.com

Visit our Journal's website for more information at https://horizon-jhssr.com/index.php

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FOREWORD

Editor's Foreword and Introduction to Vol. 7 (2) Dec. 2025

It is my privilege to present **Volume 7, Issue 2 (December 2025)** of the *Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research* (JHSSR; eISSN 2682-9096), a peer-reviewed, open-access journal published by BP Services. Independently owned and operating on a **not-for-profit** basis, JHSSR remains committed to advancing innovative, ethically grounded, and socially relevant scholarship across the full spectrum of the humanities and social sciences. Find out more here.



Behind Every Great Journal Is a Team of Unsung Heroes — Here's to the Dedication, Passion, and Precision That Make Every Page Possible!

This issue brings together **23 carefully hand-picked articles** authored by scholars from **Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and North America**, reflecting the journal's global reach, interdisciplinary ethos, and Scopus-aspiring standards. The contributions span **research articles, review essays, theological analyses, conceptual papers, and a case study**, collectively addressing enduring questions and contemporary challenges—ethics and leadership, language and peace, culture and identity, urban futures, education and technology, religion and resilience, innovation and sustainability.

Overview of Contributions

Invited and Foundational Research

The issue opens with an invited paper by **Vijay K. Arora (USA)**, *Designing Human-Centered Excellence,* which offers a reflective synthesis of ethics, leadership, and strategic planning in global academic organizations, advocating values-driven, human-centred institutional models.

Research Articles

Complementing this are original research studies that examine:

- Knowledge and language as civilizational forces (**Dean Emeritus & Professor Brij Mohan**, USA);
- University research commercialisation and innovation ecosystems (**Siti Manisah Binti Mohamad Sarujee et al.**, Malaysia);
- Intersemiotic translation and Malay folklore (**Dr. J. Yasodhara Menon et al.**, Malaysia);
- Lifelong learning among working professionals (**Wing Cheung Tang**, Hong Kong);
- Student needs and retention in higher education (**Dr. Chee Mei Hooi et al.**, Malaysia);
- Adolescent perceptions of time through interdisciplinary inquiry (**Yixuan Yu**, China);

- Sacred iconography and political identity in Sikh and Iranian traditions (**Professor Devinder Pal Singh**, USA);
- Sanskrit as a medium of peaceful cultural exchange in Southeast Asia (**Professor Venus Jain et al.**, India);
- Sustainable innovation in last-mile logistics (**Sultan Al Kaabi et al.**, Oman);
- Artificial intelligence and language-learning anxiety (**Kesvhinee Ravinthran**, Malaysia).

Review Articles

Seven authoritative review essays further deepen the issue's scope, addressing:

- Language education, AI, and peace pedagogy (**Dr. Gloria Alpini et al.**, Italy);
- Malay language, identity, and intercultural harmony (**Professor Vijayaletchumy Subramaniam et al.**, Malaysia);
- Urban public spaces and community resilience (**Dr. Võ Thanh Tuyền et al.**, Vietnam);
- Adaptive leadership and continuous improvement (**Sirtaj Kaur et al.**, India);
- Hinduism's civilizational resilience across millennia (**Professor Nayan Deep S. Kanwal et al.**, USA);
- Linguistic mediation and conflict resolution in early Jainism (**Professor Venus Jain et al.**, India).

Theological Analyses

Two rigorous theological studies interrogate history, faith, and society:

- Reassessing historiographical distortions surrounding Guru Tegh Bahadur (**Professor Balwant Singh Dhillon**, India);
- Religion, society, and civilization with a focus on Hinduism's evolution (**Professor Rabi Narayan Subudhi et al.**, India).

Conceptual Papers

Three conceptual contributions explore:

- Human-centred AI and future education (**Dr. Gloria Alpini et al.**, Italy);
- Psychological and philosophical perspectives on self-deceit (**Sarah Chi**, Canada);
- Media, masculinity, trauma, and violence (**Anlin Sharon A et al.**, India).

Case Study

The issue concludes with an interdisciplinary case study on cultural heritage and sustainable tourism in Vietnam by **Hoang Son Giang et al. (Vietnam)**, offering policy-relevant insights into the preservation of traditional performing arts.

Closing Reflections

Taken together, the **23 articles** in this issue exemplify JHSSR's mission: to publish scholarship of archival value that is intellectually rigorous, ethically informed, and socially engaged. The diversity of voices, methodologies, and geographies represented here underscores our belief that the humanities and social sciences are vital to understanding—and shaping—the complex realities of our time.

As we celebrate the journal's accomplishment of surpassing **1,396 submissions**, with only *300 accepted* and published, we acknowledge the rigorous standards maintained in the review process. This high acceptance

rate reflects our commitment to ensuring the publication of high-quality research that aligns with the journal's scope and contributes significantly to the academic community.

Our Quality

All the papers except the book-review published in this edition underwent a rigorous yet relatively rapid **double-blind peer-review process** involving a minimum of three reviewers comprising internal as well as external referees, which translates to benefits such as timeliness of publication, widespread dissemination, high visibility, and likelihood of high citations and broader impacts. This was also to ensure that the quality of the papers justified the high ranking of the journal, which hopes to be one at par with one of the renowned and heavily-cited journals not only by authors and researchers in Malaysia and America but by those in other countries around the world as well.

While I hope this issue will have particular appeal to new readers across this region and beyond, I am confident that the articles published will raise interest among our regular readership of scholars and postgraduate students elsewhere, thanks to the relevance and diversity of contributions on a region whose future bears central importance to us all.

I would also like to express gratitude to all the contributing authors for their trust, patience, and timely revisions, who have made this issue possible, as well as the reviewers and editors for their professional contribution. Last but not least, the assistance of the journal's editorial office in Texas, particularly Jessica Whitsitt, Lucy Fernandez, and Judy Meester—my adorable assistants, is greatly appreciated.

The Editorial Board of JHSSR welcomes your contributions and looks forward to many years of fruitful research to come. We continue to welcome submissions in all fields of humanities and social sciences. Horizon JHSSR is currently accepting manuscripts for its **2026-27 issues** based on original qualitative or quantitative research that opens new areas of inquiry and investigation. Empirical articles should demonstrate high rigor and quality. Original research collects and analyses data in systematic ways to present important new research that adds to and advances the debates within the journal's fields. The editors hope that the authors publishing in this journal can support the noble cause of JHSSR in reaching its goals.

JHSSR also invites call for proposals for **2026-27 Special Issues**. Our journal aims to provide a platform for researchers and technical experts to publish original papers, reviews and communications on all aspects of humanities and social sciences research. We strive to maintain a high standard of scientific objectivity, and we ensure that all submitted articles undergo a stringent yet relatively rapid double-blind peer-review process, which translates to benefits such as timeliness of publication, widespread dissemination, high visibility, and likelihood of high citations and broader impacts. Alongside a mission-driven Editor-in-chief, the globally diverse Editorial Board works with prominent scientific community to create a fast moving and rigorous editorial reviews. JHSSR follows code of conduct stipulated by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Proposals can be submitted directly via email to cee.horizon@gmail.com

Let me conclude by saying that with the publication of this issue, we are now leaping forward into the eighth year of continuous and successful scholarly publication of Horizon JHSSR. Changing publishing norms and expectations have given rise to a new wave of publishing standards that we'll be riding into 2026 soon and beyond. I am confident that the upcoming year will bring yet another challenging year of emerging scholarly articles.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the authors, reviewers, editorial team, and readers whose dedication sustains the journal's standards and vision. I trust that this issue will inform, inspire, and provoke meaningful dialogue across disciplines and borders.

Only time will tell what the next decade has in store, but one thing for sure is we will likely see greater innovation in all areas of scholarly publishing with emphasis on A.I. If you are observing other scholarly publishing trends, please do share your thoughts with the Chief Executive Editor!

Thank you for your continued support. We hope you find these articles thought-provoking and valuable in your academic pursuits, and look forward to further enriching the scholarly discourse in future issues.

Warm regards,

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Designing Human-Centered Excellence: Ethics, Leadership, and Strategic Planning for a Global Academic Organization

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ABSTRACT

In a rapidly globalizing academic landscape, institutions face the dual challenge of achieving operational efficiency and fostering ethical, human-centered environments. This paper explores the integration of ethics, leadership, and strategic planning in the design of a quality-driven global academic organization. This reflective and analytical study draws upon the author's cross-continental academic and administrative experiences, integrating theoretical frameworks—such as Total Quality Management (TQM), the Theory of Constraints, and the Whole Brain Model—with organizational practices observed in institutions across Asia, the Middle East, and North America. The synthesis reveals that effective academic organizations are characterized by three core dynamics: ethical leadership, structured strategic planning at all institutional levels, and the cultivation of human-centered learning environments. Emphasis on values-driven decision-making, interdisciplinary curriculum development, and faculty empowerment contributes to institutional excellence. By aligning institutional goals with ethical responsibility and human development, universities can transcend conventional performance metrics and foster a sustainable, inclusive academic culture. The paper advocates a shift from siloed operations to synergistic models of planning that embrace diversity, innovation, and continuous improvement [MEI, the Merit, Excellence and Intelligence in addition to DEI the Diversity, Excellence and Inclusion. MEI is top of any human enterprise and must be valued much more than DEI] Designing human-centered academic excellence requires reimagining leadership and planning through an ethical, interdisciplinary lens. This approach enables global institutions to remain responsive, relevant, and resilient in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: Academic leadership, Curriculum development, Ethics, Globalization, Higher education, Human-centered design, Strategic planning, Total Quality Management

[1]**Note:**This condensed article is based on the Final Word Lecture delivered by Professor Vijay K. Arora at Wilkes University. The original, full-length article titled "Life-Long Education for the Global Workforce in theSocio-Engineering Age" was published in the Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vol. 23(1), March 2015. Interested readers may access the original version through the journal's website http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/pjssh/browse/regular-issue?article=JSSH-ED01-2015. DOI: http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/resources/files/Pertanika%20PAPERS/JSSH%20Vol.%2023%20(1)%20Mar.%202015/00%20Invited%20Article%20-%20Namita%20Aurora%20and%20Vijay%20Aurora.pdf.

The current version has been adapted with the author's approval to suit the scope, readership, and editorial format of the Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (JHSSR) under the revised title, "Designing Human-Centered Excellence: Ethics, Leadership, and Strategic Planning for a Global Academic Organization."

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1. Introduction: Innovate or Evaporate

Reflecting on life's impermanence—triggered by the death of the author's father—this article explores the enduring value of intellectual and ethical legacy over material wealth. It calls for deliberate planning and disciplined freedom in building a sustainable, quality-focused, global organization. Planning for success must be grounded in an understanding of constraints and driven by intelligent self-restraint.

2. A Life's Journey: From Refugee to Global Educator

The author traces his journey from a refugee during India's Partition to a global academic professional. This rich personal narrative underscores how education, ethics, and cross-cultural understanding shaped his worldview. Experiences in India, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia reveal that intellectual capital, not material resources alone, drives organizational excellence. Institutions that value trust, discipline, and inclusive growth thrive. The author highlights transformative lessons from diverse educational cultures and their implications for building quality academic organizations.

3. Why Plan for Success?

True success combines material wealth with inner satisfaction and meaningful human relationships. The failure to plan equates to planning to fail. The 'engineering mindset' offers a structured algorithm to reimagine and re-engineer organizations for future success.

Strategic, tactical, and operational plans—aligned with mission and resource optimization—are essential. The process must involve data-driven decisions, consideration of constraints, market awareness, and targeted communication. Planning should incorporate feedback mechanisms, diversity of meritorious ideas, and adaptability for future growth, drawing lessons from successful practices in places like Singapore and Australia.

4. Total Quality Management (TQM): The Heart of the Matter

Quality is in the eye of the beholder and must be stressed. Quality is not merely specification compliance but a dynamic, forward-thinking commitment to excellence. The article outlines principles adapted from Dr. W. Edwards Deming, advocating a cultural transformation focused on:

- Leadership and communication
- Innovation and customer-centricity
- Elimination of barriers to pride in work
- Lifelong learning and continuous improvement

The PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle exemplifies this engineering process applied to organizational excellence. TQM is not just systems management—it is a human-centric model that prioritizes purpose, pride, and process. Deming was disparaged by his own colleagues at MIT, but the Land of the Rising Sun the Nippon welcomed his ideas that are based on the wisdom (*bodh* or *Bodha* in Sanskrit) that made Siddhartha a Buddha, following Sanskrit grammar. There are many Buddhas we see in real life, but do not give credit. Jesus became a Buddha, first not recognized by Romans, then after his cruciferous treatment open a vista that is now known as Vatican City. Protestants and other faiths love Jesus as a Spiritual Leader, but they do not think Pope should be the King of all Christians and hence the French Massacre of September 1792 for which there was a grand celebration by pope in the Vatican. Jihad is another form of Massacre. Sufis are on top of that as enunciated by Sufis like Kabir. That is Sanatan Dharma. Massacres are Stalin Dharma (killed the infidel!).

5. Ethics, Values, and Organizational Integrity

Quality and ethics are interlinked. Contrary to the belief that individuals need to be taught ethics, the article argues that most people enter organizations with good intentions but are often stifled by poor leadership or toxic cultures. That is where DEI fails, requiring MEI of TQM to be stressed.

The correlation between organizational quality and ethical leadership is strong. Historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi exemplify ethical resistance and moral leadership. The article also critiques trends such as the 'Dilbert Principle,' where incompetent individuals are promoted, leading to institutional decay.

To address ethical dilemmas, the VCR Paradigm (Values, Consequences, Responsibilities) from Carnegie Mellon University is suggested as a structured, engineering-like framework. This allows professionals to analyze actions through:

- V – Community-aligned Values and Virtues
- C – Consequences and Contingency planning
- R – Rights linked to Responsibility

6. The Human Brain: A Model for Organizational Design

The article then transitions into cognitive and behavioral diversity using Ned Herrmann's Whole Brain Model, mapping organizational roles onto four brain quadrants:

- Quadrant A (Logical, Analytical)
- Quadrant B (Organized, Sequential)

- Quadrant C (Emotional, Interpersonal)
- Quadrant D (Creative, Conceptual)

Effective organizations require whole-brain thinking, balancing creativity, execution, emotion, and analysis. Leadership emerges from synergy, not dominance. Such teams thrive on complementarity and mutual respect, forming the basis of a true 'knowledge organization.'

7. Wilkes University: Curriculum Innovation and Educational Outcomes

As part of its transformation into a quality global institution, Wilkes University is revisiting its curricular strategies. The goal is to develop graduates with both liberal arts foundations and market-driven competencies.

The author proposes a set of 'Ability Attributes' to guide program outcomes, including:

- Interdisciplinary thinking
- Data analysis
- Teamwork and multicultural engagement
- Ethical responsibility and global impact
- Lifelong learning and use of modern tools

These attributes aim to build versatile graduates. The curriculum should be mapped against these competencies to identify and address gaps through continuous improvement.

8. Faculty and Leadership Development: The Knowledge Bank Model

A university is a 'knowledge company,' and its faculty are scholars, educators, and entrepreneurs. Using Ernest Boyer's framework, faculty roles are categorized as:

- Discovery
- Integration
- Application
- Teaching

All revolve around a central 'Knowledge Bank.' This model emphasizes the importance of rewarding leadership, innovation, and teaching excellence. Leadership isn't about hierarchy—it's about contribution.

9. Vision for the Future: Engineering a Quality Person and Organization

The article concludes by emphasizing personal accountability and self-mastery. Drawing from Indian philosophy and modern leadership theory, it presents a compelling vision for transformative leadership. Individuals must:

- Contribute beyond their roles
- Communicate across differences
- Harness brain power to create and innovate

Invoking the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva as metaphors for organizational life cycles, the author urges proactive, courageous leadership. Success, he argues, depends on our willingness to challenge convention, embrace interdependence, and lead with ethics and vision.

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Academic Biography: Professor Vijay K. Arora



VIJAY K. ARORA
IEEE-EDS DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR

Professor Vijay K. Arora's intellectual and professional journey traces a remarkable path across continents and cultures. Born in the agrarian heartland of Punjab during the era of British India, his formative education was completed in Kurukshetra (Haryana, India)—a city revered in Indian philosophy as the site where Lord Krishna is believed to have delivered the final discourse of the Bhagavad Gita. He earned both his Bachelor of Science (Honours) and Master of Science degrees from Kurukshetra University.

Following a brief tenure teaching at a Regional College of Engineering in India, Professor Arora transitioned from East to West to pursue doctoral research at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

His academic pursuits then led him to Saudi Arabia, where he was part of the pioneering cohort of expatriate faculty tasked with developing the curriculum across disciplines—including medicine, dentistry, science, engineering, and graduate studies—at the University of Riyadh (now King Saud University).

In 1981–1982, he undertook a sabbatical at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign before returning permanently to the United States in 1985 to join Wilkes University as a Professor of Electrical Engineering. He later made Mountain Top, Pennsylvania, his home. After achieving tenure, Professor Arora continued his international academic engagement as a foreign expert on the Quantum Wave Project (1990–1991) under the Japan Research and Development Corporation, shuttling between Tokyo and Wilkes-Barre.

Between 1991 and 1993, he served as a Visiting Professor and Consultant at the National University of Singapore, embracing a scholarly life that integrated Eastern and Western traditions. He returned to Singapore at the turn of the millennium to serve at Nanyang Technological University. In recognition of his distinguished contributions, he was appointed the Sir Gledden Visiting Fellow at the University of Western Australia for the academic year 2000–2001.

Professor Arora has received numerous honors and has been featured in several prestigious biographical compendia. His scholarly work spans scientific research, educational innovation, and organizational leadership, with publications appearing in highly regarded international journals. He is a sought-after speaker, frequently invited to deliver keynote addresses and public lectures at universities, research institutions, and professional conferences across the globe.

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The Being of Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

The ethos of philosophy is to know the unknown. Discovery and invention offer pathways to uncover the knowable, which leads to innovations. Language, the communicative manifestations, are usually attributed to human capacities, which is an anthropomorphic hubris. Other 'animals' do have communicative skills--perhaps more intense than ours--which we do not recognize as 'language.' The primary focus of this article is to signify the unity of languages that build society and culture as a community of communities. Implicitly, identity, character, and the contours of relationships evolve, and the symphony of languages constructs a culture that sustains humanity. Languages do not die; they are sometimes suffocated. "The being of language" (Foucault, 229: 42)[2] defines the experience of language in its *Becoming*.

The minutes of my language mean the limits of my world."

—Ludwig Wittgenistein

Keywords: Being of Language; Culture and Conflict; Words & Meanings

"…does not the Classical analysis of language and grammatical facts (from Lancelot to the end of eighteenth century) rest on a definite number of concepts whose content and usage had been established once and for all: the concept of judgement defined as general, normative form of any sentence, the concept of *subject* and *predicate* regrouped under the more general category of *noun,* the concept of *verb* used as the equivalent of that of *logical copula,* the concept of *word* defined as the sign of a representation, etc.? In this way, one might reconstitute the conceptual architecture of Classical grammar".

—Foucault, 1993: 34

Last summer, I had a distinctly joyful family vacation in Alaska's wilderness, exploring six hundred miles of majestic mountainous range that encompassed unbelievable glaciers and snow-covered peaks, a testament to nature's artwork over millions of years, as the Ice Age receded. The music of waves and winds, along with the sights and sounds of flora and fauna, invoked a sense of awe and humility. Jake, our guide in the National Denali Reserve Park, explained how the natives lived 13,000 years ago and developed their five main tribes, now mostly located in Anchorage. The name *Denali*

[1]Brij Mohan is recently author of ***Return of the Leviathan: Being-For-Others*** (Barnes and Noble 2025), ***Rediscovery of Society*** (Nova, 2022). His ***forthcoming works include FLAME: Echoes From Kafka's Cave*** (Barnes and Nova, 2026) and A ***Writer's Block: Memoirs of a Dean***.

[2]Cf. Foucault, Michel. 1994. ***The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.*** New York: Vintage Books.

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evolved to authenticate their culture, identity, and unity. *McKinley* did not capture the soul of Denali's Indigenous people. The Twentieth Century brought the instruments of greedy modernity--railways, roads, new people--in search of gold, games, and oil.

Our acquisitive instinct is inherently a civilizational ingredient. Capitalism has survived mainly due to its efficiency and functional expedience. Language is a powerful vehicle of culture that sustains its essence and normative and social structures. Culture, in its turn, shapes and develops language as a dynamic process of existence. The ubiquitous universality of language is thus a force that cannot be substituted by any other human quality. In other words, language is a crucial bridge between culture and civilization.

Peter Frankopan, an eminent world historian at Oxford, rivets world history as a junction of cultural confluence: "While such countries may seem wild to us, these are no backwaters, no obscure wasteland. In fact, the bridge between east and west is very the very crossroads of civilization… It was here that civilization was born, and where many believed Mankind had been created--in the Garden of Eden." (2017: xv) Writing about the region, the people of Bactria and the Indus Valley, Frankopan reminds: *"It is the cauldron where language groups competed, where Indo-European, Semitic and Sino-Tibetan tongues wagged alongside those speaking Altic, Turkic and Caucasian. This is where great empires rose and fell. Where the after-effects of clashes between cultures and rivals were felt thousands of miles away"* (2017: xvi; emphasis mine).

James J. Gibson's notion of "affordances" (Searls, 2025) structures, perfectively, the organization of our perceptions. In Speaking *of Tongues*, Coetzee, and Dimópulos (2025) emphasize "negotiation" to ensure that substance is not lost in translation[3].

I was born, raised, and mainly educated in India. My hometown, which was located near Aligarh, Agra, and Mathura, uniquely microcosmized the confluence of languages that constituted my communicative learning and development. In a small-town languishing in feudal decadence, I first spoke *Biraj*. My Anglo-Sanskrit School taught me to read, write, and speak Hindi and English. A basic understanding of Sanskrit was required to graduate from High School. Since the triangular location of my early education was heavily colored by Muslim culture, I learned *Urdu* by default. In 1947, after India's partition, *Urdu* was nearly banished from the curricular requirements. The proximity to Hathras, a nearby city, nourished my romantic aesthetics, where I would go to see Indian films, heavily scripted in Urdu. Before migrating to the U.S. in March 1975, I lived in Lucknow, the lingering monument of sophisticated Mughal culture. Film theatres became my school to learn about the beauty and reality of life. I am thus a product of Hindi, English, and Urdu. Since Urdu was banished after 1947, I could only understand and speak without any ability to read and write. Yet, I remain an enthusiastic lover of Urdu, its poetry, music, and culture.

This anecdotal-longitudinal journey to languages signifies how our minds and hearts, as well as beliefs, values, and philosophies of life shape our destiny. Somanath Subramanian wrote about India's 'polyglot identity' in *The New Yorker* (November 2024). The life and death of a language is analogous with the rise and fall of a civilization. I was amazed how Subramanian ignored Urdu's exclusion in independent India. I wrote:

"I grew up speaking Biraj Bhasha. A language common to the area in and around Mathura, my grandfather's home. Then learned Hindi, English and Urdu during the long arduous journey that followed. I wish that Subramanian's detailed piece had spoken further about the post-independence exclusion of Urdu, which is the language of many Indian Muslims and the national language of Pakistan. The Islamization of Urdu is just one of the many sad consequences of India's partition. In 1947, and an example of how languages don't die; they are suffocated."[4]

Subramanian Observed: "In some Indian languages, the word for "language" is bhasha-the vowels long and warm, as in "car" or "tar." It has a formal weight and a refined spirit. It comes to us from the classical heights of Sanskrit, and it evokes a language with a script and a literature, with newspapers and codified grammar and chauvinists and textbooks. But there is another word, boli. It, too, refers to language, but its more accurate meaning is "that which is spoken." In its sense of the oral, it hints at colloquialism, hybridity, and a demotic that belongs to the streets. The insinuation is that a bhasha is grander and more sophisticated than a boli. The language of language infects how we think about language."[5]

Nirad Chaudhari in his classic *The Continent of Circe* wrote about the etymology of 'Hindu' and 'Indian' which are analogous with their Greek and Persian definitions. "The definition originally meant 'an inhabitant of the region of the river Indus' (in Sanskrit—*Sindhu*) but was

[3]It's highly recommended that my audience comprehend the K.A. Appiah's analysis (***The New Rork Review***, 2025, JUNE 26, 2025: 24-28) on the duality of this discourse.

[4]Letter to the Editor, The New Yorker, December 16, 2024: 3 (excerpted).

[5]https://www.magzter.com/en/stories/culture/The-New-Yorker/HOLD-YOUR-TONGUE?srsltid=AfmBOoqUSt2FGjY3pqbqPAqW5kkxkZVbWcMRNm4tePh8PvJzhK0sBmvV (Retrieved June 25, 2025).

extended to the people of the whole continent" (1966: 28-29).

Can the world's most popular democracy protect its languages? Subramanian's analysis has relevance in today's reality when unspoken language speaks louder, unmasking prejudices and stereotypes. A south Indian professor—married to a German lady—once asked me: "Why does your sister live in Madars?" I retorted: "Why do we live in the United States?" Chaudhuri called Anglicized Hindus as 'Brown Colonials." My squeamishness was inadvertently obvious.

Speaking of *Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse*—individualism, nationalism, and democracy—Chaudhuri made prescient observations about the decline of the West (1999). The US-Israeli attack on Iran is more than a class of civilizations. It is the specter of the 'fourth' horseman, Death, which obliterates the three others. I have assayed about this narcissistic nihilism in *Return of the Leviathan* (2025).

The language of Philosophy is embedded in the power of 'word.' Knowledge and truth are concubines of the quest for knowing the unknown. *Words* create a 'language' that helps serve both philosophy and knowledge. In his posthumously released book *Truth and Existence,* Jean-Paul Sartre wrote: "An eternal truth is a dead truth that has returned to the In-itself. A truth has not *become, it is becoming* [devenante]. And at the end of its *becoming*, it dies. That does not mean that it becomes false. It becomes *indeterminate…* The foundation of Truth is freedom. Thus, man can choose non-truth. This non-truth is ignorance or lie" (1992: 12-13).

Michel Foucault defined the archeology of knowledge in terms of discourses. He writes: "If I spoke of discourse, it was not to show that the mechanisms or processes if language (*langue*) were entirely preserved it; but rather to reveal, in the density of verbal performances, the diversity of possible levels of analysis; to show that in addition to methods of linguistic structuration (or interpretation), one could draw up a specific description of statements, of their formation, and the regularities proper to discourse" (1993: 200). 'The being of language,' Foucault manifests the experience of language which:

> "….involved an immense reorganization of culture, a reorganization of which the Classical age was the first and perhaps the most important sate, since it was responsible for the new arrangement in which we are still caught—since it is Classical age that separates us from a culture in which the significance of signs did not exist, because it was reabsorbed into the sovereignty of the Like; but in which their enigmatic, monotonous, stubborn, and primitive being shone in an endless dispersion" (1994: 43)

Foucauldian emphasis on 'the being of language' doubles down the symbiosis of language and culture on the one hand and knowledge and discourse on the other. *Interpretations* as well as *translations* sustain their dynamic in search of lived experiences. An anecdotal conversation will clarify how perceptual inclinations use a 'words' to manifest their biases:

> "Where can I find tea begs?" I asked at the checkout of a drug store. The Black lady, squeamishly with a grimace questioned, "What"? We both repeatedly exchange this twice. Finally, I spell 'tea'—like T, E, A-- to make her understand. At the end, I asked her, "What was so difficult to understand my question?" She responds: "I am American."

The other encounter at Albertson shows the other side of a similar Q & A. As I approached to check out, I gently asked, "How are you, ma'am?" The Black lady asks: "Are you a professor?" I said, "Yes;" "How do you know that I am a professor?" The lady at the counter said: "You speak and look like a professor."

It may be contextually relevant to mention that the above exchange took place in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where I lived and worked for about four decades. The insinuations reflect how one sees the other. The next instance unveils a rare encounter with raw innocence, still uncorrupted by our civilization:

> I was sitting on the edge of a YMCA swimming pool in my neighborhood in Baton Rouge. A young lady with her 4- or 5-year-old son was standing near the steam room. As I noticed, the young kid came towards me and said: "You look like my father." I smiled and gave him a pat on the shoulder. I few minutes later, they both exited. The little boy once again came toward me and gave me a hug and left with his mom.

I narrated this episode to my wife later. It is etched on my subconsciousness as a conviction about the innate humanity. A different encounter with two Afrikaners whom I accidently ran into, presented diametrically opposite impact on my psyche. One I met in Europe and the other in Louisiana. The scope and limits of space do not allow me to collaborate. Nonetheless, it is instructive to refrain from any generalization based on race or origin. I have found incredible friendliness in some people from Pakistan and Bangladesh. I speak neither Punjabi, nor Bangali.

Language is both a lake and river. In the first episode I was in a 'Lake' asking for 'tea;' in the latter, I was in a 'river' that streamed. The famed feminist author

Margaret Atwood succinctly said: "War begins when 'language' (communication) breaks down." We can see the horrors of soulless genocide in Gaza and mindless destruction of people and their cultures in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. The persisting violence and terror between India and Pakistan-colonially balkanized—is a reminder that weaponization of identities based on lies is prone to disaster. A self-acclaimed socialist, Muslim candidate of Indian origin just shook the political landscape of New York's mayoral race:

> "But Mamdani had a perfect answer prepared. In response to the moderator's bad-faith question, he said, "I believe Israel has the right to exist as a state with equal rights…. I believe every state should be a state of equal rights." Rather than giving in to the premise of the question, that any state has the right to an ethnically particularist legal and political character, he invoked the concept of universal freedom and rights for all. **This language resonates well with Americans, especially younger and non-white Americans, who see what Israeli rule over Palestinians looks like and think of apartheid South Africa or the Jim Crow South**." (The Nation, July-August 2025; emphasis mine)[6]

The power of language cannot be overstated. Frederic Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, and Naom Chomsky have something in common to comprehend the dialectic of language. Genealogy (origin), discourse (knowledge), and human nature (which Foucault rejects). The "Will" to *power* (Nietzsche), *knowledge* (Foucault) and *reason*, respectively albeit incongruously, underscore language that is crucial to understanding humans and socio-political systems that toward a better society.

The modern civilization has acquired indelible advancements which have uplifted billions of humans on this planet. Yet, there is no evidence that the state of humanity has achieved a higher level of fulfilment. "Success is not progress," Sartre famously said. 'Power over nature," Sigmund Freud wrote," is not the *only* precondition of human happiness, just as it is not the *only* goal of cultural endeavor" (1962; 35).

Chaudhuri's 'Three Horsemen" use atavistic language as a predatory tool to perpetuate human misery. As they say, to unrig bell is an impossible task. Innate human morality and reason are still uncorrupted by civilizational malaise requires humanization of science to achieve a secular world culture which might ensure survival with dignity.

Language is an innate human quality. Culture learned experience shapes this capacity with or without environmental influence. Chomsky, the father of modern linguistics, established this theory. "Homo sapiens is radically different from other species in numerous ways, too obvious to review. Possession of language is one crucial element, with many consequences. With some justice, it has often in the past been considered to be the core defining feature of modern humans, the source of human creativity, cultural enrichment, and complex social structure."[7]

My approach to the subject transcends both linguistics and grammar. I seek to explore the power and dimensions—nuances, translations, maxims, aphorisms, the 'being,' anecdotes—as communicative mechanism that impact inter-and-intra-relationships in human society troubled by the vagaries of a sick civilization.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not employ any of the Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies for Language refinement, drafting background section and did not perform any Task of the technology.

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[7]Noam Chomsky In conversation with Amy Brand. Why Only Us (Berwick and Chomsky, 2017) established this evolutionary basis of language. Cognitive experts now challenge this theory.

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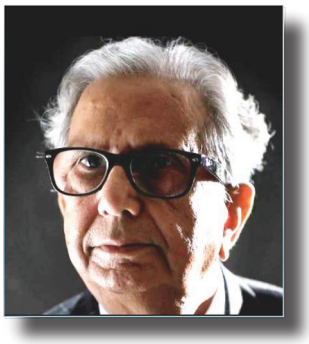
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Integrating CLIL*I*A to the Language of Peace Approach: Bridges to Tomorrow

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual review and exploratory proposal - presented as a narrative review article - examines evolving conceptions of peace, tracing a trajectory from Enlightenment ideals to contemporary approaches in language education grounded in empathy, justice, and intercultural understanding. It redefines peace not only as a philosophical ideal but as a communicative and pedagogical process, with language as a core medium of transformation. At the heart of this proposal is the integration of CLIL+IA (*Content and Language Integrated Learning enhanced by Intelligenza Artificiale/Aumentata*) with the Language of Peace Approach (LPA), forming a bilingual, AI-supported, and transdisciplinary pedagogy for peacebuilding. This fusion reshapes disciplines like History not merely as content, but as digital, bilingual spaces for ethical reflection, intercultural dialogue, and value co-construction. Through AI-enhanced tools, embodied learning, and bilingual engagement, these blended transcidiplinary approaches outline how learners can become empowered to act as empathetic communicators across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Languages, in the CLIL/A for Peace approach, become vessels of memory and bridges of understanding, seeding a pedagogy of peace in a rapidly transforming world.

Keywords: CLIL/A, GenAI, Language of Peace Approach, Positive Peace, Peacebuilding Education

> Language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education.
>
> *- H.E. Wolff*

1. INTRODUCTION

This conceptual review and exploratory proposal, situated at an early stage of research at the University of Urbino, aims to stimulate further methodological and pedagogical dialogue, rather than to offer definitive empirical findings. CLIL/A for Peace is introduced as an exploratory, hybrid teaching approach that integrates three interrelated pedagogical dimensions: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), recent developments in AI-mediated language education (IA, Italian for Intelligenza Artificiale/Aumentata), and Rebecca Oxford's (2013) Language of Peace Approach (LPA). This hybrid approach seeks to contribute to emerging debates around the ethical, cognitive, and cultural potential of AI in language learning, particularly in contexts shaped by multi/bilingualism, intercultural studies, and the urgent need for peace-oriented educational models.

The present study represents the early but purposeful stage of an evolving research trajectory, initiated ten months ago and situated in what might be described as the formative phase of scholarly inquiry. While the project remains in its initial stages, it has progressed beyond its conceptual inception and now engages in structured, transdisciplinary exploration across disciplines, pedagogical paradigms, and educational levels. The reflections and frameworks presented herein are not intended as definitive empirical findings, but

rather as an invitation to methodological and pedagogical dialogue, offering foundational insights to guide future research and practice.

This early phase is characterised by a growing methodological balance and interdisciplinary reach, marked by experimentation and collaboration. This hybrid approach explores the world through multisensory engagement, testing innovative practices across fields such as CLIL, graphic design, history, law, civic education, and AI-enhanced language learning, each informing a broader framework for AI literacy that prioritizes human values, learner agency, and ethical engagement.

Central to this research is the conceptual positioning of AI not simply as a technological tool, but as a "digital landscape" and potential co-agent for cultural translation, critical thinking, ethical awareness, and peaceful coexistence (Potkalitsky, 2023, p. 68). In this sense, CLIL*/*A for Peace aligns with current calls in the literature to develop operational frameworks of AI literacy for both learners and educators, exploring the intersections between language cognition, knowledge construction, and digital autonomy in AI-mediated environments.

Embedded within this paradigm is Rebecca Oxford's Language of Peace Approach, which advocates for the transformative role of language in fostering dignity, empathy, and character-building interaction. As Gomes de Matos (2014) reminds us, language should "dignify and humanize," an ethos echoed in UNESCO's Culture of Peace Framework (1999) and the Manifesto 2000, both of which advocate integrating ethical values-such as justice, dialogue, and solidarity into everyday classroom practice.

At this stage, CLIL*/*A is both exploratory and generative: it is beginning to articulate a shared vocabulary and conceptual scaffolding that may inform future design-based research, case studies, and AI literacy initiatives in language education. The momentum is steadily increasing, and although the work remains ongoing, its potential for methodological, pedagogical, and ethical impact is becoming ever more apparent. This is evidenced by experiments conducted thus far in several high schools and one university in Italy - most notably, one high school student's illustration was selected by a publishing house, exemplifying how valuing creativity can promote wellbeing (Coyle at the 2025 World CLIL Conference in Ireland) within the classroom, which in turn cultivates empathy, collaboration, and ethical awareness-essential foundations that extend beyond the educational environment to foster peace in the wider world.

CLILIA in Secondary Education

My journey into AI began not in a university lab, but in the humblest of modern sanctuaries: the classroom. In 2023, I caught one of my final-year high-school student attempting to cheat using ChatGPT while doing IT in English. I asked him to teach me everything he knew about AI. His astonishment soon turned into cooperation, and mine into fascination. The IT student became the teacher for a week and that flipped classroom week became an inversion of power and an initiation into the unknown. I discovered that while my student was seeking shortcuts, I was witnessing a new pathway toward deeper, interconnected learning. From that moment, I began to imagine a better way of teaching English, not as a way to resist AI in education, but as a call to shape it ethically, for real learning and *peaceful* classroom dialogue. Instead of conflict, I envisioned cooperation between teacher and learner.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Background and Blended Approaches for Peace Learning

That initial spark grew into research at the University of Urbino, where I taught a Psychology Lab in English using the innovative CLIL*/A* hybrid approach. Launched in November 2024, my study compares traditional CLIL with AI-enhanced CLIL, anticipating the June 2025 MIT *Media Lab* research on cognitive depth in AI-assisted vs. brain-only writing.[1] Both studies examine how AI reshapes learning. While methodologically aligned, my research takes a more optimistic view: AI can enhance bilingual thinking and creativity if guided ethically. This aligns with the 3rd UNESCO Global Forum on the Ethics of AI (2025, June, Bangkok), which stressed the need for *humanist* insight and critical thinking in shaping educational and technological futures.

2.1 What is CLILIA for Peace?

CLIL*/*A is a fusion of CLIL (Coyle & Marsh, 2010) with the generative potential of AI (Kentz & Potkalitsky, 2024), anchored in human ethics: CLIL*/*A aims to leverage AI to enhance language acquisition and content mastery in a synergistic and ethically responsible manner. And CLIL*/*A for Peace is a forward-thinking transdisciplinary approach that brings together three powerful elements: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the values-driven Language of Peace Approach (LPA). Instead of focusing on war and conflict, (as is often the case in traditional history) this hybrid approach reorients learning around peace-building, intercultural understanding, and ethical inquiry. Drawing inspiration from these three different academic approaches, CLIL*/*A for Peace encourages learners to explore complex topics through a personal, reflective, and ethical lens. AI tools

[1] https://www.media.mit.edu/publications/your-brain-on-chatgpt/

are used not to replace the teacher but to enhance learning, offering personalized feedback, curating diverse content, and supporting critical thinking. At its core, this hybrid approach helps learners develop not just subject knowledge and language skills, but also a deeper appreciation for peace as both a goal and a process.

CLIL/A for Peace is an approach, rather than a model, which allows educators to be flexible, interdisciplinary, and learner-centred, designed to prepare learners for a future where empathy, communication, and responsible AI use are just as important as academic achievement. We begin by unpacking the meaning behind the name CLIL/A, followed by an exploration of the core principles that shape its educational framework.

2.2 The Italian acronym CLIL+IA

The acronym itself carries meaning. The sound of CLIL/A evokes the name of Cloelia, the Roman girl who defied captivity to lead others to freedom. Though her story belongs to another world, it too speaks of navigating toward a new kind of peace, one that did not entail giving girls to enemies.

What is peace? Looking back at an earlier key moment in my academic path, in the 1990s, while I was studying at the *Istituto di Politica Internazionale*, Antonio Cassese taught that peace is a legal and ethical duty, not a utopia. He stressed the value of regulation, dignity through rules, and how language study fosters respect for other cultures. Diplomacy is not just negotiation but linguistic empathy grounded in intercultural understanding. How can we still teach these values in today's accelerated and hyperconnected world?

2.3 The Challenge: an AI Revolution Driven by LLMs

Today's AI revolution, driven by Large Language Models (LLMs), global connectivity, and exponential computing power, is reshaping how knowledge is accessed and created. Unlike past innovations, generative artificial intelligence like ChatGPT is accessible, almost everywhere, demanding educational models, that go beyond adaptation, to foster ethical, human-centred growth. Mary Meeker (2025) presents a compelling overview of the rapidly evolving digital landscape that shapes the everyday realities of today's learners. Her analysis highlights the growing disconnect between educators and Generation Z - young people born into a mobile-first world and immersed in continuous connectivity, a condition that philosopher Luciano Floridi (2019) aptly describes as onlife, blurring the boundaries between online and offline existence. Meeker's insights are not only informative but also revealing, shedding light on the intentions of social media and AI platform owners, whose influence shapes both behavior and learning. To remain relevant and effective, educators must engage critically with this context and integrate it meaningfully into pedagogical practice.

> To say the world is changing at unprecedented rates is an understatement. Rapid and transformative technological innovation and adoption are central drivers of this change, alongside a shifting global leadership landscape.
>
> Consider the founding missions of today's tech giants: Google (1998): "To organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." Alibaba (1999): "To make it easy to do business anywhere." Facebook (2004): "To give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected." Fast forward to today, and this vision has been supercharged by artificial intelligence, accelerating computing power… - together driving monumental change…
>
> ChatGPT… has become the fastest-growing 'overnight' success in history...
>
> Unlike the Internet 1.0 revolution, which emerged primarily in the U.S. and gradually spread, ChatGPT launched onto the global stage all at once... Today, platform incumbents… are racing to define the next era of AI: from agentic interfaces and enterprise copilots to autonomous systems and sovereign AI models.
>
> In sum, advances in AI… are fundamentally transforming how work is done, how capital is allocated, and how leadership is exercised - across companies, governments, and entire civilizations. All of this unfolds in parallel with the evolving ambitions and tensions of global powers, each striving to assert its economic, societal, and territorial influence.
>
> - M. Meeker

Building on the global acceleration described above, *The Geopolitics of Artificial Intelligence*, by Alessandro Aresu, highlights how AI is the twenty-first-century battleground of political capitalism between major global powers.

2.4 How can we ensure AI serves peace, not battle?

This urgent question lies at the heart of the CLIL/A for Peace hybrid approach. It calls for AI to be intentionally designed with ethical values - empathy, equity, intercultural understanding - embedded from the start. Education plays a key role by promoting critical AI literacy and human-centred use, guiding learners to engage AI as a tool for dialogue, not division or bias. The challenge is not only technical, but deeply moral: aligning AI with the shared goal of peaceful, inclusive societies.

The United States and China, driven by national-security concerns, lead a technological rivalry relying on

a major manufacturing hub in East Asia and an intensive semiconductor development centred in Taiwan pioneered by Jensen Huang. The rise of his *Nvidia* (founded in 1993), breakthroughs, like GPU for better graphic video games (William Dalley, MIT), and supercomputers, developed by Geoffrey Hinton's 2012 *ImageNet* and Stanford Fey Fey's *AlexNet* (bought by Google), have fuelled LLMs. Since its founding in 2016 by a group of tech leaders, including Sam Altman and Elon Musk, the AI not for profit company OpenAI has become a central player in the global AI landscape. AI technologies are now integrated into the most influential platforms operated by Big Tech companies such as Microsoft, Bytedance/TikTok, Tencent, Meta, Amazon, and Google. At the heart of this AI revolution lies the semiconductor industry, with key components, especially advanced chips, produced by Morris Chang, the Taiwanese-American founder of TSMC (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company), a global leader in chip manufacturing.

Advances in LLMs have sparked a major technological transformation, prompting strategic responses such as the Chips Acts in the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and the European Union to secure semiconductor supply chains and support AI innovation. The EU has its own regulatory initiatives under EU Commissioner Lucilla Sioli (2024 *EU AI Act*). Yet, in Europe, we have a few innovators such as the Netherlands' ASML, the UK's ARM (with US investment, SoftBank, and Google's DeepMind). Europe faces critical challenges in STEM talent development, language learning, and digital literacy. Italy, for example, lagging in digital literacy, faces the urgent challenge of preparing teachers and learners for this complex, fast-changing landscape. At UNESCO, Fengchun Miao highlighted the risk of being left behind, noting that 47% of global AI talent originates from China, which introduced AI literacy as early as 2003, while only 12% comes from the EU.

3. RESULTS

CLIL*I*A, GENAI, AND LPA INTEGRATION IN ETHICAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

The fusion of CLIL*I*A with the LPA meets this challenge by turning GenAI into an assistant for empathy, critical thinking, and intercultural dialogue, highlighting that innovation must serve not just performance, but also purpose. Just as athletes break records through enhanced data, tools, and training systems (Meeker, 2025), learners too can reach new heights with the right technological support. In this context, CLIL*I*A+LPA becomes essential as it integrates peacebuilding, language, and ethical reflection to empower learners to navigate and *shape*, as critical, bilingual, and justice-oriented global citizens, this geopolitical and technological transformation.

CLIL*IA* phonetically echoes the Roman heroine Cloelia, whose legendary defiance and moral courage symbolise the core values of this innovative educational approach. Cloelia chose not violence or submission, but a creative form of resistance, activating an act of peace that redefined power. Similarly, CLIL*IA* seeks to transform learning by integrating LPA, fostering bilingual fluency, and using AI to change the world. CLIL*I*A empowers learners to *cross* disciplinary and cognitive boundaries. It *humanizes* digital education through intercultural connections and personalized learning journeys, enhancing creativity, empathy, and global competence. As Stanford's Jeremy Utley suggests, AI's full potential lies in collaboration, not automation, a mindset shift CLIL*IA* embraces through cooperative learning. CLIL*IA* reimagines education as a digital space for ethical innovation and human-centred transformation. Rather than replacing human educators, AI is envisioned as an amplifier of language translation and learners' voices.

3.1 Case Studies

From "Homework Apocalypse" to Peace Pedagogy - Creating AI Tools for Transdisciplinary CLILIA Learning

This trajectory is exemplified by projects like Gaetano Strano's AI curriculum in Italian high schools, which moves learners from users to creators of AI tools, aligning with CLIL*I*A's goal: to transform education into a space of innovation.

In the midst of algorithmic biases, global inequalities, and conflicts, following Strano's example, CLIL*I*A+LPA teachers boost the language of peace from primary to tertiary education. By combining multi/bilingualism, digital ethics, and accessible AI, this hybrid approach reaffirms a timeless truth: we do not just need faster technologies, but more humane, visionary, and transdisciplinary education to build a sustainable peace. How? Let us analyse, for example, Ethan Mollick's AI policy for teaching negotiation.

At the 2024 ASU+GSV Summit, Ethan Mollick, professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, delivered a keynote that reframed the growing influence of generative AI in education. He coined the term "homework apocalypse" to describe the disruption caused by AI systems that can now complete traditional academic tasks, often better and faster than students themselves. While this phenomenon might appear as a crisis for conventional assessment methods, Mollick positioned it instead as a transformative opportunity: a call for educators to rethink how and what they teach in an age of intelligent systems.

Mollick's central argument is that educators must move beyond merely adjusting to AI tools and instead begin actively creating their own AI-powered educational environments. This shift aligns closely with the CLIL*I*A

for Peace approach, which seeks to integrate CLIL with AI-enhanced tools and peace-oriented pedagogy. Both approaches call for a transdisciplinary, participatory, and ethically responsible reimagining of the classroom.

A major feature of Mollick's proposed AI teaching is his own ad-hoc MyGPTs (see Fig. 1) customizable versions of ChatGPT that educators can design to serve specific instructional goals. These include:

Vendy the Super-Persuasive ven: A negotiation coach for practicing argumentation and persuasion skills.

Simulator Blueprint: A tool pre-built, customizable template to train AI in role-playing, enabling realistic interaction scenarios with students.

AI Intern Blueprint: A prompt-generating assistant that scaffolds reflective, task-based learning.

These innovations demonstrate how GenAI can be used not only as a productivity tool or digital landscape, but also as a collaborative co-teacher, supporting dialogic learning, critical thinking, and real-time feedback. Within the CLIL/A for Peace approach, such devices are particularly promising for fostering peacebuilding competencies through different languages.

Thus, building on Mollick's blueprints, we propose the development of a "Practice Peace Negotiating & Get Feedback" AI Tutor. This tool would allow learners to engage in simulated peace negotiations, contextualized to specific historical moments or geopolitical regions. Drawing from key negotiation frameworks such as BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement) and ZOPA (Zone of Possible Agreement), the AI tutor would guide learners through interactive negotiation scenarios. Learners would practice articulating positions, empathizing with multiple perspectives, identifying acceptable compromises, and refining their communication strategies, all in their target language (L2), with ongoing feedback from the AI.

This approach supports multiple CLIL/A goals simultaneously:

Language acquisition through contextualized, content-rich interaction;

Civic literacy by engaging with real-world conflict resolution frameworks;

Metacognitive reflection through AI-mediated feedback on both language and negotiation strategy.

Importantly, Mollick also outlines a responsible AI usage policy that can be adopted within the CLIL/A approach. He emphasizes three pillars:

Designing high-quality prompts to ensure purposeful interaction,

Maintaining a healthy scepticism of AI outputs in class,

And acknowledging AI usage in student and teacher work.

This ethical AI policy encourages learner autonomy, critical digital literacy, and trust-building in AI-mediated learning environments, which are essential for peace-centred education in the 21st century.

In sum, Mollick's vision and tools offer a concrete foundation for evolving CLIL with an AI pedagogy in ways that are both technologically innovative and deeply humanistic. This case exemplifies how AI can be integrated not just to teach language and content, but to empower learners to negotiate, collaborate, and imagine peaceful futures, making the "homework apocalypse" not an end, but a beginning. As a matter of fact, on 15 May 2025, Dan Schwartz (2025), Dean of the Stanford Graduate School

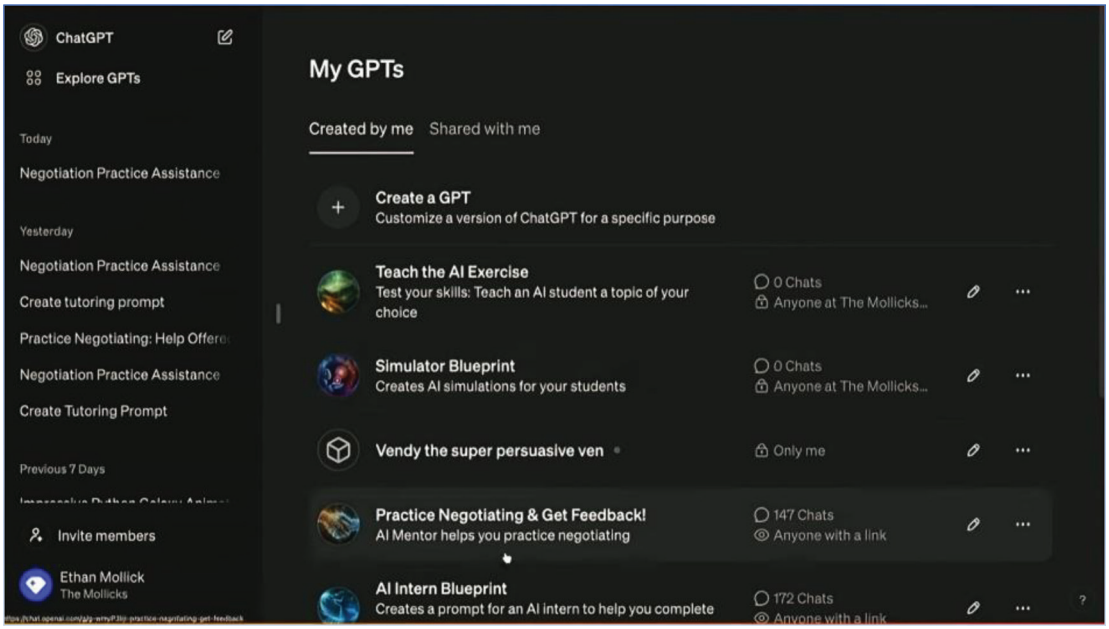


Fig. 1. Mollick's MyGPTs

of Education, highlighted a high school initiative that creatively leveraged AI to compose songs for teaching history, transforming traditional textbook learning into a dynamic, multisensory experience. He noted how AI enabled students to move beyond static representations, such as a "flat picture" of planetary systems, to interactive, multi-perspective explorations of the firmament. Schwartz emphasized AI's potential in enabling personalized tutoring and data-driven insights to assess educational effectiveness. However, he cautioned that while AI excels at analysing large-scale patterns, a humanistic perspective remains essential to determine what is truly meaningful to learn and teach, underscoring the need to critically and ethically engage with data rather than simply follow it.

3.2 The Ethical Role of AI and the Language of Peace

Against this backdrop, CLIL*I*A+LPA offers a pathway for learners to critically and creatively engage with peacebuilding, language, and free GenAI tools like, for example, ChatGPT, DeepL (for translation), and Padlet. CLIL*I*A+LPA is not merely an approach, but a call to action. It aims to develop justice-oriented, multi/bilingual citizens. Anchored in a humanist ethos (as championed by UNESCO's *Women4EthicalAI, Ramos, 2024)*, the approach centres on AI literacy and ethical reflection, especially in the face of data bias and women's underrepresentation in STEAM. Echoing Payal Arora's and UNESCO's warning that data bias can deepen inequality, CLIL*I*A's commitment to culturally and gender-sensitive AI literacy in the classroom, highlights figures like Ada Lovelace and Sister Mary, a coding pioneer and the first nun with a PhD.

In this whirlwind of tools, acronyms, avatars, and algorithms, I've come to believe this: the language of PEACE is not only for high-level seminars or policy debates; it must also be part of every classroom, *daily*, from the earliest years to university level. We owe it to our learners to teach not just how to create chatboxes but also peace through equality, multilinguality, and intergenerational perspectives, not just as content but as *practice*.

Today, thanks to modern technology, even with a modest budget and a Wi-Fi connection, a humble research fellow can access a world of intellectual nourishment, guided simply by what Leonardo da Vinci might have called *divine curiosity* (Louvre, 2019). Leonardo dreamed of flying. Today, we 'fly' faster than planes through fibre optics, cloud computing, and neural nets. But if we want to fly well, not just fast, we need more than high-tech innovation. We need transdisciplinary collaboration and pioneering education. And urgently, we must cultivate a humanist approach that travels alongside, and sometimes ahead of, our most advanced technologies. Thus, we need well-trained CLIL*I*A+LPA teachers.

3.3 The CLILIA for Peace Framework Cycle in Action

Following the review of the above teaching approaches, we now turn to the CLIL*I*A for Peace Framework Cycle in Action (see figure 2 below, co-created using Napkin AI and the free version of ChatGPT). Building on Coyle's original 4Cs (Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture) this expanded approach introduces three additional dimensions: Consciousness, Complexity, and Liberty & Responsibility, with Peace at its core. This hybrid approach integrates AI-enhanced learning with a peace-centred, ethically grounded pedagogy, fostering higher-order thinking, intercultural understanding, and reflective engagement. AI plays diverse educational roles (as content co-curator, language tutor, cognitive scaffold, cultural bridge, and ethics enabler) supporting transdisciplinary modules

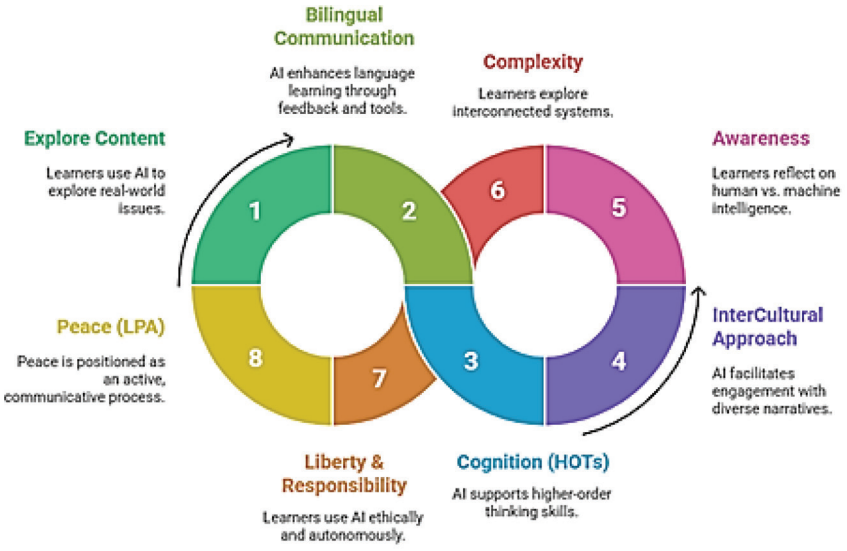


Fig.2. CLIL*I*A Peace Framework Cycle *(Made with Napkin)*

CLILIA-Peace Framework Cycle in Action: The 6Cs + L + R for Peace-Centred Learning

This approach expands Coyle's original 4Cs (Content, Communication, Cognition, Culture) with additional dimensions suited for an AI-enhanced, peace-oriented, future-facing education system:

DIMENSION	ROLE
Exploring Content	Learners explore real-world issues (e.g. the history of peace treaties) using AI-curated multilingual resources.
Bilingual Communication	Language learning is enhanced through AI-powered feedback, translation tools, and multimodal expression.
Cognition (HOTs)	Higher-order thinking is supported by AI-driven scaffolding, critical questioning, and data analysis.
InterCultural Approach	Learners engage with diverse cultural and historical narratives, facilitated by AI-sourced perspectives.
Consciousness	Learners reflect on human intelligence, empathy, and ethical action in contrast to machine learning.
Complexity	Learners explore the interconnected systems behind AI, society, and peace-building.
Liberty & Responsibility	Learners are free to use GenAI with ethical awareness, autonomy, and a commitment to fairness, justice, and peace.
Peace (LPA)	Peace is positioned as an active, communicative process that values human dignity, different languages, and inclusion.

Pedagogical Approach

CLIL*iA* forPeace is:

- **Transdisciplinary**: Connects languages, history, ethics, digital literacy, and civic education.
- **Learner-centred**: Prioritizes student voice, inquiry, creativity, and personal reflection (e.g., *I-Search essays*).
- **Ethically grounded**: All AI use is guided by fairness, transparency, human oversight, and privacy.
- **Narrative-based**: Draws on narrative inquiry (inspired by Virginia Woolf's narrative methodology) to highlight everyday experiences and encourage reflection.
- **Process-oriented**: Promotes continuous improvement, feedback loops, and portfolio-based assessment.

Roles of AI in CLILIA-Peace

AI FUNCTION	EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT
Content Co-Curator	Helps create diverse, relevant, and age-appropriate peace-related materials.
Language Tutor	Provides targeted, real-time feedback on grammar, clarity, and vocabulary.
Cognitive Scaffold	Breaks down complex tasks, promotes inquiry, and problem-solving.
Cultural Bridge	Facilitates global dialogue and understanding across contexts/subjects.
Ethics Enabler	Promotes digital literacy, bias detection, and ethical decision-making.

Sample Implementation: History + Civic Education Module
Theme: Rewriting History Through the Lens of Peace
Topic: Post-WWII Reconciliation and Peacebuilding
Language:English (for EFL learners)
Tools: AI-powered summarization, translation, writing assistant, bias-checker

Activity	Tasks/Tools
AI-Enhanced Reading	Students read about WWII consequences; AI tool generates summary and glossary.
Writing a Peace Treaty	Students draft their own peace treaties using an AI writing assistant; revise collaboratively.
Bias Spotting	Students analyse wartime propaganda using AI bias detection and discuss ethical implications.
Peace Dialogues	In groups, students role-play peace talks from various countries, guided by AI translation tools.
Portfolio Creation	Students build digital portfolios including peace treaties, reflections, and peer feedback.

Assessment in CLIL*A* for Peace

Follows **portfolio-based, formative assessment**, supported by AI and human feedback. Inspired by Terry Underwood's writing cycle and Mike Kenz & Nick Potkalitsky's teacher-led transformation model:

- □ **Ongoing Process**: Draft → Feedback (AI + Peer) → Revision → Reflection
- □ **Criteria**: Language proficiency, content understanding, intercultural awareness, ethical engagement
- □ **Student Agency**: Students choose topics, formats (written, visual, multimedia), and set personal learning goals.

Professional Development & Teacher Role

- □ **AI Literacy for Educators**: Understanding how to integrate AI ethically and effectively.
- □ **Designing AI-Responsive Curriculum**: Teachers become designers of peace-oriented, transdisciplinary learning.
- □ **From Tech-Driven to Teacher-Led**: Teachers retain pedagogical control while embracing AI as a digital assistant/ agent, not a threat.

Conclusion: From Peril to Promise

CLILIA for Peace combines the linguistic and cognitive strengths of CLIL with the transformative potential of AI and the ethical purpose of the Language of Peace Approach. This model empowers both learners and teachers to engage with complexity, communicate across cultures, and shape a more peaceful, responsible future. Made with free ChatGPT

(e.g., History and Civic Education) that encourage inquiry, creativity, and global citizenship.

Assessment is portfolio-based and formative, combining human and AI feedback, while teacher professional development emphasizes AI literacy and educator-led curriculum design. CLIL*A* for Peace ultimately reframes AI not as a threat, but as a catalyst for equity, dignity, and dialogue in education.

3.4 Pilot Study

Implementing CLILIA for Peace - A Transdisciplinary, AI-Enhanced Approach in a Bilingual Graphic Design Classroom

Let us look at my pilot study to implement CLIL*A*, a hybrid pedagogical approach that combines Content and Language Integrated Learning with Intelligenza Artificiale (IA) to support pluriliteracies, student agency, and peace-oriented learning in bilingual classrooms. Conducted in an Italian upper-secondary school in 2024, the study focused on final-year Graphic Design students engaging in a four-phase AI-enhanced learning cycle designed to foster critical thinking, intercultural awareness, and creative expression.

Thematic focus was placed on gender equality and human rights, using Mary Wollstonecraft's Original Stories from Real Life (1788) as a springboard for inquiry. In this collection of children's stories, the tutor Mrs. Mason guides young girls using a Socratic method that emphasizes reflection, empathy, and peaceful behaviour - especially the moral responsibility of avoiding harm, even to animals. This message of peaceful harmony over violence provided a powerful ethical and emotional foundation for student inquiry. Through engagement with these narratives, learners emotionally connected with the moral dimension of peace, justice, and kindness - hallmarks of the Language of Peace Approach (LPA) embedded in CLIL*A*.

CLIL*A* goes beyond traditional instruction, shifting from knowledge transmission to co-creation. It blends subject content and language learning, promoting cognitive challenge, multilingual communication, and intercultural awareness. The framework also prioritizes affective factors, valuing L1 and L2 equally, lowering barriers to participation, and positioning teachers and learners as co-creators of knowledge. Tools such as AI-powered graphic organizers, design assistants, and translation tools supported inclusive, interdisciplinary projects, especially for learners with special needs, facilitating real-world, meaningful learning experiences.

The project unfolded through four interconnected phases:

1. AI-Assisted Content Creation - Teachers used generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini Education) to adapt historical texts and create differentiated materials tailored to learners' linguistic and cognitive profiles.
2. Exploratory Inquiry - Learners conducted guided research into historical and ethical themes such as the representation of justice, childhood, and gender-supported by AI tools for summarization and clarification.
3. Creative Expression - Learners synthesized knowledge from Graphic Design, Law, and Civic Education to produce original digital artefacts (e.g., illustrated book covers, memes, podcasts, visual essays), with AI tools like Recraft and Supermeme.ai facilitating visual storytelling.
4. Collaborative Knowledge Building - Through peer feedback, co-creation, and reflective discussions on bias, equity, and ethical AI use, student learners engaged in meaningful dialogue and shared construction of understanding.

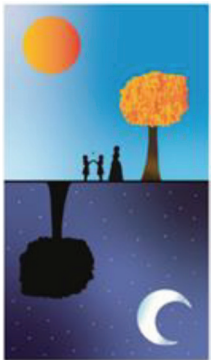


Fig. 3. Book cover created by student (2025).

A standout moment was the selection of a student's AI-assisted illustration as the cover of the new Italian edition of *Original Stories* (Figure 3), symbolizing the project's success in merging bilingual literacy, artistic creativity, and student-led learning. In one activity, students created AI-generated memes as visual poems, merging English language skills with imagery and critical reflection, turning text into prompts, and prompts into layered metaphors that spoke to ethical dilemmas, social justice, and hope.

AI in CLIL/A is not just a productivity tool: it is an emotional and cognitive catalyst. Learners used it to question, create, and connect across disciplines, examining Good and Evil, social norms, and the ethical implications of historical narratives through multimodal forms. Importantly, classroom dialogue addressed AI bias, gender stereotypes, and justice, reinforcing CLIL/A's peace-oriented and ethically grounded foundations.

Preliminary findings suggest that CLIL/A enhances language proficiency, disciplinary knowledge, and ethical awareness, while increasing learner engagement and ownership. The approach proved especially impactful in supporting diverse learners, combining AI's capacity for personalization with the humanistic, reflective pedagogy at the heart of the Language of Peace Approach. This pilot offers a replicable, scalable framework (Figure 4) for future implementation of CLIL/A-for-Peace across transdisciplinary contexts. It demonstrates how the integration of CLIL, AI, and peace education can empower learners to become critical, creative, and compassionate global citizens.

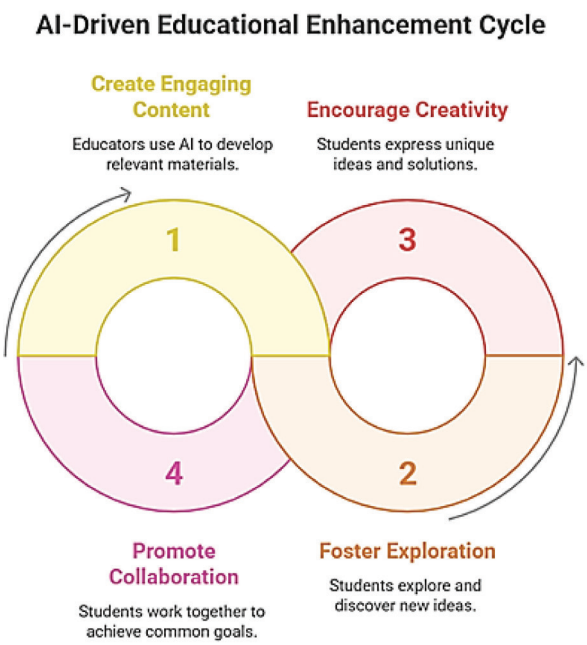


Fig. 4. CLIL/*A* in action created with Napkin

4. DISCUSSION

The Fears of AI Monsters

In his recent lecture "Machines in a World of People", Vincenzo Fano highlighted the ethical uncertainty surrounding today's AI advancements, arguing that classical frameworks, from Aristotle to Kant, struggle to address the opaque, generative, and autonomous nature of modern 'intelligent' systems. As fears of AI *monsters* grow, echoing anxieties, spread by dystopias like *Frankenstein* or mass media, it becomes clear that society lacks a shared ethical direction. Yet, scholars, such as Floridi (Yale University) and Nello Cristianini (University of Bath), emphasize that the danger lies not in AI's power, but in humanity's failure to responsibly guide it.

Education emerges as the critical frontier. The fusion of CLIL/*A* and LPA offers a transformative pedagogical response: by integrating multilingual learning with ethical inquiry, creativity, and intercultural understanding, this hybrid approach helps learners not only adapt to AI-driven change but actively shape it, anchoring education in Enlightenment ideals of peace, agency, and rational human progress.

The multifaceted role of the CLIL/*A*+LPA teacher is mainly to teach how not to confuse mere technological development with true progress and help them distinguish between technological development and meaningful, human-centred advancement. This involves fostering critical thinking about whether new technologies truly improve lives, promote equity, and support ethical values, or simply create the appearance of progress without addressing deeper societal needs. As Pier Paolo Pasolini foresaw in 1975, when denouncing the anthropological degradation of his country, there can be no peace in "the monstrous entanglement of powers and violence;" so the true monster is not AI, but the ignored truth "left untranslated into the professional languages of political economy and law" (Berardinelli, in Pasolini's *Lettere luterane*): truths that are often overlooked, simplified, or excluded in politically correct textbooks,

whether due to national narratives or institutional pressures, can limit students' ability to engage critically with complex historical and social realities. An inclusive and peace-oriented curriculum should create space for omitted perspectives, encouraging open dialogue, critical inquiry, and ethical reflection. Therefore, it is primarily the role of the teacher to equip learners with the ethical language of peace needed to articulate untold or uncomfortable truths, truths often silenced not due to irrelevance, but because of ethical voids within systems of power, including the opaque and biased nature of AI black boxes.

In the spirit of the Enlightenment and modern thinkers, like Pasolini and James Scott, *progress* is not the authoritarian imposition but the ethical refinement of human institutions, including education. Echoing Adam Smith's idea that abundance arises from *mutual* exchange (The Wealth of Nations, 1776), CLIL/A+LPA similarly positions peace education as a collective effort between teachers, learners, technologies, and cultures. When viewed this way, AI is not an end but a space for exploration and collaborative discourse. AI, in this light, can be a tool of acceleration and transformation only if we teach that the ultimate choice lies not in its algorithm but in *our conscience*. By embedding AI in a pedagogy of ethical communication, CLIL/A+LPA makes education a space for agency, where peace is built through the languages and values we teach. This transdisciplinary and ethically grounded approach reframes war not as inevitable, but as a human-made problem that can be unmade.

4.1 From Enlightenment ideals to Positive Peace

From Kant's Enlightenment ideals to Galtung's concept of Positive Peace (in *Vision of Humanity* - 2024), the understanding of peace has evolved from merely ending violence to actively *constructing* equitable, inclusive systems. Peace is not a passive state but a human-made design, shaped by education, relationships, and ethical imagination. As Sir Henry Maine noted, "Peace is a modern invention" (Woodhouse, 2022), requiring intentional teaching and cultural effort. This reflects the roots of Peace Studies, from Gandhi's *satyagraha* to modern intercultural movements.

The fusion of CLIL/A (AI-supported, multilingual learning) with Rebecca Oxford's Language of Peace Approach offers a transformative pedagogy. Grounded in empathy, ethics, and dialogue, CLIL+IA+LPA reframes language education as a tool for building dignity, not just fluency. Each lesson becomes a space for co-creating meaning, where learners engage language to foster connection, criticality, and peace in an ethically complex, tech-mediated world.

5. LIMITATIONS

The Hidden Risks of Our Digital Age

History has often privileged war and power while silencing grassroots peace movements, especially those led by women and oppressed communities (Van Den Dungen & Wittner 2003). Today's educators are called to not just revisit history, but reframe it, placing peace at the heart of learning. This aligns with traditions that see language as an ethical force. As early as *The Clouds* (423 BCE), Aristophanes, echoing Socrates, warned that language without ethics can justify harm. Socrates' wisdom rings true today, especially in light of NPR CEO Katherine Maher's claim that "reverence for the truth might be a distraction" (Sky News Australia, 25 Nov 2024).

When combined with LPA, each CLIL*/A* lesson becomes a threshold, where learners are invited to listen not just with their ears but with their *conscience*, to speak not merely with fluency but with *care*. Through the prism of languages, they begin to *imagine* peace not as abstraction, but as a lived ethic: a right to be safeguarded and a *responsibility* to be enacted, shaped by the very *value-carrying narratives* we choose to honour and we wish to uphold.

Cloelia's defiance, driven by moral clarity rather than force, embodies the ethical foundation of CLIL/A+LPA, where virtues like empathy, dignity, and justice must guide competence. Technology, powerful like Cloelia's horse, requires direction. Critics warn that AI from firms like *Palantir* risks enabling Orwellian surveillance, with recent lawsuits from students and unions raising concerns over government misuse of sensitive data for political or discriminatory purposes (The Times of India, Jun 08, 2025). These are not dystopian hypotheticals but unfolding realities.

Such developments underscore the vital role of education, not only in teaching technical skills, but in cultivating critical awareness. Within CLIL+IA+LPA, educators have a strategy to expose learners to real-world implications of AI misuse. By integrating *current events* into language and content learning, teachers help learners confront complex issues at the intersection of ethics, governance, and technology. As Orwell foresaw, language shapes thought, and if left unexamined, algorithms may inherit and amplify the very biases democracy seeks to dismantle. Thus, teaching must unveil, the hidden risks of our digital age.

6. FUTURE RESEARCH

Toward a Bilingual and Digital Pedagogy for Peaceful Intelligence

The CLIL/A for Peace hybrid approach echoes what the economist F. A. Hayek emphasized, in 1960: enduring truths must be reframed in the language of each new generation. The ideals that once carried conviction may fade in force unless reborn in context. In the era of generative AI, our most pressing task is to translate enduring human values (e.g., peace, justice, and dignity) into compelling, ethical uses of new technologies/spaces. In a moment when more than one politician seems to push for a looming World War III, we need to remember Kant who, in 1784, called humanity to "emerge from its self-incurred immaturity." So, the challenge for future research is not merely technical; it is moral. Kant called upon humanity to "Dare to understand!" Today, I don't simply echo that call, I want to adapt it for young learners: "Dare to humanize AI!" Not as shortcut, not to replace us, but to remind us who we are. That's why I teach. The greatest challenge lies in advancing human-centred research that reimagines education as a peace-oriented and transformative practice.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author acknowledges the use of generative AI tools, including ChatGPT and Napkin, which were employed exclusively for defined pedagogical purposes, as detailed in the experimental sections. Specifically, generative AI was used to assist in the conceptual design of the framework and to provide limited proofreading support. At no point were AI tools used to generate original scholarly content or to conduct analysis. All instances of AI involvement are transparently disclosed and appropriately referenced within the text.

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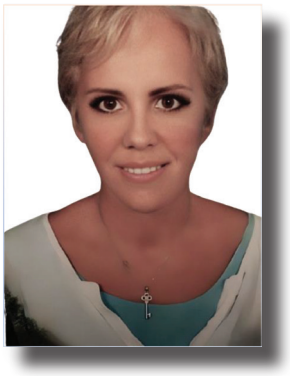
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Gloria Alpini (PhD, University of Cambridge) is a scholar of comparative literature with expertise in bilingual and AI-enhanced pedagogy. Educated in Cambridge, Paris, and Milan, she is the originator of **CLILIA**, an AI-integrated, transdisciplinary framework designed to promote empathy and intercultural dialogue in education.

Her current research explores the integration of CLILIA with the **Language of Peace Approach,** advancing ethical and inclusive models of learning. In addition to her work on pedagogy, she specializes in Enlightenment children's literature and women's writing. Dr. Alpini has held teaching and research appointments at the University of Warwick, the Pennsylvania State University, and institutions in the Middle East.

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The Soul of Unity: Malay Language and Its Role in Culture, Identity, and Peace

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the significant function of Malay as a nation-building language in advancing cultural identity, social unity, and peaceful coexistence in Southeast Asia. As the ancient lingua franca, Malay has united different ethnic, cultural, and geographical communities from Srivijaya to contemporary Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. Beyond communication, Malay is a vehicle of critical values of respect, modesty, and cooperation that have endured to shape social behaviour. Adopting a narrative review approach, this study interweaves policy documents, historical texts, and academic sources in examining Malay's role in cultural conservation and peacebuilding. The research highlights how Malay tradition—expressed through oral literature, proverbs, and community practice—nurtures shared understanding and collective identity. It does so simultaneously while globalization, English language hegemony, and the influence of new media challenge its vitality. Against such pressures, Malay demonstrates resilience in the face of state policy, social activism, and revived appeal among younger generations. New developments, including digitization of resources, inclusion into school curriculum, and creative deployment of social media, add further to its currency. Indeed, the language is compatible with regional peacebuilding agendas, like ASEAN's program of intercultural dialogue and cultural cooperation. The findings verify that Malay is not merely a language but a unifying cultural power. By maintaining and reinforcing the use of both its ancient and modern forms, Malay can maintain heritage, unify identity, and be an effective vehicle for harmony in an increasingly globalized world.

Keywords: Cultural, Malay Language, Peace, Social Unity, Southeast Asia

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1. INTRODUCTION

A child in Malaysia today can communicate in Korean due to the widespread influence of Korean entertainment products such as music and drama (Adlina et al., 2020). While this reflects the benefits of globalization, it also raises concerns about cultural shifts. Adlina et al. (2020) observed that exposure to foreign media has altered language preferences and influenced the cultural practices of Malaysian teenagers. Scholars further caution that technology, while creating borderless communication, has simultaneously contributed to cultural erosion and identity loss in many parts of the world (Tanulku & Pekelsma, 2024; Mattelart et al., 2024).

Before the rise of digital technology and global geopolitics, languages played a central role in carrying culture, history, and identity across generations. Even today, languages continue to serve as strong markers of identity despite changes in communication platforms (Levisen & Fernández, 2021). The global spread of English, beginning in the 19th century through colonial expansion, illustrates how a language can gain worldwide dominance (Li, Haider, & Callison-Burch, 2024). Nevertheless, regional and national languages such as Mandarin, Malay, and Javanese remain indispensable within their own sociocultural contexts (Shair-Rosenfield et al., 2021). The Indian subcontinent provides a clear example of how languages have long supported cultural identity and peaceful coexistence.

Against this backdrop, a key research question arises: How does the Malay language function as a cultural unifier and peacebuilder in Southeast Asia? This paper addresses this question by tracing the historical and contemporary roles of the Malay language in sustaining cultural identity, fostering unity, and contributing to regional peace.

2. BACKGROUND / LITERATURE CONTEXT

Historical Foundations

The Malay language belongs to the Austronesian family, spoken by more than 328 million people today (Thao et al., 2024). Its spread and early prominence are closely linked to the Srivijaya Empire in the seventh century, which elevated Malay to the status of lingua franca across Southeast Asia. Through trade and diplomacy, Srivijaya fostered what Manguin (2021) describes as a "Malay world" in which language, commerce, culture, and politics were interwoven. This historical foundation established Malay as not only a medium of communication but also a carrier of identity and cultural cohesion across the region.

Cross-border Unity

Contemporary studies demonstrate Malay's continuing role as a bridge among diverse communities. Sutikno, Kartolo, and Asnawi (2024) showed that in Deli, Indonesia, Malay fosters inter-community relationships between Javanese and Malay sub-communities, providing a shared linguistic space that supports cultural integration. Their study of 112 respondents highlights how Malay functions as both a practical communication tool and a marker of collective identity. Beyond Deli, Malay has historically united communities across Sumatra, Borneo, the Malay Peninsula, and parts of the Philippines, serving as a lingua franca for trade, cultural exchange, and governance (Zulkifli & Yusoff, 2022). Similarly, Yamirudeng (2017) observed that Malay enables Thai-Malay Muslims to

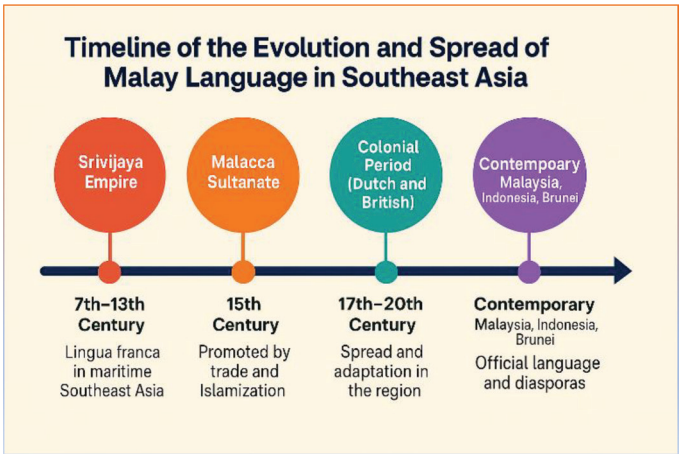


Figure 1. Timeline of the Evolution and Spread of Malay Language in Southeast Asia

Source: Authors, 2025.

The historical development of the Malay language from the Srivijaya Empire to its contemporary role across Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and diaspora communities.

retain cultural identity and cross-border solidarity despite pressures from dominant languages in Southern Thailand.

Cultural Symbols

The unifying role of Malay extends beyond daily communication into the realm of cultural symbolism. Shared identities across the Malay Archipelago are rooted in traditions carried by the language, including pantun (poetic quatrains), *adat* (customs), and *tatasusila* (ethics). These cultural symbols embody values such as respect, humility, and cooperation, ensuring that Malay is not merely spoken but lived as a framework for coexistence (Idrus et al., 2014). Communities in Selangor, for example, including *Acheh, Boyan*, and *Banjar* groups, continue to be linked through Malay, which facilitates not only cultural ties but also economic and social exchanges (Zulkifli & Yusoff, 2022).

Comparative Perspectives

The significance of Malay in fostering unity can be better understood when compared to other languages with similar integrative roles. Arabic, for instance, spread widely through Islam, uniting Muslim communities across continents and influencing Malay vocabulary, cultural practices, and greetings in Malaysia (Mahfud et al., 2022; Soliman & Khalil, 2024). Similarly, German functions as a unifying language across multiple European countries, shaping cultural and administrative interactions (Abdumannonovna, 2022). These parallels highlight that Malay, like Arabic and German, has acted as a vehicle for cultural continuity, identity formation, and socio-political integration.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative narrative review design with documentary analysis rather than fieldwork. Narrative review is an appropriate strategy because the research seeks to integrate the existing scholarship, policy, and historical records about the Malaysian Malay language's role in cultural identity and peacebuilding, rather than creating new empirical data (Merzali Celikoglu & Hamarat, 2022).

A total of approximately 45 sources were consulted, comprising peer-reviewed journal articles, historical texts, national language policy reports, ASEAN and UNESCO reports, and chosen ethnographic studies applicable to Southeast Asia. The inclusion criteria were such that sources had to directly address the Malay language in terms of cultural identity, peacebuilding, sociopolitical cohesion, or interethnic communication. Exclusion criteria excluded non-peer-reviewed articles, opinion articles, and research studies not immediately related to language, identity, or peace studies.

Document analysis proceeded along three keyword sets, namely "Malay language and identity," "Malay and peacebuilding," and "language and cultural heritage in Southeast Asia." This procedure enabled the bringing together of literature along history, sociolinguistic, and policy domains so that a comprehensive report regarding the function of the Malay language as a cultural unifier and as a tool of peace was established.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1. Malay Language and Cultural Identity

Bahasa Malaysia is not just a tool of communication; it is a world view that embodies respect, humility, harmony, and spirituality. As what Yamirudeng (2017) observed, Malay is not just an informative tool but a manifestation of values that regulate how communities live, communicate, and interact. Terms like budi bahasa

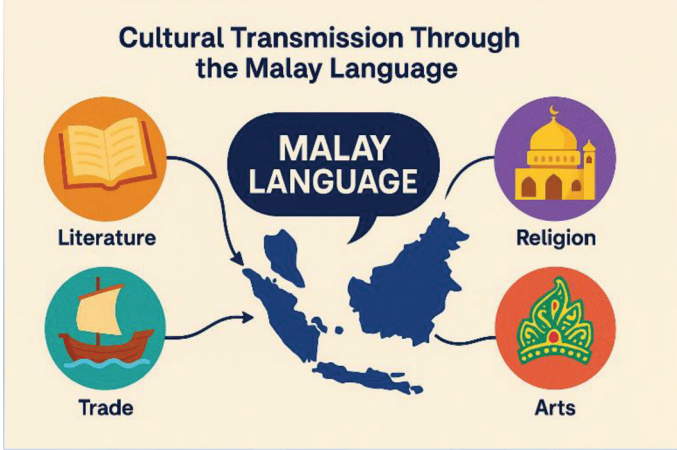


Figure 2. Cultural Transmission Through the Malay Language

Source: Authors, 2025

A symbolic representation of the Malay language's role in transmitting values that underpin multicultural cohesion and peace.

(proper language), adat (customs), and tatasusila (ethics) span centuries of moral wisdom and cultural norms.

Cultural representations such as pantun (poems), proverbs, and cerita rakyat (folk tales) have always been at the centre of the 'value creating' process within a community. These oral traditions are not merely artistic; they educate. Kozakh is a humorous and educative story in the form of Pantun (Pantun, 2025), containing metaphors and rhythmic formation, that are used as a teaching material media and entertainment. Idrus et al. (2014) observed that *sabar* (patience), *rendah diri* (humility), and *rukun* (harmony) are transmitted through these traditions, and continue to inform national identity and public values in Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, and parts of Indonesia. The language wraps itself around daily life, learning, and ritual, subtly shaping.

4.2. Language as a Tool for Peaceful Coexistence

With time, Malay has shown to be more than just a national tongue; it has served as a link between cultures. Historical documents and studies by Hiranpaisitkul et al. (2022) and Ayob (2012) indicate how Malay facilitated communication in commerce, diplomacy, and daily exchanges throughout Southeast Asia. Its openness and impartiality made it perfect for bringing together individuals from various ethnic and religious communities.

Furthermore, the language embodies what many view as a kind of "soft power," particularly in the ASEAN area. Collins and Ahmad (1999) emphasize that Malay fosters peace not through coercion but via the values inherent in the language. Terms such as gotong-royong (collaborative effort) and *muafakat* (consensus) are more than mere words; they reflect a mentality grounded in communal values. In addition, Islamic values like *rahmah* (compassion), *aman* (peace), and *adil* (justice) are seamlessly woven into daily Malay dialogue. These values aren't merely stated; they're enacted, taught in educational settings, conveyed through the media, and evident in how individuals settle disputes and foster relationships.

Importantly, these linguistic and cultural values resonate with regional frameworks. The ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025, for example, explicitly calls for the promotion of a "culture of peace and moderation" through education, intercultural dialogue, and shared values (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016). Aligning Malay linguistic traditions with such peacebuilding policies strengthens its role as both a cultural heritage and a contemporary instrument for fostering unity in Southeast Asia.

4.3 Role in Multicultural Societies

In multicultural nations such as Malaysia, Brunei, and certain regions of Indonesia, the Malay language remains a unifying element that connects individuals from diverse backgrounds. According to Zulkiflee and Suhaimi (2023), Malay serves not only as the national language but also as the medium through which varied communities can communicate with one another on an equal basis. In Malaysia, for example, it links Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Indigenous groups, serving as a routine resource in education, public services, and mass media.

Festivities and artistic displays also embody this welcoming essence. Occasions such as *Hari Kebangsaan* and *Hari Malaysia* unite individuals, with the Malay language being pivotal in speeches, songs, and communal practices. In Singapore, despite the prevalence of English, Malay continues to be recognized as an official language and plays an important role in heritage education. In both formal ceremonies and community events, Malay frequently serves as the expression of common identity and shared history.

Parallel models are found in other multicultural societies. Mandarin, for instance, is the language bridge across China's diverse ethnic groups and brings them into national identity without displacing most regional languages. Similarly, Hindi is a lingua franca in India that brings together different speakers of other mother tongues in governance, media, and popular culture. These parallels reinforce the argument that Malay, along with Mandarin and Hindi, has a key role of ensuring togetherness and intercultural understanding in advanced multicultural communities.

4.4 Resilience Against Linguistic Hegemony

Even with the dominant influence of English and other worldwide languages, Malay has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to evolve and persist. Numerous minority languages globally face significant challenges to exist in the current digital and globalized environment. However, as described by Collins and Ahmad (1999), Malay has continued to be significant due to robust government policies, public involvement, and its deep connections to religion and tradition.

Its power resides in the emotional and cultural bond it cultivates. In educational institutions, religious centers, government assemblies, and across social media platforms, Malay remains vibrant. Global organizations such as UNESCO and ASEAN acknowledge their importance, enhancing its credibility internationally (e-IR, 2023). The revival of the Jawi script in educational institutions and signage, previously considered to be declining, is now experiencing a resurgence. For numerous

individuals, Jawi represents more than merely a script; it's an emblem of pride and a reminder of the abundant cultural heritage associated with the Malay language.

Regional recognition further attests to such resilience: Malay (in its standard forms of Bahasa Malaysia, Bahasa Indonesia, and Bahasa Brunei) is an officially or nationally recognized language in three ASEAN nations which are Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei collectively representing more than 300 million speakers. Beyond these national borders, Malay is constitutionally recognized as part of Singapore's four officially recognized languages, thereby attesting to its wider sociopolitical function.

International institutions have also acknowledged this role. UNESCO declared 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages, flagging activities to promote preservation of language diversity, and from that point on has supported programs that protect Malay as Southeast Asia's intangible cultural heritage. UNESCO collaborations with ASEAN recently have emphasized digitization and intergenerational passing on of regional languages, including Malay, as key to sustainable development and peace building (UNESCO, 2022).

4.5 Revival and Hope

A subtle resurgence is happening, particularly among younger people who are reengaging with the Malay language through innovative and imaginative methods. Instagram accounts advocating pantun and YouTube channels instructing in Jawi are actively aiding in the resurgence of linguistic pride within digital realms. Efforts to bring back Jawi in educational settings and on signs (Jawi Script, 2025) represent a significant move towards reconnecting with cultural roots, seen not merely as a formality, but as an active tradition. While specific hashtag metrics for Malay poetry or Jawi writing are not publicly available, TikTok dominates social media engagement in Southeast Asia with the region accounting for nearly one-quarter of the platform's global ad-viewership (China Daily, 2025) and some countries like Malaysia recording over 28 million users and a 48.6% annual increase in reach (Meltwater, 2024). This underscores the platform's potential for cultural content such as Malay poetry or Jawi revival to reach and influence a wide audience.

Beyond Southeast Asia, this drive persists. The Malay diaspora is displaying a revived interest, frequently utilizing the language to maintain a connection to their cultural identity. Within academic communities, Malay is attracting interest for its linguistic depth and prospects in peace education. According to Zulkiflee and Suhaimi (2023), the future of the Malay language isn't just about conserving the past; it's about redefining how it can promote empathy, communication, and harmonious living in a globalized society. With community engagement and educational changes, Malay is reaffirming its significance, not only historically but also currently and in the future.

The implications of this research can be situated in existing theoretical frameworks. Sociolinguistically, the Malay language offers proof for the linguistic relativity principle, such that language not only affects communication but also worldview and social interaction patterns (Levisen & Fernández, 2021). Its role as a unifier likewise translates well into Joseph Nye's soft power theory, since Malay affects cooperation and coordination through values of harmony, respect, and consensus and not coercion. Also, the support function of Malay as an overarching medium across Southeast Asia is in line with Benedict Anderson's imagined communities' theory, where shared language enables individuals of varying backgrounds to envision themselves to be part of an encompassing cultural and political community. Pitting the Malay language under such theoretical constructs underscores both its cultural heritage and practical role as a tool for peacebuilding and social integration in Southeast Asia.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Malay language, described as *Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa* (Language of the Nation's Soul), serves as a tool to connect generations, transmit ancestral wisdom, foster cultural identity, and unity. The Malay language acts as a bridge for communication and cultural expression (Othman et al., 2022), ensuring the transmission and preservation of cultural values, wisdom, tradition, and artistic expressions among its multicultural societies. Positive values such as working together for a good cause (gotong royong) and reaching consensus *(muafakat)* are integrated into the lexicon to promote peace and harmony (Ayob, 2012; Misa Melayu, 2025) and the *talibun, Hikayat Awang Sulung Merah Muda*, beautifully captures imagery of this communal unity, cooperation and respect through verses like,

Yang pekak pembakar meriam, (The deaf lights the cannon),
Yang buta penghembus lesung, (The blind blows the mortar),
Yang lumpuh penghalau ayam, (The crippled repels the chicken),
Yang pekung penjemuran, (The scarred dries the crops),
Yang kurap pemikul tabuh. (The one with ringworm carries the drum).

On a broader scale, the Malay language serves as an agent of peace, uniting nations, races, religions, and ethnicities in Southeast Asia and beyond, including Malay-speaking communities in Southern Thailand, Southern Philippines, Sri Lanka, and South Africa. Bound by shared history, culture, and linguistics, the

Malay language has remained a powerful unifying force (Ayob, 2012; Zulkiflee & Suhaimi, 2023), evident in events such as *Sumpah Pemuda* 1928 that united Indonesia, and its survival in Southern Thailand despite political and linguistic pressures. This study reaffirms the Malay language as the soul of unity, preserving wisdom, values, and identity despite colonialism and globalization. As Pantun (2025) declares, *Bahasa menunjukkan bangsa* (Language defines a nation), reminding us that Malay is never a barrier to success, unity, and harmony, and must continue to remain relevant and enduring.

To ensure the sustainability of the Malay language in serving its functions as the tool to preserve culture, enhance national identity and foster peace, the following actions are proposed:

1. Digitizing the Malay Language and Cultural Heritage

In today's era where the world massively embraces advanced technology, the Malay language must make full use of digital advancement to persevere and remain relevant. The transmission of culture, wisdom, and artistic traditions can now be done digitally to reach a wider range of audiences while making the preservation and transfer process more appealing and engaging. Highly interactive game-like applications, for instance, can attract young people while literary enthusiasts can collaborate to initiate a digital bank for collections of oral and written traditions from various ethnicities and races, to include Indigenous communities.

2. Popularizing Cultural Pride and Unity through social media

Younger generations who communicate through social media need to develop pride in using and advocating the Malay language. Platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram can position the language and its values at the center, promoting identity and unity. Sharing pantun and *sajak* fosters unity among Malay-speaking communities worldwide, including the diaspora in Cape Town and Sri Lanka, proving the saying "*jauh di mata, dekat di hati*" (far from the eyes, close to the heart).

3. Integrating Malay Language and Values in Education for Peacebuilding

Language can support the United Nations' SDG 16 on peace, justice, and unity. ASEAN nations may consider adopting Malay as a second or third language for diplomacy, starting with schools where children learn it as a second or foreign language and are introduced to traditions and values through literary traditions. Values such as *bertolak ansur* (tolerance), *bergotong royong* (working together), and *berbudi bahasa* (polite speech) can be fostered, while folklores rich in positive messages can be included in the syllabus. Schools can also revive traditions via *pantun, syair,* and *sajak* competitions while at another level, enthusiasts producing modern works inspired by tradition should receive media coverage and government funding so that writings promoting peace can flourish.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not employ any of the Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies for Language refinement, drafting background section and did not perform any Task of the technology.

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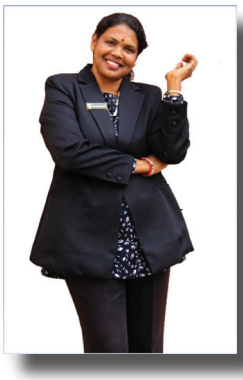
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Cities in Motion: Reimagining Public Space and Urban Communities in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The evolving dynamics of 21st-century cities have transformed public spaces into critical arenas where socio-political, economic, and cultural processes intersect. **Methods:** This study adopts a qualitative, integrative review methodology combining narrative synthesis with elements of systematic mapping. A total of 95 peer-reviewed studies (2000–2024) were systematically identified and thematically coded into five core themes: inclusive and adaptive urban design, civic identity and resistance, participatory governance, spatial inequality, and privatization/commodification of public commons. **Results:** Findings reveal that public spaces are no longer mere physical environments but function as vital platforms for social interaction, economic activity, political expression, and community identity. The literature underscores how design, governance, and accessibility significantly impact social equity, community cohesion, and urban resilience. **Discussion:** The review highlights several key trends, including the growing emphasis on inclusive urban design, participatory governance models, and adaptive, multi-use spaces. Persistent challenges remain, such as spatial inequality, privatization, and the socio-economic marginalization of vulnerable communities. **Conclusion:** Public spaces must be reimagined as dynamic, inclusive commons that foster socio-economic vitality and civic engagement. Future urban planning must prioritize equitable access and community participation to ensure resilient and just urban futures.

Keywords: Urban Studies, Public Space, Urban Community, Urban Socio-Economics, Placemaking, Spatial Justice, Smart Urbanism

1. INTRODUCTION

Public spaces have long constituted the lifeblood of urban life, functioning as key sites for social interaction, economic exchange, political expression, and cultural performance (Gehl, 2011; Low, 2017; Whyte, 1980). In this study, "public space" is defined as a shared physical or hybrid (physical–digital) environment that is publicly accessible and collectively used, serving multiple socio-political, cultural, and economic functions (Carr et al., 1992). For analytical clarity, public spaces can be categorized into:

- Spaces for recreation and leisure– such as parks, playgrounds, greenways, and waterfronts (Chiesura, 2004);
- Spaces for political, cultural, and economic activities – such as squares, pedestrianized streets, traditional markets, and civic plazas (Mitchell, 2003; Harvey, 2012).

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Recognizing these typologies is crucial for understanding functional transformation processes, especially the trend toward multi-functional integration in contemporary urban contexts (Amin, 2008; Madanipour, 2020).

In the 21st century, public space has emerged not merely as a geographical or architectural feature but as a multidimensional construct central to the socio-political and economic fabric of urban life (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005). A confluence of factors—including globalization, neoliberal urban governance, technological innovation, climate change, and social justice movements—has dramatically transformed how public space is conceptualized, accessed, governed, and experienced (Harvey, 2012; Soja, 2010).

Importantly, these processes manifest differently across regions. In the Global North, smart technologies and placemaking initiatives often dominate policy discourse (Townsend, 2013; Greenfield, 2017), while in the Global South, issues of basic accessibility, informality, and spatial justice remain paramount (Watson, 2009; Kombe, 2010). This regional diversity forms an essential comparative lens throughout this review, ensuring that the analysis moves beyond a Western-centric perspective.

Public spaces are not static; they evolve through the interplay of design, governance, and community agency. Well-designed and well-managed public spaces foster belonging and collective identity, enabling inclusive urban citizenship (Gehl, 2011; Jacobs, 1961). Conversely, privatization and commodification risk diminishing their democratic potential (Sorkin, 1992; Zukin, 2010). The subsequent sections examine these dynamics through a systematic synthesis of 95 scholarly works, generating a framework that connects spatial design, urban governance, community engagement, and socio-economic transformation.

2. METHODS

This review adopts a qualitative, integrative methodology combining narrative synthesis with elements of systematic mapping to capture the evolving role of public space in shaping urban communities and socio-economic dynamics. The approach is interdisciplinary, engaging literature from urban studies, sociology, geography, planning, and political economy, to account for the multifaceted nature of public space as both a physical and socio-political construct (Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019).

Literature Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted in **Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar** between January and March 2025. Keywords and Boolean combinations included: *urban public space*, *urban communities*, *socio-economic change*, *urban resilience*, *placemaking*, *spatial justice*, *inclusive urbanism*, and *public space governance*. Filters restricted results to peer-reviewed, English-language publications between **2000 and 2024**, ensuring contemporary relevance while capturing two decades of theoretical and empirical development.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and book chapters.
- Studies examining relationships between public space and urban community life, socio-economic change, or governance structures.
- Theoretical and empirical contributions relevant to the socio-spatial functions of public space.

Exclusion criteria:

- Non-peer-reviewed sources such as blogs, media articles, and design portfolios lacking socio-theoretical framing.
- Literature focusing exclusively on technical infrastructure without a social context.

Bias Mitigation Strategies

To reduce selection bias, two reviewers independently screened all abstracts and full texts, resolving discrepancies through discussion (Higgins et al., 2019). Reference chaining was used to identify additional relevant studies. To enhance transparency and reproducibility, the review followed a PRISMA-like four-phase process—identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion—adapted for qualitative synthesis (Page et al., 2021).

Data Extraction and Thematic Coding

The initial search yielded over 200 documents, which were imported into NVivo 12 for qualitative coding. After applying the inclusion criteria, 95 studies were retained for in-depth review. Each document was coded inductively and deductively, producing five overarching thematic categories (Table 1):

1. Inclusive and adaptive urban design;
2. Civic identity and resistance;
3. Participatory governance;
4. Spatial inequality;
5. Privatization and commodification of public commons.

Table 1. Thematic Dimensions of Urban Public Space Identified in the Literature Review.

Theme	Description
Inclusive & Adaptive Urban Design	Designing spaces to accommodate diverse users and community needs.
Civic Identity & Resistance	Spaces for political activism, cultural identity, and civic engagement.
Participatory Governance	Community-driven planning and management models.
Spatial Inequality	Unequal distribution and access to quality public spaces.
Privatization & Commodification	Commercialization and exclusionary practices in public space use.

Source: Authors, 2025.

Analytical Framework

The synthesis was guided by theoretical lenses including Henri Lefebvre's (1991) "right to the city," David Harvey's (2012) theory of urbanization and capitalism, and Jane Jacobs' (1961) advocacy of community-based urbanism. These perspectives were integrated into a conceptual framework mapping the interplay between spatial design, governance, community agency, and socio-economic transformation (Figure 1). This framework underpins the Results and Discussion, ensuring coherence between thematic synthesis and the paper's three guiding research objectives.

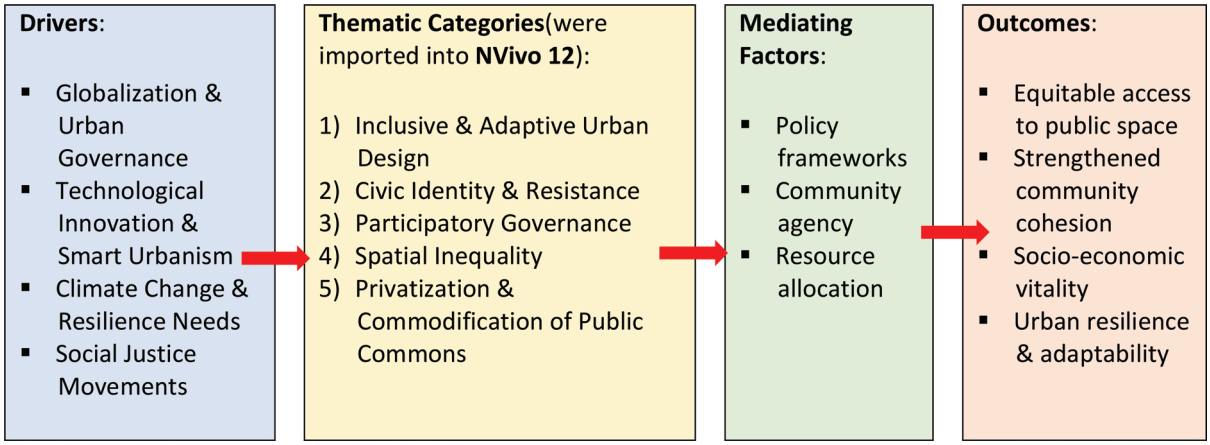


Figure 1. Integrated Analytical Framework for Public Space and Urban Communities. This framework illustrates the relationship between global and local drivers, thematic categories synthesized from the literature, mediating factors, and intended outcomes, adapted from Lefebvre (1991), Harvey (2012), and Jacobs (1961)

3. RESULTS

3.1 Thematic synthesis of literature

From the qualitative coding of 95 peer-reviewed sources (2000–2024), five core thematic categories emerged. These themes capture both persistent challenges and emerging innovations in the reimagining of public space. Importantly, the literature indicates that socio-economic and technological changes have diversified the uses and meanings of public spaces rather than completely restructuring their physical forms. Public spaces increasingly integrate multiple functions—recreational, political, economic, cultural—within the same spatial setting, reflecting a shift toward multifunctional and hybrid environments (Amin, 2008; Madanipour, 2020; Chiesura, 2004).

3.2 Functional diversification vs. structural change

Analysis of case studies reveals that while certain global forces—such as digital technologies, urban regeneration policies, and pandemic-responsive design—affect the use patterns and governance models of public spaces, they rarely obliterate the foundational functions (e.g., gathering, circulation, recreation). Instead, these forces layer new functions upon existing forms, producing hybridized spaces that serve multiple roles simultaneously (Townsend, 2013; Honey-Rosés et al., 2020).

For example, a central square in a Global South city may function as a daytime produce market, an evening performance venue, and a site for political rallies during election seasons—illustrating multifunctional integration without radical physical restructuring.

4. DISCUSSION

This review reaffirms that public spaces are not static or neutral landscapes but dynamic arenas where urban life is negotiated, contested, and reimagined (Low, 2017; Madanipour, 2020). The shift from viewing public spaces solely as physical locales to recognizing them as socially constructed terrains reflects a broader transformation

Table 2. Thematic Categories of Public Space in the 21st Century (Synthesis from 95 Sources).

Theme	Description	Representative Functions & Examples	Selected References
1. Inclusive & Adaptive Urban Design	Designing spaces to accommodate diverse users and adapt to evolving needs, incorporating universal design principles and climate-responsive features.	Accessible parks, child-friendly streets, gender-sensitive lighting.	Gehl (2011); Carmona (2019)
2. Civic Identity & Resistance	Public spaces as sites for political activism, cultural identity formation, and grassroots mobilization.	Protest squares, cultural festivals in plazas, heritage markets.	Mitchell (2003); Harvey (2012)
3. Participatory Governance	Community-led planning and co-management models that enhance local stewardship.	Co-designed waterfront promenades, neighborhood-managed parks.	Fainstein (2010); Lydon & Garcia (2015)
4. Spatial Inequality	Disparities in access and quality of public spaces, often linked to socio-economic status, ethnicity, or geography.	Underserved peri-urban green spaces, informal settlements lacking plazas.	Soja (2010); Watson (2009)
5. Privatization & Commodification	Commercial control and securitization of space limiting public use and inclusivity.	Business Improvement Districts, privatized waterfronts.	Zukin (2010); Sorkin (1992)

Source: Authors, 2025.

in urban studies, particularly in understanding the interdependence of design, governance, accessibility, and community agency.

4.1. Spatial Justice and Community Agency

The concept of spatial justice (Soja, 2010) offers a useful lens to evaluate how urban design and governance practices affect different groups. Persistent disparities in access to quality public spaces are evident, especially in marginalized communities—including low-income residents, ethnic minorities, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

Examples from the Global South highlight these disparities in vivid terms. In Bogotá, Colombia, the city's Ciclovía program repurposes streets for cyclists and pedestrians every Sunday, enabling equitable access to safe public space despite high car dependency (Montero, 2017). In Johannesburg, South Africa, urban regeneration projects like Maboneng Precinct have revitalized underused areas but also raised concerns about gentrification and exclusion (Visser & Kotze, 2008). These cases illustrate how community-led initiatives can advance inclusivity, while also underscoring the risk of exclusion if governance is not equity-focused.

Inclusive design strategies—such as universal design, gender-sensitive planning, and child-friendly infrastructure—should be embedded into all interventions (UN-Habitat, 2020). Participatory planning models, including co-design workshops and neighborhood stewardship programs, empower residents to shape their environments, build social capital, and ensure sustained engagement (Fainstein, 2010; Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

4.2 Public Space in the Digital and Post-Pandemic Era

The intersection of digital technologies and public space has become increasingly prominent. While tools such as mobile participation platforms and augmented reality layers can enhance engagement (Townsend, 2013), they raise ethical issues around surveillance, data privacy, and the digital divide. This is particularly relevant in Global South cities where internet access and digital literacy remain uneven (Cruz & Harindranath, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the necessity of flexible, safe, and health-promoting public spaces. Tactical urbanism—such as pop-up bike lanes in Mexico City or temporary open-air markets in Manila—demonstrated

that low-cost, rapid interventions can provide immediate benefits while informing longer-term planning (Honey-Rosés et al., 2020).

4.3. Recommendations (Global South Inclusion)

While global urban policy discourse often draws heavily on Global North examples, lessons from the Global South can inform more context-sensitive planning:

1) Leverage informality as a strength – Recognize that informal public spaces, such as street vending areas in Ho Chi Minh City or Nairobi's matatu stages, play essential economic and social roles (Bromley, 2000).
2) Prioritize community co-management – In Kerala, India, local government and residents jointly manage public open spaces, ensuring maintenance and cultural relevance (Prasad, 2019).
3) Ensure resilience in resource-limited contexts – Cities with constrained budgets can adapt open spaces using low-cost, participatory design methods, as seen in participatory park upgrades in Medellín, Colombia.

Integrating these approaches into broader policy frameworks can help ensure that public space governance advances equity, inclusivity, and resilience in diverse urban settings.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Conclusions

The contemporary urban landscape is undergoing rapid transformation, shaped by forces including globalization, digitalization, climate change, and growing socio-economic inequality. Within this evolving context, public space re-emerges not only as a physical or geographical construct but as a socio-political and cultural arena central to identity formation, community resilience, and urban equity (Lefebvre, 1991; Harvey, 2012).

By synthesizing 95 scholarly works published between 2000 and 2024, this review identifies five key thematic domains—inclusive design, civic identity and resistance, participatory governance, spatial inequality, and privatization/commodification—that together frame the transformation of public space in the 21st century. Importantly, the analysis underscores that socio-economic and technological changes have diversified the uses and meanings of public space rather than wholly restructuring its physical forms.

To ground these findings historically, it is important to acknowledge the pre-2000 legacy of urban public space scholarship and practice—from the modernist functional zoning of the mid-20th century (Jacobs, 1961; Whyte, 1980) to late-20th-century critiques emphasizing social production of space and participatory design (Carr et al., 1992). These earlier frameworks laid the foundation for current debates on multifunctionality, hybridization, and spatial justice.

From a policy perspective, city-level strategies can operationalize these insights:

Barcelona's Superblocks demonstrate how reconfiguring street networks can prioritize pedestrians, improve air quality, and foster social interaction (Mueller et al., 2020).

Medellín's Library Parks illustrate how investment in culturally relevant public infrastructure can advance both spatial equity and community engagement (Brand & Dávila, 2011).

Singapore's Active, Beautiful, Clean Waters Programme integrates ecological resilience into public waterfront design (PUB Singapore, 2018).

Embedding such interventions within local planning frameworks can ensure that public spaces are governed and designed to maximize inclusivity, resilience, and socio-economic vitality.

Limitations

While this review contributes to the interdisciplinary discourse on public space, several limitations should be acknowledged:

Scope and Language Constraints – The focus on English-language, peer-reviewed literature may exclude important regional studies, indigenous knowledge systems, or innovative practices documented in other languages or non-academic formats, potentially skewing the geographic and cultural representation.

Temporal Scope – The main dataset covers publications from 2000 to 2024, which captures recent shifts in urban design and governance but underrepresents earlier formative works unless explicitly integrated in the discussion.

Methodological Boundaries – The use of a narrative, integrative review—while allowing for thematic depth—introduces subjectivity in source selection and interpretation. Bias mitigation strategies were applied, but full reproducibility is constrained compared to formal systematic reviews.

Lack of Empirical Validation – Without primary fieldwork or empirical testing, the practical applicability of the conceptual framework may vary depending on local socio-political and economic contexts. Future studies could validate these insights through case-based comparative research across diverse urban settings.

Despite these limitations, the review offers a conceptual roadmap for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to advance spatial justice, inclusive design, and multifunctional integration in public space governance. As cities navigate challenges of growth, inequality, and ecological crisis, equitable and participatory public space planning remains a critical pathway toward more cohesive, adaptive, and just urban futures.

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Building Effective Management through Adaptive Change and Continuous Improvement

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In today's increasingly complex and dynamic environment, organizations must demonstrate agility, speed, precision, and a proactive capacity for change to ensure long-term success. The modern organizational model is no longer hierarchical but is instead characterized by networks of alliances and partnerships. Stakeholders now include a broader range of actors beyond shareholders, such as employees, suppliers, customers, local communities, and global partners. This evolving landscape necessitates a shift from reactive management to strategic, forward-looking approaches. **Methods:** This conceptual study explores the role of adaptive change and continuous improvement in building effective management frameworks. It emphasizes the strategic alignment of human resource practices with organizational culture, recruitment processes, and change management principles. Drawing upon literature and case observations, the analysis outlines key strategies for cultivating openness, transparency, mutual trust, and constructive competition within organizations. **Results:** Findings suggest that human resource managers must transition from traditional support roles to become strategic partners capable of anticipating future workforce needs. Effective hiring practices, continuous learning from both successes and failures, and the fostering of a learning organization are shown to significantly enhance performance. Change management emerges as a holistic process requiring careful coordination of goals, stakeholders, and internal capabilities to achieve sustainable transformation. **Conclusion:** To thrive amid complexity, organizations must embrace adaptive change and continuous improvement as integral components of management. Strategic human resource planning, combined with a culture of trust and learning, enables institutions to respond effectively to shifting demands. Coordinated and inclusive change management practices ensure that transformations are not only implemented smoothly but also deliver long-lasting value across all levels of the organization.

Keywords: Change management, Organizational change, Strategic management, Continuous improvement, Benchmarking

1. INTRODUCTION

The corporate world in the new economic environment is experiencing a paradigm shift in management thought where human resources have become the key asset of an organization and strategic human resource management is recognized as an important element to achieve competitive advantage.

Moreover, this era of fierce competition and ever-changing global markets has resulted in a shift in organizational design from command, control and compartmentalization to:

1) Smaller companies employing fewer people, with greater emphasis on teamwork.

2) Service orientation with a sharper focus on customers.
3) A network of specialists- a far cry from the bureaucratic way of functioning and integrated hierarchies.
4) Performance-linked pay rather than seniority-based pay.
5) A redefined work culture that focuses on constant learning and continuous improvement.

A major impediment to organizational efficiency is lack of proper communication and information flow. One reason for this is compartmentalization i.e., groups of employees working towards different goals with little knowledge of other functions or understanding of the overall goals of the organization. Werther (1996) explains human resource function can play a vital role in redefining the role of the middle management to reduce bureaucracy, building synergies across the organization and networking.

2. CHALLENGES BEFORE THE ORGANIZATION

With the increase in competition, locally or globally, organizations must become more adaptive, resilient, agile and customer-focused to succeed. Within the change in environment, Al-Haddad (2015) suggests the HR professional to evolve to become a strategic partner, an employee sponsor or advocate and a change mentor within the organization. In order to succeed, HR must be a business-driven function with a thorough understanding the organization's key decisions and policies.

The idea for the research rests on the idea that organization must be dynamic, flexible and resilient in order to be remain in competition in new-era environment. The process begins with the analyses of both internal and external influences by the managers in the organization for the desired state. This diagnosis sets the foundation for the change and aligning the organizational strategy. Effective management requires that leaders articulate the purpose of change in a way that inspires employees and builds commitments with clear defined, realistic and measurable sustainable goals.

Flexibility is essential, as leaders may need to recalibrate strategies in response to emerging challenges. To remain in business, human resource managers need to efficiently handle the following human resource challenges:

2.1 Handling diverse workforce

Dealing with people from different age, gender, and race, ethnicity, educational background, location, income, parental status, marital status, religious beliefs and work experience can be challenging task for HR managers. Managing people with different set of ideologies, views, lifestyle and psychology can be very risky. Effective communication, adaptability, agility and positive attitude of HR managers can bind the diverse workforce and retain talents in the organization.

2.2 Managing change

Bringing change in organizational process and procedures implementing it and then managing it is one of the biggest concerns of HR managers. Burnes (2011) explains business environment as very volatile. Upgrading technology and training employees lead to handle the change in the process.

2.3 Retaining talents

Globalization has given freedom to have endless lucrative opportunities to work, hiring and retaining the talent. Maintaining harmonious relations with them, providing excellent work environment and offering more remuneration and perks than competitors can retain and motivate them.

2.4 Conflict management

HR mangers should know how to handle employee-employer and employee-employee conflicts without hurting their feelings. They should be able to listen to each party, decide and communicate to them in a convincing manner in order to avoid future conflicts.

Once, the challenges are cleared the implementation of adaptive change should be gradual and systematic; focusing open dialogue, coaching and support. Alongside this, continuous improvement ensures the sustainable progress by adopting tools such as Lean management, Kaizen and Six Sigma for enhancing productivity. A culture of learning must be fostered as opportunities for growth. Adaptive changes emphasize adjustments rather than shifts, ensuring modifications with organizational goals and employee's capabilities. It complements by adopting systematic approaches such as Plan-do-check-act (PDCA) cycle, benchmarking and performance reviews to regularly monitoring outcomes, identifying gaps and implementing refinements. Moreover, training and development must be central, equipping employees and leaders with the skills to embrace innovation and goal oriented.

To establish goal oriented framework, there is need a structured approach to guide organizations through planned and efficient skills and communication. A transition approach of ADKAR (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement) offers systematic approach to manage and sustain long-term improvements creating urgency for change, engaging leadership support, building awareness among employees, and reinforcing new behaviour to embed changes into organizational

culture. First, awareness must be created to help people understand the change. Once it builds, implementing necessary desire focusing on motivating individual and building their willingness. They also need knowledge to establish new environment by applying new skills, overcome challenges by training, skills and acquiring information to transform ability. Finally, reinforcement ensures the change is sustained through recognition, feedback and continuous support. ADKAR ensures the changes embedded into the organizational culture making one of the effective modes for the long-term success.

Thus, HR managers must be proactive with all strategies and action plans in order to meet the changing needs of the organization.

3. NEED TO RESPOND TO THE CHANGE

An organization comprises a network relationship involving human and physical resources. There are several ways in which human resource management can strengthen these relationships to accomplish organizational goals.

Al-Haddad (2015) emphasis change management as a broad discipline that involves ensuring change is implemented smoothly and with lasting benefits, by considering its wider impact on the organization and people within it. Each change initiates to have its own set of objectives and activities, all of which must be coordinated.

With globalization and technological changes feeding each other, business paradigms have undergone a major shift. Information technology has resulted in flatter structures and less hierarchical control in organizations. This has to lead to reduction of supervisory levels with fewer middle managers; thus, the role of middle managers will need to be refined. They can no longer be only collectors and fillers of information but will have to add value to the organization. Burnes (2011) further concern to run system and create new ones if required, facilitate the efficient flow and utilization of information and work transnational.

Zehir (2012) explains middle managers and supervisors should be trained to become independent entrepreneurs. Moreover, to avoid stagnation, they should aim to get promoted to higher management levels through continuous learning. Middle managers need to come out of their traditional ways of following instructions from their supervisors.

Today, the Indian managers are more productive, creative and innovative and operate in a flexible time frame, which may require working longer than nine-to-five working hours. Zehir (2012) further enthused to focus on the diversity in work and the opportunity to meet people and markets worldwide. Thus, the Indian managers are more than happy and satisfied to push ten frontiers of his job responsibility.

Competition has placed several demands on Indian companies, especially in terms of revamping the organization to meet contemporary needs. To remain competitive, Werther (1996) suggests organization to achieve higher productivity levels with fewer resources. This may lead to the abolition of, any jobs to make way for new and different job profiles.

4. EFFECTS OF COMPETITION ON ORGANIZATION

A new management profile is where managers should take into cognizance the fact that organizational competitiveness is linked to human resources competence. Ruchi (2009) suggests business should be viewed holistically. The human resources managers should develop competence in dealing with employees as well as other organizational stakeholder-customers, investors, lowers, etc.

In the current Indian scenario, while public services are being privatised, private sector organizations are also in the process of re-examining their structures and job roles. Traditional hierarchies are making way for innovative structure to manage organizations.

In an organization, importance is given to hiring the right people for the right roles. Learning from the success or failure, the workers improve their individual efforts and collective resources. This strategy is to self-actualization at the workplace, where human beings perform best when they have the freedom and responsibility for doing their job.

5. TECHNIQUES OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The present business environment, require both private and public sector enterprises to continuously hone their skills, inculcate the best practice across divisions and functions, reengineer their business processes, and keep reinventing themselves through continuous learning and innovation. There are two important tools-benchmarking and business processes reengineering- used for bringing continuous improvement.

5.1 Benchmarking

In the era of constant environmental change, total quality management is the need of the hour for organization. While greater emphasis on the product quality is required to survive in any business in today's competitive environment, customer service has to be given equal importance. For this purpose, Gray (1993) proposed new management tools and techniques need to be developed. Benchmarking is one such structured management tool, and novels the simple act of comparison and learning for organizational improvement.

An organization can improve its own process and systems by carrying and learning from other leading organizations excelling in specific areas. Benchmarking has wide applicability for various functions and also serves as an important vehicle for implementing contemporary strategic human resource policies and practices.

It is worth noting that successful benchmarking begins with the mind and has to be approached with the attitude of a learner. It requires the humility to learn from someone else and the wisdom to implement match and perhaps better the best practices. This is especially relevant in the case of benchmarking; human element forms a major component.

An essential ingredient was found by Nambiar (2009) that for a successful benchmarking programme is to prioritise and focus on a few business practices or functions that will affect the critical success factors of an organization at given point of time. One can identify appropriate internal and external benchmarking and most importantly, absorb the relevant best practices to enhance organizational effectiveness.

5.1.1 The Benchmarking process

Benchmarking is not just a competitive analysis. Ruchi (2018) explains it as further more than simple examination of the pricing and features of competitors' products or services; it considers not only the output, but also the process by which the output is obtained. Benchmarking is much more than market research. Because it considers the business practices that enable the satisfaction of customer needs and thus helps the organization to realise superior business performance.

Benchmarking is a systematic and continuous process that enables organizations to identify world-class performance and measure themselves against that. The process of benchmarking is as follow:

5.1.2 Benchmarking Human Resources Policies and Practices

Human resources management offers wide latitude for the benchmarking process as it is amenable to internal, competitive, and functional and generic benchmarking. According to Gray (1993), an organization should benchmark to develop a holistic model for its human resource function, which is tuned to its corporate objectives and serves to enhance its competitive edge. The model should include appraisal of the human resources function in terms of its contribution, both direct and indirect, and also financial and non-financial, to overall profitability and effectiveness of the organization.

The relative weight age to be given to each area for benchmarking is best determined by an organization's objective pressures. An effective approach would be to identify and focus on an aspect that will have maximum impact on critical performance areas.

5.1.3 Active Steps for Effective Benchmarking

The goal before the human resource manager is to use benchmarking as an effective tool to bring about transformation in organization.

A manager should consider the benchmarking exercised as a "project" that must show results. To begin with, the manager should:

1) Understand why such a study is being conducted. Is it because of the influx of technologies or loss of customers/market share?
2) Nambiar (2009) suggests preparing a report that documents the processes or functions the exercise will address, the extent to which the exercise will improve those areas, and

Table 5.1.1. the benchmarking process.

Planning phase	Identifying who and what to benchmark
	Collecting data and information
Analysis phase	Determining the "gap" between the current status and the benchmark
	Forecasting levels of performance
Integration phase	Communicating findings and gaining acceptance from organization
	Establishing functional goals
Action phase	Preparing an action plan
	Implementing and monitoring
	Recalibrating benchmark
	Inculcating best practices and achieving the leadership position

Source: Adapted from OpenAlex, 2025.

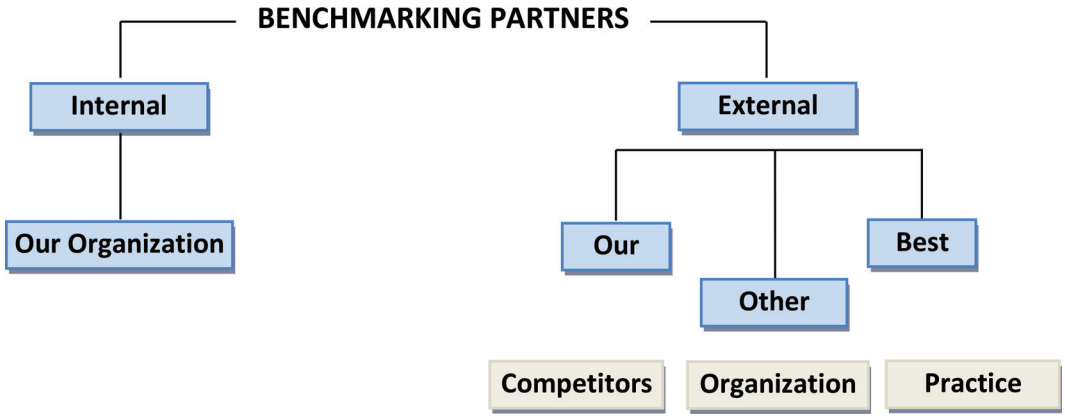


Figure 5.1.2. Benchmarking Partners

the likely result of these improvements on the organization, customers, employees and shareholders.

3) Identify the human resources related areas to be benchmarked and prepare a list of the sources of the excellent practices to be followed.
4) Evolve the scope of the study that includes project duration, resources and budget requirement and key players and their roles.
5) Review methodology or the research techniques to be used. These steps will enable the department to gather valuable competitive comparison data that will help the organization to take corrective measures wherever necessary.

5.2 Business Process Reengineering

The contemporary practice for enhancing organizational growth involves focus on internal and external factors, such as customer's needs, market trends, cost, quality, service and speed of deliver. Improvement in these requires constant redesigning and rethinking of existing business strategies and processes. This practice helps to create a dynamic and flexible organization.

Business Process Reengineering (BPR) is the ability of an organization to step back and rethink the way it does business. It further helps the organization to improve efficiency and effectiveness and achieve competitive advantage. A successful reengineering programme will move an organization from rigid compartmentalization to a more fluid environment. This will improve the formation and disbanding of teams comprising employees with different specialization, as and when required.

BPR often shifts the power base, changing the "command-and-control" approach to "mobilise and enable". Effective reengineering involves focus on all four business components: strategy, business processes, people and technology. Nambiar (2009) focuses business processes for undergoing a transformation from function-oriented company to a process-oriented structure where service delivery, customer's satisfaction and product development are the key components. Thus, it is important for the human resources function to reposition itself for high value-added service.

5.2.2 Action Steps for Reengineering

We have seen that business process reengineering can serve as a powerful tool for transformation of organization. The challenge before human resource manager is to successfully handle the reengineering exercise using the following measures:

1) Identify the key signals factors that's suggests the need for reengineering within an organization.
2) Carrying out a needs assessment kin the areas market needs, customer-satisfaction to provide maximum return on investment for reengineering efforts.
3) Setting performance targets to achieve corporate goals and provide the organization with competitive advantage.
4) Top management support is of paramount importance since reengineering has the power to change the destiny of a company and its internal and external stakeholders.
5) An effective plan should be prepared on the study of policies and practices of market tends, customer needs, internal strengths and weaknesses and competitors' benchmarking facilitate accurate decision-making.
6) Forming a steering team with senior managers, human resource professionals, line managers and consultants interlinked and assigned specific responsibilities.
7) A pilot test must run to confirm the effectiveness of the systems and new processes.

8) Monitoring the steer group to empower managers and employees by making the responsible for the completion of the exercise.
9) Creating a sense of urgency for implementing a compelling programme with top priority.
10) Managing reengineering with fears like anxieties, politics and power struggles within the organization for internal change towards new way of doing business.

6. CONCLUSION

The rapid advancement in IT is transforming the human resource function as routine transactional activities are being atomised, streamlined, reengineered and substituted by high-powered information system. Today's human resource professionals need to move towards effectively fulfilling the multiple roles strategic partners, administrative experts, employee champions. Continuous improvement serves as a powerful strategy for navigating change and enhancing overall management effectiveness.

The human resource function should be customer-focused rather than functionally driven and should be able to add value in quantifiable terms. Human resource professionals need to deliver higher quality services, create an effective competitive corporate culture and reduce the human resources related administrative costs. Effective leadership, organizational readiness and style of implementation are important inputs for its success.

Ultimately, the integration of continuous improvement into change management ensures a sustainable process. It equips organizations to respond confidently to new challenges, drive performance, and maintain effective management practices in a constantly changing world.

6.1 Recommendations of the Study

To thrive in today's dynamic business environment, organizations must adopt adaptive management practices grounded in continuous improvement. The organizations should embrace teams to view change as an opportunity. Leader should develop a growth mind-set across all levels. Effective management empowers team to adopt agile methodologies for flexibility and decision-making for continuous improvement goals. The team must set clear objectives, delegate authority and trust to make decisions aligned with autonomy and accountability. Moreover, leaders must be equipped to manage uncertainty with planned training in change management and system thinking to ensure they can inspire, support and lead through complexity.

However, change is constant, but adaptability is a choice. Building a management approach is both responsive and resilient ensures long-term effectiveness and sustainable success. Adaptive change is more successful when knowledge and innovation flow freely across an organization. Leaders must be the catalyst-creating environments where continuous improvement is not a project, but a way of operating.

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Banyan Resilience: The Civilizational Survival of Hinduism Across Five Invasions and 5,000 Years

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ABSTRACT

Hinduism, one of the world's oldest continuous traditions, has withstood the pressures of conquest, colonization, suppression, and modern scepticism for over five millennia. This paper explores the extraordinary resilience and adaptability of Hinduism as a civilizational force rather than a monolithic religion. Tracing the arc of history through five major phases of foreign intrusion—the Persian, Greek, Turko-Afghan, Colonial, and Post-colonial/Modern periods—this review reveals how Hinduism absorbed, resisted, and redefined itself in the face of existential threats. Despite the destruction of temples, silencing of Sanskrit, and marginalization of ritual practice, Hinduism regenerated itself through localized devotion, vernacular expression, philosophical engagement, and global outreach. Movements like Bhakti, the rise of reformist thinkers like Swami Vivekananda and Dayananda Saraswati, and the international embrace of yoga and the Gita underscore its adaptive genius. Far from being static, Hinduism's strength lies in its decentralized, pluralistic essence—rooted like a banyan tree that regrows with every attempt to sever it. This review synthesizes historical, philosophical, cultural, and socio-political dimensions to examine how Hinduism transformed challenges into catalysts for evolution, ultimately emerging as a global spiritual and civilizational presence.

Keywords: Adaptability, Bhakti Movement, Civilizational Continuity, Colonialism, Hinduism, Sanskrit, Spiritual Resilience, Syncretism

1. INTRODUCTION

Hinduism, often described as one of the world's oldest living religions, is more accurately understood as a civilizational matrix that encompasses philosophy, ritual, ethics, art, and daily practice. Rather than being centered on a single prophet, book, or ecclesiastical institution, Hinduism thrives through decentralization, diversity, and deep-rooted cultural expressions. Over the past 5,000 years, it has endured multiple waves of invasions and ideological suppression—from Persian conquerors

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and Hellenistic philosophers to Turko-Afghan sultanates, British colonizers, and modern secular critiques (The Indic Legacy, 2025). Despite attempts to marginalize or erase its traditions, Hinduism has continually regenerated itself, drawing on its pluralistic nature and embeddedness in the lives of its adherents.

This paper explores the resilience of Hinduism not merely as a religion, but as a civilization. Through historical analysis, philosophical reflection, and cultural observation, we examine how Hinduism has responded to five major historical intrusions—absorbing, transforming, and evolving rather than breaking. The metaphor of the **banyan tree**, with its spreading branches and regenerative aerial roots, symbolizes this civilizational tenacity.

By understanding Hinduism as a dynamic, living tradition, we gain insight into broader questions of religious survival, cultural memory, and the continuity of indigenous knowledge systems in the face of foreign domination and internal reform. This review synthesizes historical and contemporary sources to offer a state-of-the-art exploration of how Hinduism, despite profound external and internal challenges, continues to shape the spiritual and cultural consciousness of over a billion people globally.

Hinduism, unlike many organized religions, has evolved not from a single prophet or scripture, but from a tapestry of philosophies, cultural expressions, and living traditions. This very nature has allowed it to respond flexibly to foreign incursions, internal reform, and civilizational shifts.

2. HISTORICAL-CULTURAL-SOCIAL CONTEXT

Scholarly engagement with the endurance of Hinduism has spanned disciplines—from history and religious studies to anthropology and political theory. The literature reflects two predominant paradigms: the **religious continuity perspective**, which underscores the endurance of spiritual traditions, and the **civilizational resilience perspective**, which emphasizes Hinduism's broader cultural, linguistic, and philosophical survival amidst systemic disruption.

Classical Foundations

Early interpretations of Hinduism by Western scholars such as Max Müller (1891) framed it as a textual



Figure 1. Rooted in resilience—Hinduism grows anew through every challenge

Source: Authors, 2025.

Click Here, to watch this Video—A Video on Burned, Banned, But Never Broken: The 5,000-Year Journey of Hinduism's Resilient Soul

Credit: The Indic Legacy

To grasp the emotional and historical depth of this civilizational journey, the video (See Figure 1) offers a powerful narrative overview of Hinduism's survival across centuries of upheaval: Burned, Banned, But Never Broken: The 5,000-Year Journey of Hinduism's Resilient Soul. From the Achaemenids to the British, invaders tried to crush it. They destroyed temples, silenced priests, and mocked its wisdom. Yet Hinduism endured — not just as a religion, but as a living, breathing civilization. This is the untold story of how Dharma bent but never broke. Of sages and saints who sang in silence. Of mantras echoing across millennia. Discover how Hinduism survived five great invasions and still thrives in hearts, homes, and heritage across the globe. A legacy as deep-rooted as the banyan.

tradition rooted in the Vedas, often overlooking its lived, pluralistic character. Müller's philological approach focused on Sanskrit scripture, thereby contributing to a reductive understanding that excluded vernacular and ritual dimensions. However, Indian scholars like Swami Vivekananda (1893/2006) and Dayananda Saraswati (1875/2005) challenged such narrow readings, emphasizing the relevance of Vedantic philosophy and the potential of Hinduism as a modern, universal force.

Colonial Reappraisal

During the British colonial period, Hinduism was often portrayed as irrational or stagnant, particularly by Christian missionaries and Orientalist administrators (Inden, 1990). In response, the **Hindu reform movements**—such as the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Ramakrishna Mission—sought to reconcile tradition with modernity. Scholars like Romila Thapar (2002) argue that these reformulations were not merely defensive but strategic, allowing Hinduism to assert cultural autonomy while engaging with Western rationality.

Postcolonial and Contemporary Discourse

Post-independence scholarship, notably by Partha Chatterjee (1993) and Ashis Nandy (1983), emphasized the resilience of Hinduism as a form of cultural resistance to both colonial rule and global modernity. More recently, authors like Diana Eck (2012) and Anantanand Rambachan (2015) have advocated for understanding Hinduism as a dynamic, dialogical tradition—marked not by rigidity but by interpretive fluidity and regional expression.

Recent cultural-historical readings also call for introspection within Hinduism. Brij Mohan (2025), drawing on Harsh Mahaan Cairae's interpretive study of Vedic literature and Indo-Aryan culture, contends that Hinduism's spiritual core has often been compromised by its own gatekeepers, much like in other religious traditions. He observes, "chanting mantras of mayhem in mindless ritualistic settings amounts to obfuscation of wisdom" (Mohan, 2025, p. 2), suggesting that Hinduism's continuity must also be guarded against ritual excess and historical amnesia. This view offers a self-critical complement to the resilience narrative.

Resilience Through Movement and Memory

The role of the **Bhakti movement** in preserving Hindu spirituality under Turko-Afghan rule has received considerable attention. Scholars such as John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (2006) argue that Bhakti poets localized devotion and democratized spirituality, thus bypassing elite control and formal institutions. Similarly, the global dissemination of **yoga and Vedanta**, as analyzed by Elizabeth De Michelis (2005), illustrates how Hindu thought adapted to and even influenced Western paradigms of wellness and ethics.

Civilizational vs. Religious Identity

While some political theorists argue for a homogenized "Hindu identity" as a reaction to historical trauma (e.g., Savarkar, 1923/2005), others warn against conflating religion with nationalism (Doniger, 2009; Jaffrelot, 2007). This tension reflects the duality of Hinduism—as both an inclusive, adaptive tradition and, at times, an exclusionary political instrument.

This literature context reveals that Hinduism's survival cannot be attributed to mere orthodoxy or resistance. Instead, its genius lies in its **porous boundaries**, **philosophical elasticity**, and **cultural embeddedness**. From Sanskrit to street bhajans, from the Upanishads to Instagram yoga influencers, Hinduism demonstrates what sociologist Ninian Smart termed "dimensional pluralism"—an ability to live through diverse expressions, not in spite of them.

3. METHODOLOGY

This review employs a **historically grounded and thematically comparative approach** to trace the resilience of Hinduism across five major periods of external challenge: the Persian conquest, the Hellenistic encounter, the Turko-Afghan invasions, British colonialism, and postcolonial-modern secularism. The methodology combines **qualitative content analysis** of primary texts, historical records, and secondary scholarship across disciplines to reveal the patterns of continuity, adaptation, and transformation within the Hindu civilizational matrix.

3.1 Selection of Sources

Sources were selected based on three criteria:

1. **Relevance** to the theme of religious or civilizational resilience;
2. **Chronological representation** across the five historical phases;
3. **Diversity of perspectives**, including Indian and Western scholarship, reformist and traditional voices, and both academic and popular expressions.

Primary sources include translations of the **Vedas**, **Upanishads**, **Bhagavad Gita**, **Bhakti poetry**, and speeches by figures such as Swami Vivekananda. Secondary sources span works by historians (Romila Thapar, John Keay), religious scholars (Diana Eck, Anantanand Rambachan), sociologists (Ashis Nandy, Partha Chatterjee), and political theorists (Christophe Jaffrelot, Rajeev Bhargava).

3.2 Analytical Framework

The paper is structured through a **civilizational lens**, using four analytical dimensions to assess Hinduism's resilience:

- **Philosophical Adaptability**: Shifts in metaphysical focus, reinterpretation of dharma, and integration of non-dualist (Advaita) and devotional (Bhakti) paradigms.
- **Cultural Diffusion and Localization**: Transition from Sanskrit to vernacular languages, and the spread of rituals, festivals, and oral traditions.
- **Institutional Response**: The decline, transformation, or survival of institutions such as Gurukuls, temples, and reform movements.
- **Global Influence and Recontextualization**: The postmodern reception of yoga, Vedanta, and Gita teachings in global spiritual and corporate contexts.

Each invasion period is analyzed as a **case study** in civilizational resilience, drawing parallels and distinctions in how Hinduism absorbed external influences, reconstituted its core, and reemerged with renewed vigor.

3.3 Limitations

While this review strives for breadth and balance, it acknowledges certain limitations:

Regional variations (e.g., Tamil, Assamese, Kashmiri Hindu traditions) are not deeply disaggregated.

The tension between spiritual tradition and political mobilization is discussed only as a secondary theme.

Source material is largely textual and interpretive; archaeological and ethnographic data are beyond the scope of this review.

This methodological framework aims to offer not just a chronological account but a **patterned analysis** of Hinduism's regenerative capacity—rooted in diversity, decentralized expression, and spiritual pragmatism.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The resilience of Hinduism across 5,000 years of history is not accidental—it is deeply embedded in its decentralized structure, adaptive core philosophies, and civilizational breadth. Through an examination of five major periods of historical disruption, this section analyzes how Hinduism not only withstood external pressures but often emerged spiritually and culturally strengthened.

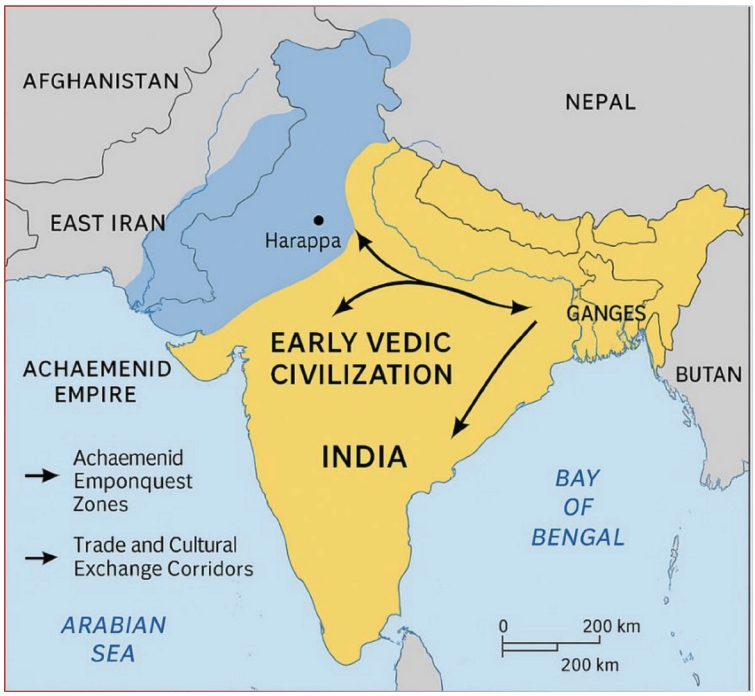


Figure 2. Map of Early Vedic India and Achaemenid Conquest Zones: A map showing Vedic regions (yellow), Achaemenid reach (blue), and trade/cultural exchange corridors

Source: Authors, 2025.

Territorial overlap between early Vedic civilization and the Achaemenid Empire in the 6th century BCE, illustrating the geopolitical context of the first foreign intrusion into Hindu cultural zones. Despite Persian administration in the northwest, core Vedic practices endured inland.

Note: *Present-day Pakistan is a colonial-era creation and does not reflect the cultural or civilizational continuity of the Vedic landscape it once comprised.*

4.1 The Persian Encounter (6th Century BCE): Continuity Through Absorption

The Achaemenid conquest of north-western India introduced new administrative and linguistic frameworks but failed to dislodge Hindu religious life. The **Vedic yajnas** continued, Sanskrit flourished under local patronage, and dharma remained the organizing principle of social life. As Thapar (2002) notes, Hinduism's strength lay in its **plural and localized expression**, which allowed it to coexist and subtly integrate with Persian cultural elements without losing identity.

The Indo-Aryan legacy, which includes both Vedic and Zoroastrian traditions, reveals a shared cultural matrix that was later polarized through mythic narratives of gods and demons. As Cairae shows, the gods of one tradition were often the demons of the other, and both stemmed from a common ancestral faith (Mohan, 2025). This convergence complicates simplistic notions of civilizational confrontation and highlights Hinduism's ancient interweaving with other spiritual lineages.

4.2 The Greek Interlude (4th Century BCE): Encounter as Dialogue

Alexander the Great's incursion brought the Greeks into philosophical contact with Indian sages, most famously the **Gymnosophists**. Instead of iconoclasm or suppression, this period witnessed **intellectual exchange**. The Greek admiration for Indian metaphysics—especially concepts found in the Upanishads—demonstrates a mutual respect (McEvilley, 2002). Indian thought not only survived the Hellenistic encounter—it subtly influenced Stoicism and Neoplatonism.

A symbolic depiction of philosophical encounter between Indian sages and Greek thinkers following Alexander's campaign (circa 327 BCE). Rather than violent suppression, this interaction featured metaphysical inquiry and cultural curiosity, leading to mutual influence.

This era illustrates Hinduism's civilizational strategy: **philosophical openness as resilience**. The capacity to debate and transcend external categories rendered it less vulnerable to conquest by ideology.

4.3 The Mughal Period (8th–18th Century): From Suppression to Vernacular Devotion

This period posed perhaps the most severe civilizational challenge to Hinduism. From Mahmud of Ghazni to Aurangzeb, many temples were desecrated under Turko-Afghan and Mughal regimes, Sanskrit was marginalized, and priestly institutions were dismantled (Eaton, 2000). Yet, this period also gave rise to the **Bhakti movement**, a spiritual revolution that democratized devotion and emphasized personal experience of the divine.

Figures such as **Kabir**, **Mirabai**, **Tulsidas**, and **Chaitanya Mahaprabhu** localized dharma in regional



Figure 3. Dialogical Exchange: Indian Gymnosophists and Greek Philosophers: Artistic or infographic representation of a dialogical circle with Indo-Greek figures and shared themes (e.g., soul, nature, asceticism)

Source: Authors, 2025.

Territorial overlap between early Vedic civilization and the Achaemenid Empire in the 6th century BCE, illustrating the geopolitical context of the first foreign intrusion into Hindu cultural zones. Despite Persian administration in the northwest, core Vedic practices endured inland.

***Note**: Present-day Pakistan is a colonial-era creation and does not reflect the cultural or civilizational continuity of the Vedic landscape it once comprised.*

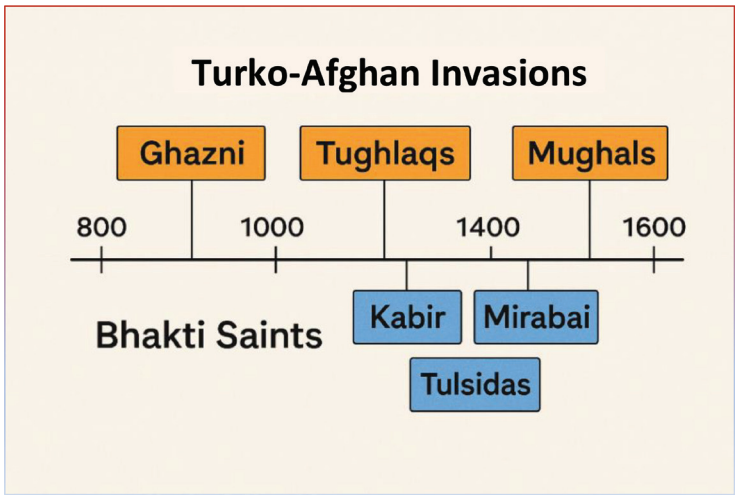


Figure 4a. Timeline: Turko-Afghan and Mughal Conquests and the Rise of Bhakti Saints (800–1800 CE): Dual-track horizontal timeline with rulers on top and saints/poets on the bottom

Source: Authors, 2025.

A chronological timeline juxtaposing key Turko-Afghan rulers and invasions (Ghazni, Tughlaqs, Mughals) with major Bhakti saints (Kabir, Tulsidas, Mirabai). This visual illustrates the cultural counter current of vernacular devotion in response to political and religious suppression.



Figure 4b. Bhakti Poets Kabir and Mirabai**:** Visual depiction of key figures from the Bhakti movement, which emerged as a grassroots devotional response to political and cultural upheaval during Turko-Afghan and Mughal periods rule. Kabir's egalitarian verses and Mirabai's Krishna devotion reflected Hinduism's inward turn toward personal, non-institutionalized spirituality

Source: Authors, 2025.

Visual depiction of key figures from the Bhakti movement, which emerged as a grassroots devotional response to religious turmoil and cultural upheaval during Afghan and Mughal rule. Kabir's egalitarian verses and Mirabai's Krishna devotion reflected Hinduism's inward turn toward personal, non-institutionalized spirituality.

tongues, bypassing Sanskrit orthodoxy. This vernacular spirituality was not a dilution but a **decentralized revival**—spiritual decentralization as survival.

4.4 British Colonial Rule (18th–20th Century): Reform, Revival, and Intellectual Resistance

British colonialism introduced a new form of erasure—not through iconoclasm, but through **epistemic violence**. Hinduism was labeled as irrational and backward by missionary educators and Orientalist scholars (Inden, 1990). Sanskrit education was replaced by English curricula, and traditional practices were mocked.

In response, Hindu thinkers initiated a powerful **intellectual and spiritual counter-movement**. Swami Vivekananda's Chicago address in 1893 reframed Hinduism as a global, tolerant, and philosophically profound tradition (Vivekananda, 2006). Dayananda Saraswati's Arya Samaj returned to the Vedas to reclaim original Hindu thought as rational and scientific.

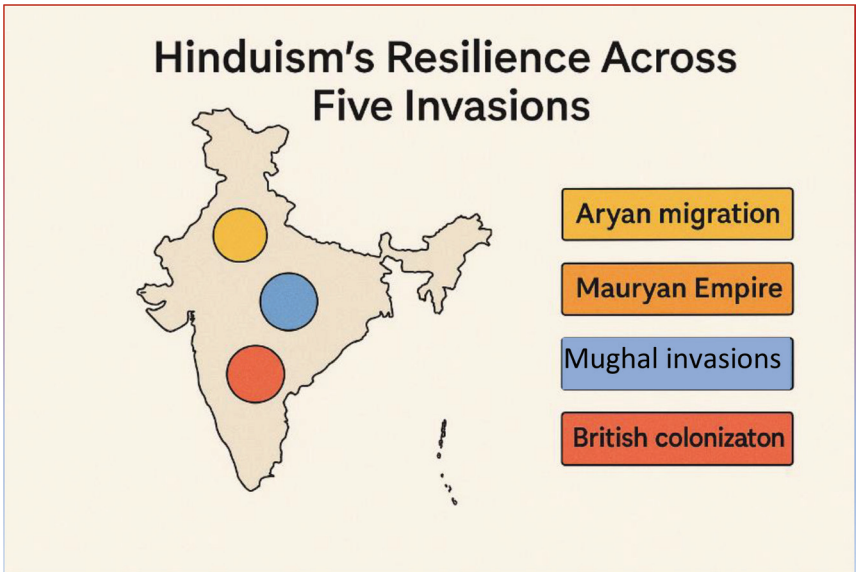


Figure 5. Colonial Erasure and Hindu Reformist Responses (1800–1947): Flowchart or matrix showing "Colonial Challenge" on one side and "Hindu Response" on the other, connected by themes (e.g., Education, Identity, Spirituality)

Source: Authors, 2025.

An overview of the British colonial project's intellectual critiques of Hinduism—through missionary schools, administrative reforms, and Orientalist narratives—and the corresponding Hindu reformist awakening by figures like Swami Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, and Sri Aurobindo.

These reformers did not merely preserve tradition—they **reformulated Hinduism** as a universal ethos compatible with modernity.

4.5 Postcolonial and Modern Challenges: Reassertion in a Secular Age

After Indian independence, Hinduism faced a more subtle yet pervasive challenge: **modern marginalization**. Elites dismissed Sanskrit as archaic, temples were labeled superstitious, and secularism was often interpreted as the absence of religion. Yet Hinduism adapted again—this time through **global cultural dissemination**.

Yoga became a global wellness practice.

The **Bhagavad Gita** found new relevance in leadership and psychology.

Festivals like **Diwali** became internationally recognized.

Meanwhile, internal spiritual movements like **Art of Living**, **Isha Foundation**, and **Ramana Ashram** drew global seekers into contemporary expressions of ancient wisdom. Despite attempts to privatize or politicize religion, Hinduism continued its civilizational arc—proving once more that it bends but never breaks.

4.5.1 The Global Revival of Sanātana Dharma: Srila Prabhupada and the ISKCON Movement

The late twentieth century marked a renewed global recognition of *Sanātana Dharma*—the eternal spiritual foundation of Hindu civilization—through the work of **A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada (1896–1977)**. Born in Kolkata, India, and spiritually nurtured in the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, Srila Prabhupada received the instruction from his guru, **Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswami**, to bring the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* to the West. In 1965, at the age of seventy, he embarked from Kolkata aboard the steamship *Jaladuta* with only thirty-eight rupees and a trunk of his books, determined to share the message of *Sanātana Dharma* with a world beset by materialism and moral disillusionment.

Against formidable odds, he arrived in Boston and soon after established the **International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)** in New York City in 1966. His mission coincided with a period of cultural turbulence in the West, characterized by widespread experimentation with drugs, existential questioning, and a search for deeper meaning beyond material success. Srila Prabhupada's message of devotion (*bhakti*), ethical living, and spiritual discipline resonated deeply with this generation, offering a holistic alternative grounded in timeless values of compassion, self-control, and inner joy.

Over the next twelve years, Srila Prabhupada **circumnavigated the globe fourteen times**, authored and translated more than fifty-five books—including complete English renderings of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*—and established **108 temples and communities worldwide**. His personal correspondence, exceeding ten thousand letters, guided disciples in diverse

nations and social contexts. Through the practice of *bhakti yoga*, vegetarianism, and the chanting of the **Hare Krishna mantra**, ISKCON revitalized the universal aspects of Hindu spirituality, emphasizing that divine realization transcends geography, race, or nationality.

Srila Prabhupada's contribution extends beyond religious revivalism to represent a **civilizational reawakening of Hindu thought in the modern world**. His movement institutionalized *Sanātana Dharma* as a living philosophy through humanitarian initiatives such as "Food for Life," cultural education programs, and the establishment of Vedic research and publishing centers. Today, the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*—long revered as a spiritual scripture—is increasingly recognized by scholars as a text of profound philosophical, ethical, and even ecological insight. Universities and academic institutions across continents have introduced it as a **source of civilizational and literary study**, further bridging the dialogue between faith and scholarship.

In this sense, the ISKCON movement exemplifies Hinduism's **capacity for civilizational adaptation and global diffusion**. By integrating scriptural wisdom with contemporary life, Srila Prabhupada reintroduced the values of *Sanātana Dharma* into modern consciousness—transforming individual lives and community ethics alike. The continuing growth of ISKCON's educational and devotional networks across metropolitan cities worldwide affirms Hinduism's **banyan-like vitality**—ever-rooted, ever-expanding, and eternally regenerative.

(For further reference, see ISKCON Communications, 2025; Bhaktivedanta Archives, 2024; www.iskcon.org*)*

4.6 Patterns of Resilience

Across all five periods, three recurring themes emerge:

Decentralization of Authority: No central institution meant no single point of failure.

Localization of Practice: Devotion moved to the vernacular, making it unkillable.

Philosophical Elasticity: From monism to dualism, from ritual to renunciation—Hinduism adapts to its historical moment.

These features made Hinduism more than a religion—it became a **civilizational grammar** capable of expressing itself anew in each generation.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FORECAST

Hinduism's story is not merely one of survival—it is one of **civilizational renewal**, generation after generation. Across five historical disruptions—from ancient Persian incursions to the Mughal era, British colonialism, and the complexities of modern secularism—Hinduism has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for **adaptation without erasure**, and **transformation without**

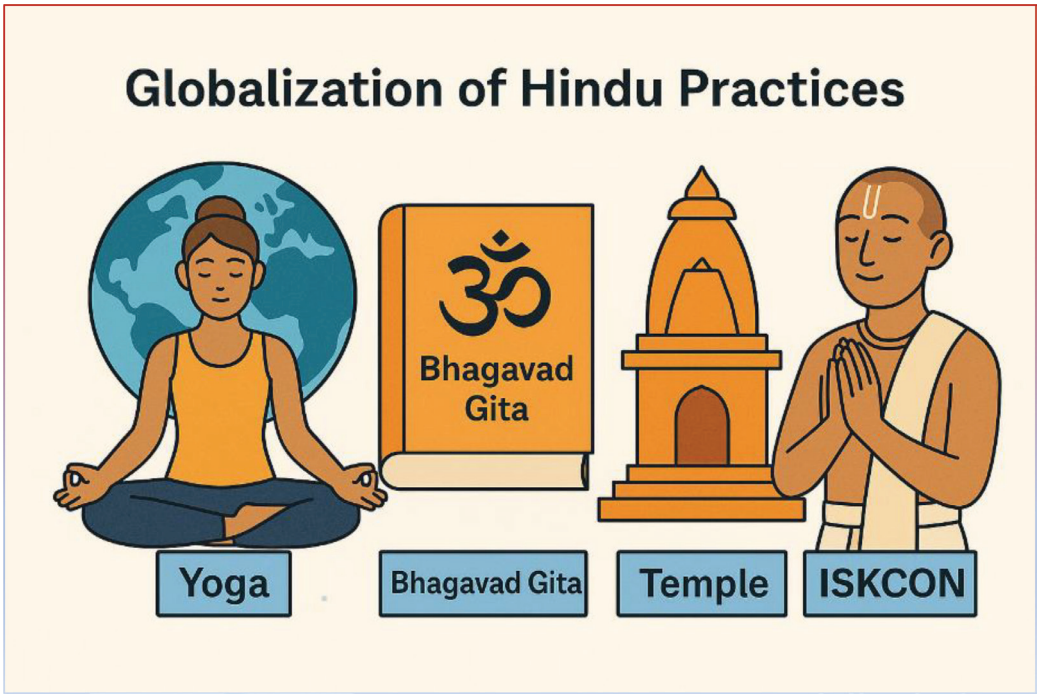


Figure 6. Globalization of Hindu Practices in the 21st Century: Global Spread of Hindu Traditions: From Sacred Texts to Global Yoga Studios and Temples

Source: Authors, 2025.

Contemporary global uptake of Hindu-derived practices—such as yoga, Diwali celebrations, and Bhagavad Gita-based leadership seminars—demonstrates the religion's ongoing civilizational relevance and adaptability beyond India's borders.

fragmentation. This resilience is rooted not in centralized dogma or rigid orthodoxy but in its decentralized, pluralistic, and embedded character. Like the banyan tree from which this study draws its metaphor, Hinduism has responded to attacks not with brittle resistance, but by growing new roots—philosophical, cultural, and devotional.

Key to this resilience is Hinduism's **philosophical elasticity**, **vernacular diffusion**, and **grassroots spirituality**. Its ability to transition from Sanskrit to local languages, from elite ritualism to popular devotion, and from regional to global platforms has ensured that no single mode of suppression could eliminate it entirely. The transitions from yajna to bhakti, from oral transmission to global publishing, from temple to WhatsApp—each reflects a civilizational rhythm attuned to both continuity and change.

Yet, Hinduism's future also presents profound questions. The **risk of politicization**, the **tension between tradition and modernity**, and the **commodification of spiritual practices** like yoga and meditation call for thoughtful reflection. As Hindu identity becomes increasingly entangled with nationalist movements in South Asia and the diaspora, there is a danger of losing the very pluralism and philosophical openness that sustained it for millennia (Doniger, 2009; Jaffrelot, 2007).

Looking forward, scholarship must focus on three interrelated domains:

1. **Re-engaging with Regional Traditions**: Beyond Sanskritic and Brahminical narratives, the oral, tribal, and folk forms of Hinduism need renewed attention to appreciate its full civilizational depth.
2. **Hinduism in the Global South and Diaspora**: Comparative studies across Mauritius, Bali, Trinidad, and the U.S. can reveal how Hinduism is evolving in plural societies under modern conditions.
3. **Digital Dharma**: The growing presence of Hindu thought in podcasts, online discourse, and AI-generated spiritual content presents a new frontier in its civilizational journey. Will this digitalization enrich or dilute its essence?

In closing, Hinduism's extraordinary endurance is not a relic of the past—it is a living example of how tradition, when rooted in wisdom and shaped by culture, can thrive even in the face of conquest, ridicule, and reinvention. As global civilizations wrestle with questions of identity, resilience, and coexistence, Hinduism offers a profound case study in **bending without breaking, and evolving without forgetting**.

Hinduism's civilizational story is also a cautionary one. Brij Mohan (2025) warns that resilience without reflection can lead to stagnation or moral dilution. Referencing Cairae's critique of Indo-Aryan history, he argues that Hindus themselves have sometimes undermined their own spiritual ideals through rigid orthodoxy or exclusionary practices. As modern Hinduism engages the world, its challenge will not only be to resist external distortion, but also to prevent internal decay—a lesson applicable to all world religions seeking ethical continuity in pluralistic societies.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not employ any of the Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies for Language refinement, drafting background section and did not perform any Task of the technology.

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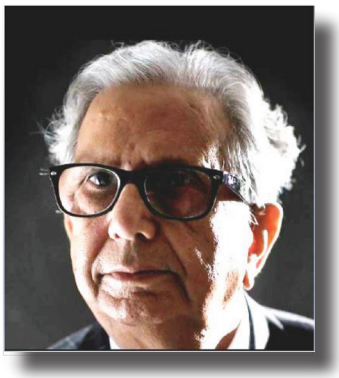
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REVIEW ARTICLE
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Resolving Sectarian Rifts in Early Jainism: Prakrit Poetics and the Politics of Reconciliation (10th–12th CE)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how medieval Jain *ācāryas* employed specific Prakrit linguistic strategies to facilitate sectarian reconciliation during the intensified *Śvetāmbara-Digambara* conflicts of the 10th-12th centuries CE. Using systematic textual analysis and semantic field mapping, this research analyses commentaries on principal *Āgama* texts by Haribhadra Sūri, *Abhayadeva Sūri*, and *Śīlāṅka Sūri*. Three primary reconciliation strategies were identified: semantic neutralization through universal terminology, paradoxical formulation that validates diversity within unity, and hierarchical reframing using the *vyavahāra-niścaya* framework. Key reconciliation formulas such as *"Savve jīvā piyāyarā"* (all souls are beloved) and *"Nānā-maggehi eko maggo"* (through various paths, one path) demonstrate sophisticated peace-building discourse that transcends sectarian divisions by emphasizing shared soteriological foundations. The findings reveal that Prakrit functioned as a neutral linguistic medium, enabling commentators to address doctrinal disagreements while maintaining theological integrity. This research contributes to both Jain scholarship and contemporary peace linguistics by demonstrating how sacred languages can serve as effective tools for religious conflict resolution, offering insights relevant to modern interfaith dialogue and conflict mediation practices.

Keywords: Prakrit linguistics, Jain sectarianism, Religious conflict resolution, Medieval Indian commentaries, Peace-building discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary peace-building initiatives increasingly recognize language as a powerful mediator in religious conflicts (Appleby, 2003). This phenomenon is particularly evident in medieval Jainism, where sectarian tensions between *Śvetāmbara* and *Digambara* communities reached critical intensity during the 10th-12th centuries CE. These conflicts coincided with broader socio-political transformations across the Indian subcontinent (Mohanan et al., 2024). Differing interpretations of monastic practices and scriptural authority created deep divisions that threatened Jainism's soteriological unity (Dundas, 2003). While academic scholarship has extensively documented doctrinal differences and institutional conflicts, the role of linguistic mediation in managing these disputes remains largely unexplored.

Prakrit occupied a unique position as the sacred language of Jain scriptures, distinct from Sanskrit's Brahmanical associations. Unlike Sanskrit, which was restricted to scholarly elites and carried sectarian connotations, Prakrit's accessibility and neutrality made it ideally suited for reconciliation dialogue (Cort, 2001). Its

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egalitarian nature transcended social hierarchies, while its status as the language of *Mahāvīra's* teachings provided unquestioned religious authority. This linguistic neutrality enabled commentators to address sectarian disputes without appearing to favour either tradition, creating a discursive space for meaningful dialogue.

This study addresses a critical research gap by examining how specific linguistic strategies embedded within Prakrit commentaries facilitated sectarian reconciliation during periods of heightened conflict. Unlike previous scholarship by Dundas (2003), Cort (2001), and Flügel (2006), which primarily focused on doctrinal differences and institutional dynamics, this investigation reveals how Jain commentators developed sophisticated linguistic tools for peace-building. The research systematically analyses reconciliation verses and their contextual deployment, contributing to both Jain studies and emerging peace linguistics scholarship by demonstrating how sacred languages can function as instruments of conflict transformation.

The findings illuminate medieval precedents for contemporary interfaith mediation, revealing how carefully crafted linguistic strategies can preserve doctrinal integrity while fostering unity across sectarian divides. This study's novelty lies in its systematic identification of Prakrit reconciliation formulas and their rhetorical mechanisms, offering insights relevant to modern conflict resolution methodologies and interfaith dialogue practices.

2. LITERATURE CONTEXT

2.1 Sectarian Schism

The schism between *Śvetāmbara* and *Digambara* Jains emerged from fundamental disagreements on monastic practices and scriptural interpretation, with historical evidence suggesting crystallisation during the early centuries of the Common Era (Jaini, 1998). The *Śvetāmbara* tradition, signifying "white-clad," sanctioned monks to don simple white garments, while *Digambaras*, known as "sky-clad," maintained complete nakedness as indispensable for spiritual liberation. This ostensibly trivial distinction reflected deeper theological schisms concerning liberation's appearance, women's spiritual capacity, and authoritative texts' authenticity (Jain & Mohanan, 2020). During the 10th-12th centuries, these conflicts escalated to unprecedented levels as regional kingdoms emerged and selectively favoured different Jain sects (Dundas, 2003). Sectarian considerations increasingly influenced political appointments, with Gujarat's trading communities predominantly supporting *Śvetāmbara* establishments while rulers like the Western Chalukyas patronised *Digambara* institutions. These patronage patterns generated competitive dynamics, transforming doctrinal differences into socio-political contests that threatened Jain unity.

2.2 Language Hierarchies

The medieval Jain linguistic landscape was characterised by complex hierarchical negotiations between sacred and scholarly traditions. Prakrit functioned as the language of canonical scriptures (de Jong, 1972), while Sanskrit dominated royal patronage and scholarly discourse. *Ardhamāgadhī* maintained its primacy in liturgical contexts, traditionally associated with *Mahāvīra's* teachings, whilst *Śaurasenī* and *Māhārāṣṭrī* variants appeared in regional commentaries and narrative literature. Commentators flourished during this period as they navigated crucial linguistic tensions—upholding Prakrit's sacred authenticity while engaging with Sanskrit's intellectual sophistication (Jain, 2019). This tension created opportunities for innovative linguistic strategies that could bridge Prakrit's accessibility with Sanskrit's exclusivity, potentially spanning ruptures between sectarian factions (Bronkhorst, 2011). Prakrit's egalitarian nature made it accessible beyond scholarly circles, positioning it uniquely for rapprochement dialogue.

2.3 Prior Studies on Reconciliation

Contemporary scholarship on religious conflict resolution has increasingly recognised language as a mediating force in interfaith dialogue. Recent studies demonstrate how linguistic strategies can transform adversarial discourse into collaborative frameworks (Widiastuti et al., 2025). Bar-Tal (2013) emphasises the role of semantic reframing in reducing intergroup tensions, while Fox (2019) documents how religious communities employ linguistic neutralisation to maintain unity amid doctrinal diversity.

Modern peace linguistics research reveals that sacred languages possess unique mediating properties due to their emotional resonance and shared cultural significance (Shah, 2024). Studies of contemporary interfaith dialogue demonstrate how strategic vocabulary selection can reduce defensive positioning while maintaining doctrinal integrity. These findings provide theoretical frameworks for understanding medieval reconciliation strategies, suggesting that linguistic mediation represents a consistent pattern across religious traditions and historical periods. Cort (2001), Flügel (2006), and Dundas (2003) have provided detailed analyses of Jain sectarian dynamics, documenting ideological differences and institutional developments comprehensively. However, this abundant scholarly heritage reveals significant gaps concerning linguistic negotiation strategies employed during periods of heightened conflict. While scholars have

precisely delineated doctrinal disagreements and political alliances, systematic analysis of reconciliation vocabulary remains lacking in scholarly literature. This lacuna mirrors broader trends in medieval Indian religious studies, where scholars chronicle discord without adequate consideration of peace-building instruments.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs systematic textual analysis and semantic field mapping to examine reconciliation strategies in medieval Jain commentaries. The methodology comprises four key components:

3.1 Source Selection Criteria

Primary sources were selected based on three parameters:

- **Temporal relevance**: Commentaries on foundational *Āgama* texts *(Ācārāṅga, Sūtrakṛtāṅga, Uttarādhyayana Sūtra)* composed during 10th–12th centuries CE
- **Sectarian documentation**: Texts explicitly addressing sectarian tensions during composition period
- **Manuscript availability**: Palaeographically verified manuscripts with reliable provenance (Kapadia, 2003)

3.2 Corpus Composition and Sectarian Bias Acknowledgment

The study focuses primarily on *Śvetāmbara* commentarial traditions, including works by *Haribhadra Sūri, Abhayadeva Sūri*, and *Śīlāṅka Sūri*. **Methodological limitation**: This predominance of Śvetāmbara sources reflects manuscript preservation patterns and accessibility constraints rather than deliberate selection bias. Limited access to Digambara commentarial traditions, particularly those preserved in South Indian manuscript collections, may influence findings toward Śvetāmbara perspectives on reconciliation strategies. Where available, Digambara responses are incorporated to ensure balanced sectarian representation.

3.3 Linguistic Analysis Framework

Manual coding process was employed for systematic identification and analysis of reconciliation terminology through:

- **Lexical mapping**: Systematic identification of peace-building vocabulary across commentaries
- **Semantic field analysis**: Operationalization of conceptual networks within reconciliation discourse through thematic clustering of related terms (e.g., unity, diversity, compassion)
- **Syntactic pattern analysis**: Examination of grammatical structures characterizing conflict resolution discourse
- **Code-switching analysis**: Investigation of Prakrit-Sanskrit transitions in doctrinally sensitive passages, indicating intended audience and rhetorical strategies (Bronkhorst, 2011)

3.4 Contextual Validation

Each linguistic finding underwent contextual scrutiny through:

- Cross-referencing with contemporary inscriptional materials
- Comparison with broader medieval Indian peace-building discourse patterns
- Analysis of target demographics and sectarian orientation (Jain & Mohanan, 2024)

3.5 Methodological Constraints

Several limitations affect this study:

- **Manuscript preservation**: Conservation issues create potential gaps in textual documentation
- **Dating ambiguities**: Chronological analysis complicated by uncertain dating of specific commentaries
- **Scribal interpolations**: Medieval manuscript traditions contain later additions requiring careful textual analysis
- **Limited Digambara access**: Restricted entry to South Indian Digambara commentarial collections prevents comprehensive sectarian comparison

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The systematic analysis of Prakrit reconciliation verses presents within it three chief linguistic strategies that are utilised by medieval Jain commentators in order to ease sectarian harmony. *Haribhadra's* fundamental tenet "*Savve jīvā piyāyarā, savve jīvā suhaṃkāmā*" depicts nearly the "shared foundation" approach. This realises the concept via planned application of the universal quantifier "*savve*" (all) to emphasise shared traits beyond sectarian divides. Because it does avoid complex wording this verse uses easy Prakrit terms. This lexicon connects to specific theological positions, thereby creating semantic neutrality that allows shared acceptance. Abstract theological concepts are not alluded to, only fundamental human experiences such as "*Piyāyarā*" (beloved/dear) and "*suhaṃkāmā's*" (pleasure-seeking) emotional reverberation. *Haribhadra's* discourse expressly supports this universality for it elucidates that "*Na ya Svetāmbarāṇaṃ, na ya Digambarāṇaṃ, savvesāṃ jīvāṇaṃ*" (Neither of *Śvetāmbaras* alone, nor of *Digambaras* alone, but of all souls), and he deliberately exerts effort for diverting focus from factious sectarian identities to communal soteriological aspirations (Hemacandra, 2002). "*Nānā-maggehi eko maggo*"

(Through various paths, one path) constitutes *Śīlāṅka›s* revolutionary concept, and this represents advanced paradoxical architecture. Paramount concord is affirmed also heterogeneity is corroborated. "Nānā" (various/ different) with "*eko*" (one) are positioned in an adjacent way, which engenders semantic tension that is resolved after people's comprehension of hierarchy, as people acknowledge surface-level differences even though they maintain deeper doctrinal coherence. This formulation validates disputed practices, as in monastic clothing diverging and rituals differing, as legitimate approaches directed toward identical spiritual objectives, effectively neutralising accusations about heterodoxy, which galvanised sectarian conflicts. Since this conundrum possesses a certain linguistic refinement, it aids further in memorisation and also reiteration because it assures the common propagation of reconciliation tenets throughout those Jain communities.

Abhayadeva's "Karuṇā-pūrveṇa avabohaṇā" (Understanding preceded by compassion) promulgates interpretative precepts for addressing denominational disparities because it is a nexus which joins affective inclination to cognitive procedure as well. The instrumental case *"karuṇā-pūrveṇa"* grammatically subordinates understanding toward a compassionate substructure, with this implying that doctrinal apprehension requires empathetic groundwork (as shown in Table 1). Empathy is what we require instead of merely examining participation. This expression transforms possible confrontations that are controversial into paths for understanding dialogue. Therefore, structures are organised in governing theological disparities. Doctrinal rectitude is not forfeited by way of this instatement. These particular linguistic strategies are supported by such mechanisms. They unveil such an advanced comprehension of conflict mediation principles. During reconciliation times, experts consistently negate meaning studies. They do this because they circumvent denominationally idiosyncratic nomenclature without any failing. Passages on reconciliation use names like "*sādhaka*" (practitioner) or "*mumukṣu*" (liberation-seeker). Epithets including "*Śvetāmbara*" or "*Digambara*" are avoided instead of "*dharma-kāṅkṣin*" (dharma-aspirant). This terminological selection eliminates identity markers, which usually elicit defensive replies and sectarian positioning from people (Williams, 1991), and establishes discursive room to permit dialogue. The reconciliation vocabulary extends to specific Prakrit technical terms that facilitated inter-sectarian dialogue. Terms such as "samaṇa-dharma" (ascetic dharma) replaced sect-specific designations, while "mokṣa-mārgī" (liberation-path follower) provided inclusive identity markers. The employment of compound formations like "sarva-jīva-hitaiṣin" (one who desires welfare for all souls) and "dharma-sādhaka" (dharma practitioner) created semantic fields that transcended sectarian boundaries. Particularly significant is the use of "anekānta-vādī" (proponent of multiple perspectives) as a unifying identifier, drawing upon Jainism's foundational epistemological principle to validate diverse interpretations while maintaining doctrinal coherence (Cort, 2001).

The poetic sophistication of these reconciliation verses extends beyond their semantic content to encompass sophisticated metrical and phonetic structures characteristic of classical Prakrit *kāvya*. Haribhadra's *"Savve jīvā piyāyarā"* employs the *'anuṣṭubh'* metre with internal alliteration (*savve...suhaṃ*), creating euphonic resonance that facilitates memorisation and liturgical recitation. Similarly, *Śīlāṅka›s* paradoxical

Table 1: Prakrit Linguistic Strategies for Sectarian Reconciliation in Medieval Jainism (10th–12th CE)

Strategy	Key Prakrit Phrase (IAST)	Literal Translation	Rhetorical / Linguistic Function	Sectarian Impact
Semantic Neutralisation	*Savve jīvā piyāyarā, savve jīvā suhaṃkāmā*	"All souls are beloved; all souls seek happiness"	Uses universal quantifier (*savve* = "all") to emphasise shared traits; avoids sect-specific terminology; employs emotionally resonant vocabulary.	Shifts focus from factional identity (Śvetāmbara/Digambara) to common soteriological aspirations, reducing identity-based defensiveness.
Paradoxical Formulation	*Nānā-maggehi eko maggo*	"Through various paths, one path"	Juxtaposes diversity (*nānā*) with unity (*eko*), creating semantic tension resolved through deeper doctrinal coherence; employs rhythmic and memorable phrasing.	Validates diverse ritual and monastic practices while reinforcing shared spiritual goals, neutralising accusations of heterodoxy.
Hierarchical Reframing	*Karuṇā-pūrveṇa avabohaṇā*	"Understanding preceded by compassion"	Positions compassion (*karuṇā*) as a prerequisite to comprehension; aligns emotional readiness with cognitive engagement; reflects two-truth (vyavahāra/niścaya) framework.	Encourages empathetic interpretation of doctrinal differences, enabling dialogue without sacrificing doctrinal integrity.

Source: Authors, 2025

Note: Translations reflect literal meaning while preserving theological nuance. Adapted from primary commentaries of Haribhadra Sūri, Śīlāṅka Sūri, and Abhayadeva Sūri.

formulations utilise *'āryā'* metre patterns, as seen in "*Eko dharmo nānā-rūpo, nānā-rūpo eko dharmo"* (One dharma, many forms; many forms, one dharma), where the chiastic structure *(eko...nānā...nānā...eko)* mirrors the conceptual reconciliation of unity and diversity. The employment of *'yamaka'* (verbal repetition) and *śleṣa* (double entendre) techniques, borrowed from Sanskrit *'alaṅkāraśāstra'* but adapted to Prakrit's phonetic flexibility, demonstrates the commentators' sophisticated understanding of poetic craft in service of theological reconciliation (Williams, 1991).

Beyond the classical meters, medieval Jain commentators employed sophisticated Prakrit prosodic patterns specifically designed for reconciliation discourse. The *gāthā* meter, characterized by its four-line structure with alternating long and short syllables, appears frequently in Abhayadeva's commentaries, particularly in verses like "Dhammassa mūlaṃ ahiṃsā, ahiṃsāya mūlaṃ samaṃ / Samaṃ ca nāṇaṃ ca eko, maggo mokkhassa sāhaṇo" (The root of dharma is non-violence, the root of non-violence is equanimity / Equanimity and knowledge together form one path, the means to liberation). This *gāthā* structure, with its 12+10+12+10 syllabic pattern, creates a rhythmic cadence that facilitates both memorization and chanting, while the semantic parallelism between "mūlaṃ" (root) repetitions reinforces the interconnectedness of seemingly disparate sectarian practices. The employment of *doha* meter in reconciliation contexts, as seen in Śīlāṅka›s "Eka dharma aneka rūpa, aneka rūpa eka dharma" demonstrates how the couplet's balanced structure (13+11 syllables) mirrors the conceptual balance between unity and diversity that characterizes successful sectarian mediation.

The technical deployment of advanced Prakrit poetic devices reveals deliberate aesthetic strategies for conflict resolution. *Anuprāsa* (alliteration) appears systematically in reconciliation verses, as exemplified in Haribhadra's "Sādhāraṇa-sādhya-siddhi-sādhana-saṃyoga" (common goal-achievement-method-combination), where the repeated 'sa' sounds create phonetic unity that reinforces semantic harmony. The sophisticated use of *upamā* (simile) and *rūpaka* (metaphor) transforms abstract theological concepts into accessible imagery, as in the frequently cited reconciliation verse "Jaha ega sūriya aneka-kiraṇa-vikāsa, taha eka dharma aneka-sampradāya-prakāsa" (As one sun manifests through many rays, so one dharma manifests through many traditions). This metaphorical framework employs the *vasantatilakā* meter (14 syllables with specific gaṇa patterns: ta-bha-ja-ja-ga-ga) to create both aesthetic pleasure and theological clarity. The strategic placement of *yamaka* (verbal echo) in phrases like "mokṣa-mārgī mārgī-mokṣa" creates linguistic palindromes that symbolically represent the reciprocal nature of sectarian understanding, while the technical device of *śleṣa* (double entendre) allows commentators to address multiple sectarian interpretations simultaneously within single verses.

The memorability and widespread acceptance of these reconciliation verses directly correlates with their sophisticated prosodic architecture and aesthetic appeal. Cognitive studies of oral tradition demonstrate that metrical regularity, combined with phonetic beauty, significantly enhances retention rates, explaining why Prakrit reconciliation formulas achieved broader circulation than prose theological arguments (Bronkhorst, 2011). The employment of *chandas* (prosodic science) principles in reconciliation discourse created what medieval theorists termed *rasa-yoga* (aesthetic-spiritual synthesis), wherein the emotional satisfaction derived from poetic beauty (*kāvya-ānanda*) facilitated acceptance of challenging theological propositions. Haribhadra's reconciliation verses consistently employ the *mātrā-vṛtta* (quantitative meter) system, where syllabic weight rather than stress patterns determines rhythm, creating a musical quality that transcends regional linguistic variations and enables pan-Indian circulation. The aesthetic sophistication of these verses elevated reconciliation discourse from mere doctrinal argumentation to *kāvya* (refined poetry), thereby attracting educated audiences who might otherwise dismiss sectarian mediation as intellectually inferior, while the inherent beauty of the language created positive emotional associations with peace-building messages that persisted beyond immediate theological contexts.

Hierarchical reformulation is also an additional conciliatory method that reliably differentiates veracity's "*vyavahāra*" and "*niścaya*" tiers. These terms allude to practical as well as definitive levels. Also, the terms allude to utilitarian levels and unqualified levels. When reconciliation verses utilise this two-truth framework, sectarian differences are acknowledged as legitimate conventional distinctions. They unite then greatly at that final level. People are enabled due to this advanced philosophical mechanism that is conveyed via exact Prakrit vocabulary so that they recognize variety without weakening necessary doctrinal unity and also conceptual instruments for handling theological pressures are furnished. Emotional resonance couples together along with aesthetic aspects with memorability to intentionally create reconciliation verses. People with recollection of these verses resonate emotionally. Those lines create that result. Phonetic configurations fashion linguistic elegance when they alliterate as well as rhyme internally, plus employ balanced metre. Such elegance

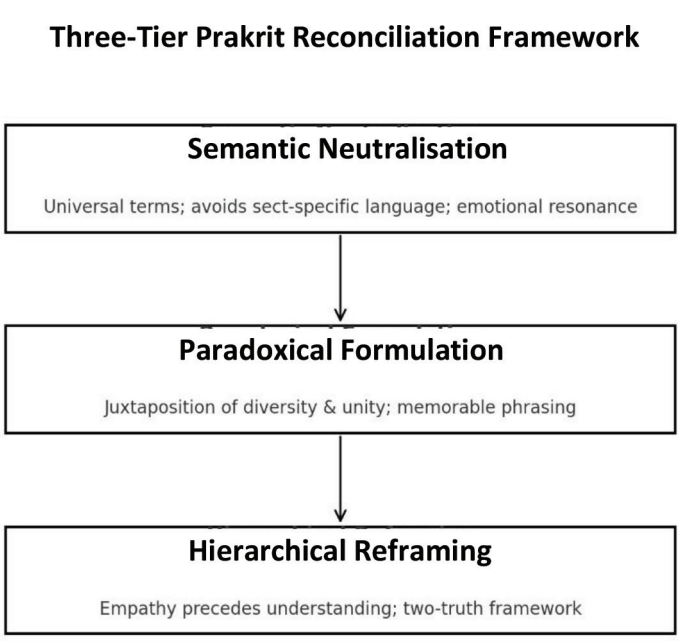


Figure 2: Three-Tier Prakrit Reconciliation Framework

Source*:* Authors, 2025

exceeds arguments when they are just intellectual. "*Piyāyarā*" alongside "*suhaṃkāmā*" engender emotional responses as well from euphonious sounds. These replies convince emotionally, rather than logically, thus assisting acceptance across sectarian divides afterwards. In that these verses do function as liturgical tools which can be recited repeatedly, they incorporate reconciliation doctrines all throughout religious practices, and they assure continuing contact through peace-building dialogues. Each linguistic stratagem was deployed systematically by Jain exegetes in the medieval period. They acted so as to evince how they apprehended that language could conciliate within religious disputes. The Three-Tier Prakrit Reconciliation Framework (Figure 2) illustrates the systematic progression from Semantic Neutralisation through Paradoxical Formulation to Hierarchical Reframing, demonstrating how medieval Jain commentators constructed increasingly sophisticated levels of theological mediation. The framework's tiered structure reflects the commentators' understanding that effective reconciliation required multiple linguistic strategies operating simultaneously: foundational semantic neutrality to establish common ground, paradoxical formulations to validate diversity within unity, and hierarchical reframing to provide philosophical frameworks for ongoing dialogue. This systematic approach enabled the preservation of sectarian distinctiveness while maintaining overarching Jain unity, as evidenced by the continued coexistence of Śvetāmbara and Digambara traditions despite their fundamental disagreements. Doctrinal integrity was upheld additionally when authorities reframed the hierarchy. Semantic neutralisation helped also in maintaining aesthetic appeal. These strategies did succeed as Jains were unified. Theological variances carried on even with the unity. Clever linguistic peace handles religious conflict with skill, as this success has actually showed.

These Prakrit reconciliation strategies find remarkable parallels in contemporary Buddhist and Hindu sectarian mediation efforts. Buddhist commentators addressing *Mahāyāna-Theravāda* tensions employed similar semantic neutralisation techniques, using *Pāli* terms like "*sabbadhammesu*" (in all dharmas) to transcend sectarian boundaries, while *Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava* reconciliation literature utilised Sanskrit formulations such as *"ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*" (Truth is one, the wise call it by many names) to validate diverse devotional practices (Bronkhorst, 2011). The shared employment of paradoxical formulations across these traditions suggests a broader South Asian pattern of linguistic mediation in religious conflicts, wherein sacred languages served as neutral territories for theological negotiation while preserving doctrinal authenticity within each tradition.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This investigation demonstrates that medieval Jain scholars developed sophisticated linguistic reconciliation strategies that make distinct scholarly contributions across three interconnected fields. **To Jain studies**, this research provides the first systematic analysis of Prakrit as a mediating language in sectarian conflicts, revealing previously unexamined reconciliation mechanisms within commentarial traditions (Dundas, 2003). **To linguistics**, it establishes a new analytical framework for understanding

how sacred languages function as neutral mediating instruments in religious discourse, expanding beyond traditional philological approaches (Bronkhorst, 2011). **To peace studies**, it offers empirical evidence of early documented linguistic conflict resolution strategies, providing historical precedents for contemporary interfaith mediation methodologies (Appleby, 2003). The methodological framework developed in this study opens significant avenues for digital humanities applications in religious conflict analysis. The systematic identification of reconciliation terminology through semantic field mapping provides a foundation for developing computational tools that can automatically detect peace-building discourse patterns across large manuscript corpora (Mohanan et al., 2024). Future digital humanities projects could create searchable databases of reconciliation vocabulary, enabling quantitative analysis of peace-building language evolution across different historical periods and religious traditions. Machine learning algorithms trained on the three-tier reconciliation framework could identify similar linguistic strategies in unexplored commentarial literature, potentially revealing broader patterns of religious conflict mediation throughout South Asian manuscript traditions (Kingsley et al., 2024). The identified Prakrit reconciliation formulas do represent quite early documented examples since they involve mediation of religious conflict by means of a planned deployment of language. The identified Prakrit reconciliation formulas provide concrete methodological insights for contemporary interfaith dialogue practitioners. The semantic neutralization strategy offers a template for developing inclusive religious vocabulary that transcends denominational boundaries, while the paradoxical formulation technique demonstrates how apparent contradictions can be reframed as complementary approaches to shared spiritual goals. Modern interfaith organizations can adapt the hierarchical reframing approach to acknowledge surface-level differences while emphasizing deeper theological commonalities. These medieval strategies directly inform current conflict resolution methodologies by providing linguistically-tested approaches for managing religious tensions without compromising doctrinal integrity, offering practical tools for religious leaders, peace mediators, and interfaith dialogue facilitators working in pluralistic societies. When sacred languages are being used along with syntactic and with semantic stratagems, the research elucidates efficacious impartial mediation instruments that do emphasise similarity over disparities. Instead, initiatives for peace-building considered emergent stem up from commentarial traditions because they contest standard assumptions regarding intrinsically controversial medieval religious discourse. Medieval scholars evinced how they employed universal quantifiers as well as constructed paradoxes furthermore reframed hierarchies, also those actions refined their comprehension regarding language's mediating potential for managing theological tensions and preserving doctrinal integrity. Quite a few promising options exist. These must improve this simple effort. These particular routes are to feature in future studies that are planned. Investigations juxtapose as well as broaden related analytical constructs for disparate medieval Indian religious conventions. These inquiries, notably regarding *Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava* and Buddhist sectarian disputes, could clarify broader arrangements of linguistic mediation throughout South Asian religious settings (Mohanan et al., 2024). Manuscripts could reveal further supplementary reconciliation passages. Surveys regarding unexamined Jain commentaries shall be required here. The vocabulary about peace-building will grow. The reason is simply that they do reveal some additional reconciliation extracts. Enquiry developed as medieval methods suggest. The development produced present interfaith discussion strategies. The material presented may provide implementations for modern dispute resolution. Therefore, quantitative scrutiny of peace-building vocabulary progression is indeed eased through the digital humanities endeavours that generate searchable compendiums of reconciliation terminology all throughout Jain literature. This interdisciplinary approach to medieval religious discourse analysis establishes a replicable methodology for investigating linguistic mediation strategies across diverse historical and cultural contexts, ultimately advancing our understanding of how sacred languages can serve as instruments of peace rather than division.

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Recipient of several prestigious honors—including the President's Award by the President of India, the Outstanding Educator & Scholar Award, and the Distinguished Woman Educator & Scholar Award—Dr. Jain has published over 75 research papers, many indexed in Scopus, with a focus on religion, culture, and the role of women in religious practices.

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A recipient of the Best Paper Presenter Award at the International Conference on Indian Knowledge Systems at NIT Rourkela and Bronze Medallist for academic excellence, Mohanan combines rigorous historical analysis with interdisciplinary expertise spanning archaeology, museum studies, and cultural preservation. Her advanced training includes coursework at Harvard University and the University of Reading, while her role as Graduate Teaching Assistant across multiple Amity University institutes reflects her commitment to pedagogical excellence. As a member of the Indus International Research Foundation, she brings innovative methodological approaches to ancient world studies, positioning her work at the forefront of contemporary scholarship on cultural exchange and historical connectivity.

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Bridging the Gap: Barriers to Malaysian Public University Research Commercialisation

RESEARCH ARTICLE
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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Malaysian public universities achieve only 5-10% downstream commercialisation rates. This compares poorly to 30-60% rates in other Asian economies and developed nations. Current assessment frameworks inappropriately evaluate universities on post-transfer outcomes. These outcomes are beyond their institutional control rather than controllable pre-transfer activities. **Methods:** This study employed triangulated multi-qualitative analysis. It integrated commercialisation policies from all five Malaysian research universities. The study included comprehensive literature review of six innovation gap clusters and structured interviews with ten Technology Transfer Office (TTO) personnel. The Pre-Transfer Market Readiness Gaps Conceptual Framework applies six complementary theoretical perspectives. This distinguishes controllable pre-transfer activities from uncontrollable post-transfer outcomes. **Results:** The study validated and extended existing literature by identifying ten critical innovation gaps across three challenge domains that align with six established literature clusters (Strategic/Policy, Skills/Competency, Financial, Organisational/Cultural, Stakeholder Coordination, and Market Orientation). Go-to-market barriers include industry's lack of R&D adoption readiness (scoring 14.8). Policy framework deficiencies include inadequate commercial viability frameworks (scoring 12.4). Measurement standardisation issues also emerged. Multi-theoretical convergence validates that high-priority gaps operate simultaneously. They span institutional, organisational, resource-based, and relational dimensions identified in prior research. **Discussion:** The sphere of control analysis reveals important insights. Universities are evaluated against marketing and financial success metrics. These occur beyond their influence. Meanwhile, technical success activities within their control remain inadequately optimised. The performance measurement paradox demonstrates why standardised frameworks produce inconsistent results. There is 5-50% variation when institutions optimise reported performance rather than substantive effectiveness. **Conclusion:** The study confirms that innovation gaps require integrated multi-theoretical approaches rather than isolated frameworks and contributes both literature validation and a novel paradigm shift toward process-based assessment. This operates within universities' controllable operational sphere. This enables systematic evaluation of pre-

transfer market readiness capabilities whilst maintaining accountability within appropriate institutional boundaries. **Future Research**: Future studies should develop industry readiness assessment tools, pre-transfer commercial viability frameworks and unified measurement standards that distinguish university-controllable from external factors whilst exploring how the six validated gap clusters evolve through integrated intervention strategies.

Keywords: Commercialisation, Innovation Management, Market Readiness, Commercial Viability, Technology Transfer, University Policy, Performance Measurement, Malaysia

1. INTRODUCTION

Technology transfer serves as a crucial connection between university research and commercialisation. It converts university intellectual property (IP) into market-ready products. Malaysian public universities exhibit significantly lower commercialisation rates compared to international benchmarks. Malaysian public universities achieve only 5-10% commercialisation success rates. This is substantially lower than 30-60% rates in other Asian economies and developed nations (Edwards, 2021, Malay Mail). Despite Malaysia's scientific research output increasing 4.5-fold between 2008 and 2018, IP commercialisation rates fell by 8.3% from 2005 to 2015 (Edwards, 2021, Malay Mail).

The research gap emerges from a critical misalignment. Universities are evaluated based on market performance after technology transfer. This is beyond their control rather than their effectiveness during the controllable pre-transfer phases. Despite multiple frameworks and significant research output, little is known about specific factors. These are the organisational, institutional, or resource-related factors that most influence commercialisation outcomes. The focus should be on factors within universities' sphere of control. The objective is to identify and analyse pre-transfer market readiness gaps. This focuses on Malaysian public research universities' technology transfer frameworks. The study transcends outcome-based metrics to examine controllable factors which affect commercialisation potential.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks in University Technology Commercialisation Research

University technology commercialisation research has predominantly employed several theoretical frameworks as presented by **Figure 1**. This is documented by Dzakiy et al. (2023) in their comprehensive analysis.

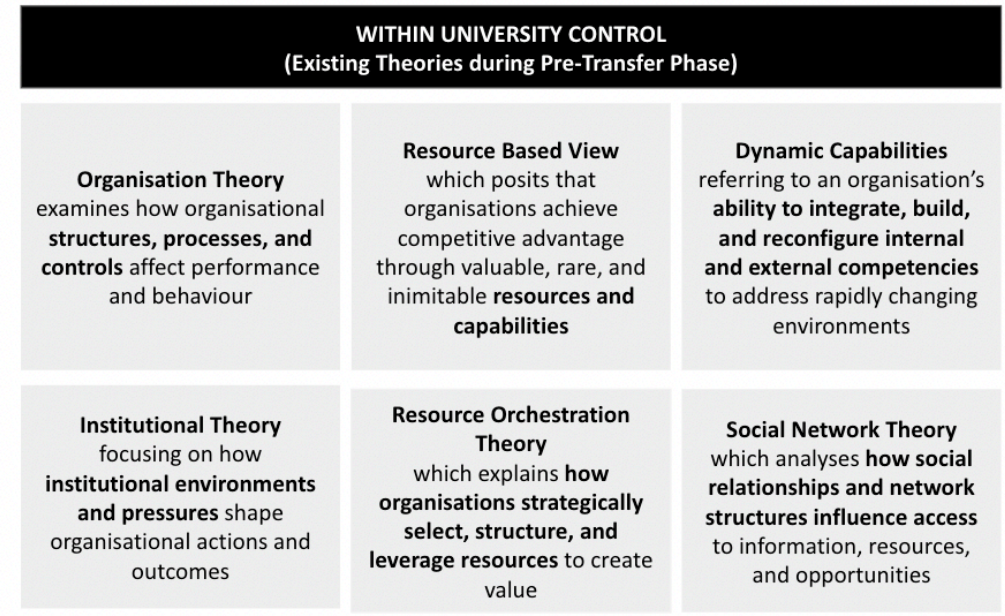


Figure 1. *Existing Theories Applicable to University Commercialisation*
Note: Existing theories documented by Dzakiy et al., 2023

Resource-Based View emerges as the most extensively applied framework. It identifies critical drivers of technology commercialisation performance. This emphasises how universities achieve competitive advantage through valuable, rare resources and capabilities. These include IP protection and business development capabilities (Shahidan et al., 2019).

Institutional Theory focuses on how university-level environmental factors shape organisational actions. **Organisation Theory** examines how managerial control impacts performance across different technology transfer stages. It also examines how organisational context influences academics' entrepreneurial decisions.

Emerging theoretical perspectives include **Resource Orchestration Theory**. This explains how universities strategically select and manage human, social, financial, and technological resources. **Dynamic Capabilities Theory** addresses how universities create and capture value. This occurs through technological exploitation and asset reconfiguration. **Social Network Theory** examines how relational and structural embeddedness in academic networks influences the outcome. It emphasises the critical role of active academic involvement and network relationships in technology transfer success (Dzakiy et al., 2023).

2.2 Success Factors in University Technology Transfer

Romanowski (2019) proposes a comprehensive multidimensional framework. This framework understands commercialisation success across three independent yet interrelated dimensions. Technical success (effective transfer). Marketing success market viability with revenues exceeding costs) and Financial success (cost recovery from development to market introduction).

International success requires coordinated supply-side (universities) and demand-side (industry) capabilities. European institutions such as KU Leuven demonstrate integrated collaboration models (124+ spin-offs over 50 years) (Ewalt, 2019). Asian approaches emphasise government-supported frameworks (Japan's Society 5.0) (Ueyama, 2018). US practices feature market-driven approaches supported by the Bayh-Dole Act.

Current evaluation frameworks show significant limitations. Malaysia's MyRA® in the *Glosari* MyRA® I & II (*Pindaan* 2023) (Jabatan Pendidikan Tinggi, 2023) guidelines evaluate universities on post-transfer outcomes beyond institutional control. This has created accountability misalignment.

2.3 Innovation Gaps Based on Literature Review

Despite RM1.152 billion in government research investment, Malaysia achieved only 20 successful commercialisations generating RM7.6 million revenue (Mudaa et al., 2021). This study identifies six interconnected innovation gap clusters hindering research commercialisation in Malaysian public universities from the literature review: Strategic & Policy Gaps (**Table 1**), Skills & Competency Gaps (**Table 2**), Financial Constraints (**Table 3**), Organisational & Cultural Barriers

Table 1: *Innovation Gaps Cluster 1 – Strategic & Policy Gaps.*

Innovation Gaps	Description	Source	Relevant Theory
Protective IP Strategy Limitations	The protective IP strategy in Malaysian public universities limits commercialisation success and increases gaps, with traditional focus on preserving IP rights rather than enabling collaboration	Sarujee et al. (2022) Palfrey (2011)	Resource-Based View (IP protection capabilities)
Inadequate IP Awareness	Weak IP awareness amongst researchers and institutions, hindering effective commercialisation strategies	Mudaa et al. (2021)	Resource-Based View (IP capabilities and knowledge resources)
Lack of Policy Uniformity	No uniformity on commercialisation policy across institutions, creating inconsistent approaches	Mudaa et al. (2021)	Institutional Theory (institutional frameworks)

Source: Authors, 2025

Table 2: *Innovation Gaps Cluster 2 – Skills & Competency Gaps.*

Innovation Gaps	Description	Source	Relevant Theory
Lack of Entrepreneurship Skills	Researchers lack entrepreneurial skills necessary for successful commercialisation of research outputs	Mudaa et al. (2021)	Resource Orchestration Theory (human resource management)
Absence of Entrepreneurial Behaviour	Absence of entrepreneurial behaviours amongst researchers, limiting commercialisation potential	Khademi et al. (2015)	Organisation Theory (academics' entrepreneurial decisions)
Business Skills Deficiency	Lack of business skills and expertise in commercialisation amongst academic staff	Khademi et al. (2015)	Resource Orchestration Theory (strategic human capabilities)

Source: Authors, 2025

(**Table 4**), Stakeholder Coordination & Collaboration Gaps (**Table 5**), and Market Orientation & Commercial Focus Gaps **(Table 6)**. Each cluster is systematically mapped to established theories—Resource-Based View, Resource Orchestration Theory, Institutional Theory, Organisation Theory, and Social Network Theory —to validate the gaps against existing theoretical frameworks.

These six clusters can be reorganised into two broader domains: Firstly, **Go-to-Market and Operational Readiness Challenges** encompassing Skills and Competency Gaps and Market Orientation & Commercial Focus Gaps. And secondly, **Support System and Organisational Framework Challenges** including Financial Constraints, Organisational & Cultural

Table 3: *Innovation Gaps Cluster 3 – Financial Constraints.*

Innovation Gaps	Description	Source	Relevant Theory
Insufficient Financial Resources	Lack of capital funds and limited access to industrial funding, with availability of finance being the most critical factor affecting commercialisation from start to finish	Khademi et al. (2015)	Resource Orchestration Theory (strategic financial resource management)
Inadequate Infrastructure	Poor infrastructure supporting commercialisation activities, including inadequate technology transfer office capabilities	Khademi et al. (2015)	Resource-Based View (technological and infrastructure capabilities)
Over-dependence on Government Grants	Over-dependence on government grants leading to complacency and inefficiency in income generation	Lim et al. (2016)	Institutional Theory (environmental dependency and institutional frameworks)

Source: Authors, 2025

Table 4: *Innovation Gaps Cluster 4 – Organisational & Cultural Barriers.*

Innovation Gaps	Description	Source	Relevant Theory
Organisational Culture Barriers	Organisational culture not fully supporting entrepreneurship, with focus on research rather than commercialisation	Yusof et al. (2012)	Organisation Theory (organisational context influence on entrepreneurial culture)
Weak Control Systems	Lack of effective control measures and prudence in control systems, with uncertainty about rewards for risk-taking	Yusof et al. (2012)	Organisation Theory (managerial control systems and performance)
Leadership Deficiencies	Absence of strong entrepreneurial leadership amongst academic leaders	Yusof et al. (2012)	Organisation Theory (managerial control and leadership impact)
Complexity and Risk Aversion	Complexity and risk involved in commercialisation processes, with costs and risks associated with commercialisation activities	Khademi et al. (2015)	Organisation Theory (risk management and organisational decision-making)

Source: Authors, 2025

Table 5: *Innovation Gaps Cluster 5 – Stakeholder Coordination & Collaboration Gaps.*

Innovation Gaps	Description	Source	Relevant Theory
Weak Cooperation Between Stakeholders	No cooperation between universities, industry, and government, creating significant gaps in the commercialisation ecosystem	Mudaa et al. (2021)	Social Network Theory (network relationships and structural embeddedness)
Stakeholder Coordination Issues	Gaps between stakeholders including researchers, TTOs, university managers, industry, and government	Othman et al. (2014)	Social Network Theory (multi-stakeholder network coordination)

Source: Authors, 2025

Table 6: *Innovation Gaps Cluster 6 – Market Orientation & Commercial Focus Gaps.*

Innovation Gaps	Description	Source	Relevant Theory
Limited Market Research Capabilities	Insufficient market research and lack of awareness of market requirements by researchers	Khademi et al. (2015)	Dynamic Capabilities Theory (value creation and capture through market intelligence)

Source: Authors, 2025

Barriers, and Stakeholder Coordination & Collaboration Gaps.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design and Data Sources

As per **Table 7, Table 8** and **Table 9**, this research employs comparative policy analysis design using triangulated multi-qualitative approach with three data sources ensuring reliability through convergent validation.

Trustworthiness and Validity Measures: To ensure rigour and trustworthiness, the study employed member checking whereby Tier 2 interviewees were able to edit and review their submission via SurveyMonkey for verification and accuracy; maintaining a detailed audit trail via detailed documentation of analytical decisions, coding processes, and theme maturation; conducting peer debriefings with Supervisors to challenge assumptions; and using triangulation across data sources and methods to verify outcomes.

3.2 Data Collections

Policy Analysis: Thematic analysis following Krippendorff's (2004) method examined institutional processes. This covered all five research universities

Table 7: *Data Sources, Types and Collection Methods.*

Data Source	Type	Specific Data Collected	Collection Method	Sample Size	Purpose
Primary Literature	Secondary	Official policy documents, commercialisation guidelines, technology transfer frameworks	Document analysis	Five Documents (100% of Research Universities' Policies)	Identify institutional processes and operational constraints
Secondary Literature	Secondary	Academic articles on commercialisation strategies, existing theories and innovation gaps	Systematic literature review	Multiple databases	Support policy analysis with theoretical foundation and literature review
Stakeholder Interviews	Primary	TTO experiences, innovation gaps validation, commercialisation challenges	Tier 1 TTO – Unstructured interviews Tier 2 TTO Structured interviews	Five TTOs (100% of Research Universities)	Validate findings and identify additional gaps

Source: Authors, 2025

Table 8: *Data Source Cross-Validation Matrix.*

Validation Process	Primary Literature	Secondary Literature	Stakeholder Interviews	Reliability & Credibility Purpose
Policy Framework Validation	Identifies formal institutional constraints.	Provides theoretical context for policy effectiveness	Confirms practical implementation challenges	Cross-verification of policy-practice gaps
Innovation Gap	Documents official support mechanisms	Offers academic explanations for commercialisation barriers	Validates gaps through practitioner experience	Triangulated identification of persistent issues
Commercialisation Process Verification	Outlines prescribed procedures	Presents best practice frameworks	Reveals actual operational realities	Multi-source validation of process effectiveness
Institutional Context Validation	Establishes regulatory environment	Provides comparative international perspectives	Confirms local application challenges	Comprehensive understanding through source convergence

Source: Authors, 2025

Table 9: *Data Triangulation Matrix.*

Validation Method	Primary Literature	Secondary Literature	Stakeholder Interviews	Purpose
Source Triangulation	Policy document themes	Academic theory validation	Practitioner experiences	Convergent validation of gaps
Method Triangulation	Document analysis	Literature review	Semi-structured interviews	Multiple data collection methods
Investigator Triangulation	Independent coding	Mapping to the stakeholder validated innovation gaps identified from the thematic analysis of institutional policies	Participant prior completion of the SurveyMonkey form	Reduce researcher bias
Theory Triangulation	Policy framework analysis	Multiple theoretical lenses and six literature review clusters	Practical validation	Comprehensive understanding

Source: Authors, 2025

Table 10: *Tier 2 Interview Participant Details.*

University	Number of participants	Positions	Interview Mode
UTM	3	Director and Officers	SurveyMonkey & Face-to-Face
USM	1	Director	SurveyMonkey & Face-to-Face
UM	1	Director	SurveyMonkey & Face-to-Face
UKM	4	Deputy Director and Officers	SurveyMonkey & Google Meet
UPM	1	Deputy Director	SurveyMonkey & Google Meet
Total	10	3 Directors, 2 Deputy Directors and 5 Officers	Mixed Mode

Source: Authors, 2025

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Malaya (UM). Documents were purposively selected from verified government portals and institutional databases.

Stakeholder Interviews: As per **Table 10**, comprehensive interviews with TTO personnel from all Malaysian research universities achieved 100% coverage. Data collection ensued in May-June 2025. Sessions lasted 2.5-3.0 hours.

3.3 Innovation Gaps Analysis Process

As presented by **Figure 2**, a structured three-tier validation process as per Malodia et al.'s (2023) method, progressively refined findings: 1. Zero Order List: Combined gaps from policy analysis and initial Tier 1 TTO feedback; 2. First Order List: Validated and expanded gaps from comprehensive Tier 2 TTO interviews. This used weighted scoring (16 points to 1st place, down to 1 point for 16th place); 3. Second Order List: Final gaps after considering government support availability.

3.4 Conceptual Framework

The Pre-Transfer Market Readiness Gaps Conceptual Framework (**Figure 3**) provides multi-theoretical analysis addressing theoretical fragmentation in technology transfer research. Building on Romanowski's (2019) three-dimensional success model, the framework introduces sphere of control analysis distinguishing controllable pre-transfer activities from uncontrollable post-transfer outcomes. The framework integrates six complementary perspectives from Dzakiy et al. (2023): Institutional Theory, Resource-Based View, Organisation Theory, Social Network Theory, Dynamic Capabilities Theory, and Resource Orchestration Theory.

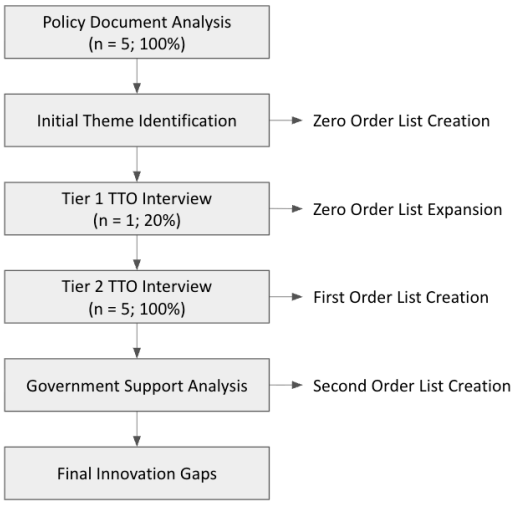


Figure 2. *Innovation Gaps Development Process*

4. RESULTS

4.1 Policy Analysis: Systematic Thematic Analysis of Malaysian Research Universities

This section presents systematic thematic analysis of commercialisation policies from five Malaysian research universities (UTM, UKM, UM, UPM, and USM) using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis methodology, identifying patterns, similarities and gaps across institutional approaches to intellectual property commercialisation.

4.1.1 Thematic Mapping of Institutional Policies

The systematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) three-step methodology. Step 1 (Thematic Map of Institutional Policies) established seven primary themes as the foundational framework (see **Figure 4**). Step 2 (Initial Thematic Analysis) created preliminary thematic analysis for each theme (**Figures 5-10**), analysing relationships between current commercialisation practices and established themes. Step 3 (Final Thematic Analysis) transformed the approach by enhancing the thematic framework to focus on innovation gaps, reassigning analysis from theme-based to gap-based codes (RU1-RU5), illustrated in final thematic maps (**Figures 11-16**).

4.1.2 Analysis of Seven Institutional Themes

The initial seven themes (**Figures 5-11**) provided the foundation for understanding policy variations. Theme

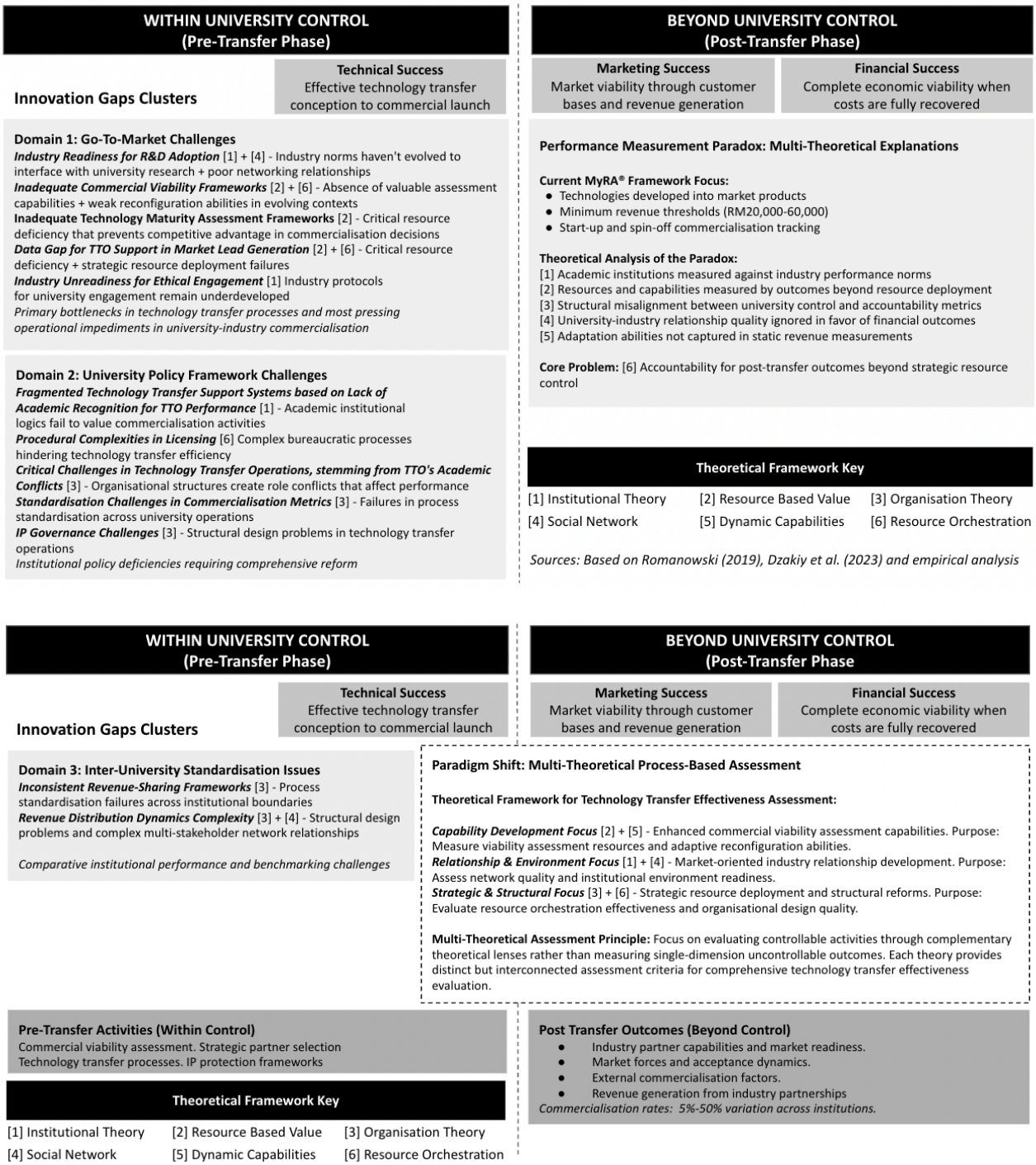


Figure 3. *Pre-Transfer Market Readiness Gaps Conceptual Framework*

1 (Definition of Commercialisation) shows that most universities lack clear definitions, with only UM offering clarity as "taking of an idea to an outcome – whether a product, service, process or organisation system to market by way of licensing, assignment, spin-off or joint ventures" (UM Centre of Innovation and Enterprise, 2014).

Theme 2 (IP Ownership) illustrates varied approaches, from UM's conditional ownership (UM Centre of Innovation and Enterprise, 2014) to USM's worldwide ownership policy (Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2020). Theme 3 (Commercialisation Processes) reveals diverse approaches. UTM implemented an integrated ecosystem combining ICCubeX incubator, Radis and Innocomms platforms (Innovation and Commercialisation Centre, 2022), while UKM manages IP through INOVASI@UKM (Pusat Inovasi Kolaboratif, 2018).

Theme 1: Definition of Commercialisation

UTM

Not specified by policy document.

UKM

Not specified by policy document.

UM

"Taking of an idea to an outcome – whether a product, service, process or organisation system to market by way of licensing, assignment, spin-off or joint ventures".

UPM

Not specified by policy document.

USM

Not specified by policy document.

Theme 2: IP Ownership Models

UTM

- No specific ownership requirements.
- Uses: patents, copyright, trademark, integrated circuit layout design, industrial design, trade secrets.

UKM

- No specific ownership requirements.
- Uses: patent, copyright, trademark, integrated circuit layout design, industrial design.

UM

- Conditional/Collaborative Ownership: UM typically retains sole ownership but allows joint ownership when external collaborators make substantial contributions.
- Default: UM solely owns IP, others have first right to negotiate commercial license.

UPM

- Full university ownership: UPM holds ownership rights to all IP created by teachers, students or staff.
- Committed to protect these rights under the law.

USM

- Full university ownership: USM claims worldwide ownership of all IP by staff, students, fellows including commissioned projects.
- Assigns IP back when university decides against protection/commercialisation.

Theme 3: Processes and Methods

UTM

- 6-Stage Commercialisation Ecosystem: 1. Fundamental research; 2. Translational research; 3. Translation; 4. Showcase; 5. Licensing; 6. Spin-offs & Commercialisation.
- Platforms: ICCubeX incubator, Radis, Innocomms.

UKM

- IP Management: Central TTO INOVASI@UKM™ .
- Methods: Licensing to start-ups, foreign companies, joint ventures and partnerships.
- Uses deeds of assignment and diverse commercialisation models.

UM

Comprehensive commercialisation methods - Exclusive/non-exclusive licensing, assignment, spin-offs, joint ventures and other legal means.

UPM

- Methods determined by University from time to time.
- Establishes commercialisation methods to obtain suitable pecuniary returns for wealth creation.

USM

- Licensing Types - Exclusive, non-exclusive, sole, cross-licensing with geographical, temporal and field limitations.
- Decision Body: Commercialisation and Licensing Committee.

Theme 4: Revenue Distribution and Wealth Sharing

UTM

Not specified by policy document.

UKM

- Income Sources: Commercialisation revenue + company dividends.
- Inventor Benefits: Receivable as long as the commercialisation revenue is generated, beyond employment & transferable upon death (subject to approval).

UM

Two revenue sharing models:

- Internal grants: 50%/50% for first RM100K, then sliding scale.
- Federal grants: 100% originator (first RM250K), then tiered: 80%/20%, 60%/40%, 50%/50%, 40%/60%.
- After deducting development, protection and marketing costs.

UPM

- University obtains suitable pecuniary returns for wealth creation.
- Benefits derived for common advantage without detriment to university.

USM

Dual Income Structure:

- Gross Income: 30% originators, 70% university.
- Net Income Tiers: 70%/30%, 65%/35%, 60%/40%, 50%/50% based on revenue thresholds
- Multiple originators need written agreements.

Theme 5: Spin-offs and Start up Companies

UTM

- 15-step establishment process: Application → Discussion → Endorsement → Certification → JPU approval → Company registration → Recognition certificate issuance.
- Support: Entrepreneurship Encouragement Scheme - special leave for academic staff.

UKM

- Company Formation: UKM supports start-up and spin-off companies by staff and students.
- UKM accommodates university start-up companies for IP commercialisation.

UM

Business Entity Structure:

- UM establishes companies with originator and UM equity.
- UM offers minimum 20-30% equity in spin-offs.
- Researchers may request higher equity.
- Factors: IP value, patent strength, researcher commitment, service length and business potential.

UPM

Not specified by policy document.

USM

Multiple Entity Types:

- Start-ups: Founder-established with founder and university equity.
- Spin-offs: USM-established with licensing agreements.
- Joint Ventures: With third parties for IP commercialisation.
- Equity considers IP value, patent strength and commitment.

Theme 4 (Revenue Distribution and Wealth Sharing) demonstrates significant variations, with UM offering sliding scales (UM Centre of Innovation and Enterprise, 2014) and USM adopting tiered systems from 70%/30% to 50%/50% (Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2020). Theme 5 (Spin-offs and Start-up Companies) features UTM's fifteen-step establishment process and Entrepreneurship Encouragement Scheme (Innovation and Commercialisation Centre, 2022).

Theme 6 (Collaborative Arrangements) highlights UTM's Quadruple Helix Model, integrating education, research, government and community sectors

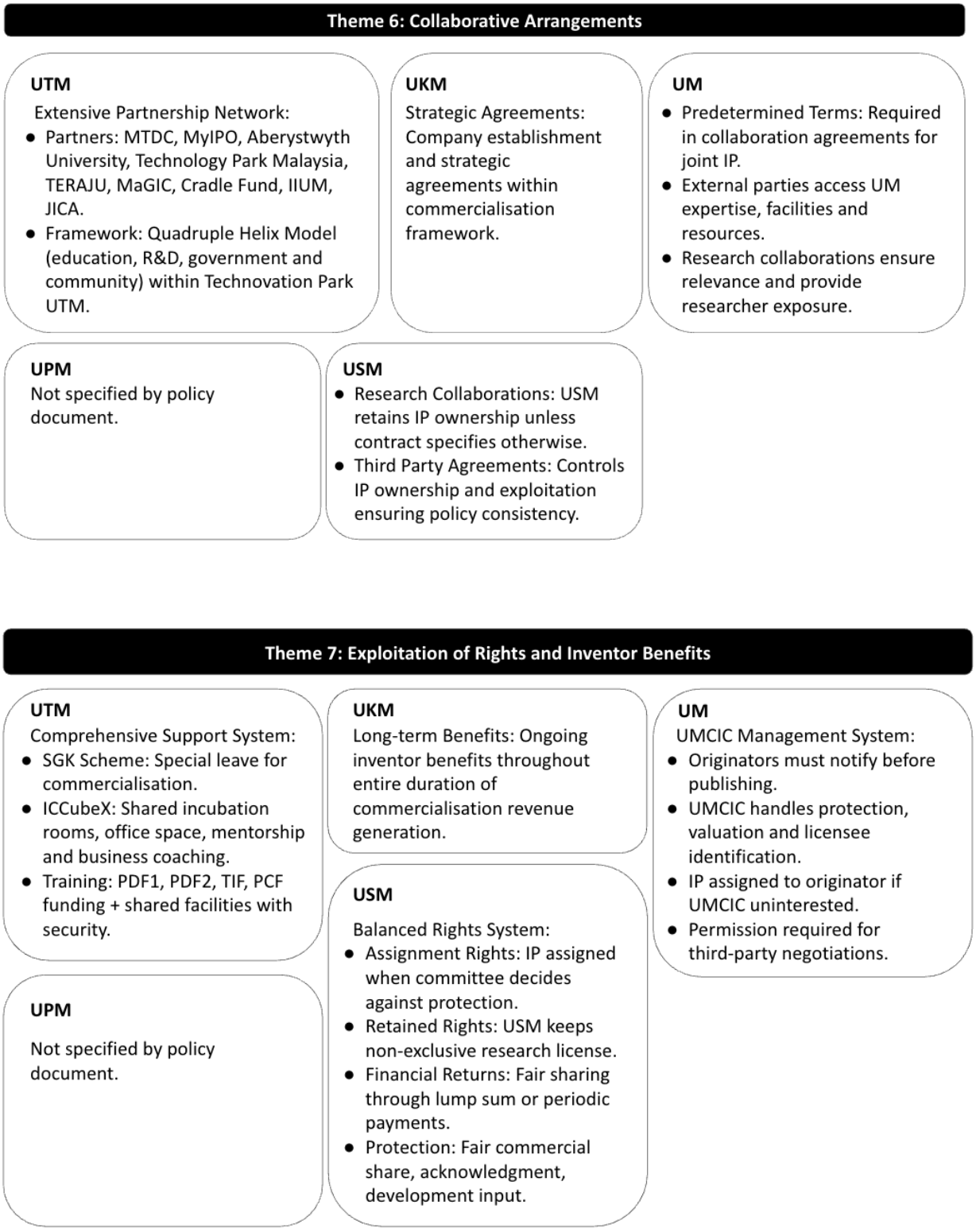


Figure 4. *Thematic Map of the Malaysia Institutional Commercialisation Policies*

Note: The above information was extracted from the commercialisation policies of all Malaysian public universities as follows:-
a) UTM - Innovation and Commercialisation Centre (2022)
b) UKM - Pusat Inovasi Kolaboratif (2018)
c) UM - UM Centre of Innovation and Enterprise (2014)
d) UPM - Universiti Putra Malaysia (2013)
e) USM - Universiti Sains Malaysia (2020)

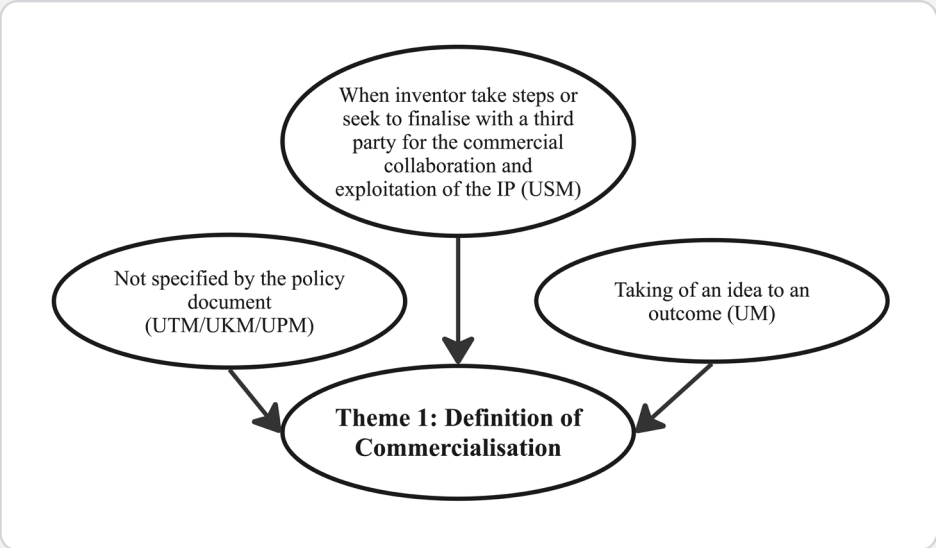


Figure 5. *Initial Thematic Analysis of Theme 1: Definition of Commercialisation*

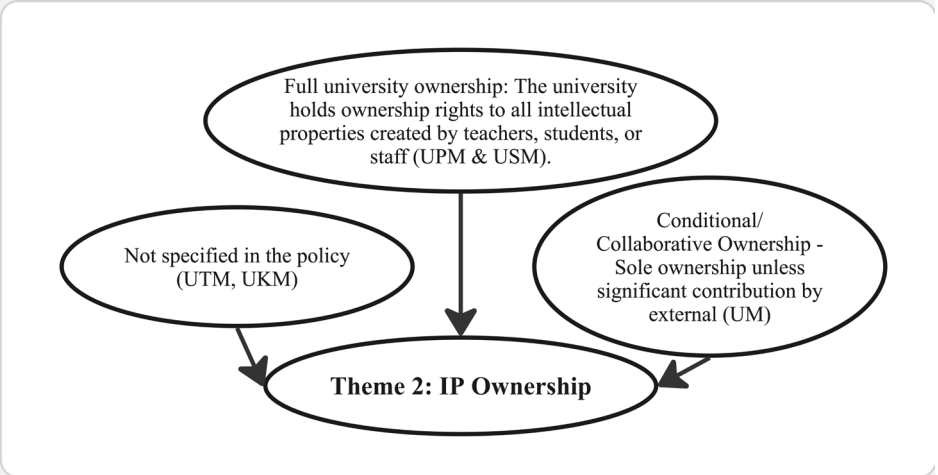


Figure 6. *Initial Thematic Analysis of Theme 2: IP Ownership*

(Innovation and Commercialisation Centre, 2022). Theme 7 (Exploitation Rights and Inventor Benefits) shows notable disparities in institutional support mechanism for inventors, ranging from UTM's entrepreneurship comprehensive incubation support to USM's flexible IP.

This disparity based on policy analysis suggests lack of institutional isomorphism, with universities operating in isolation rather than adopting common practices. The absence of clear definitions indicates weak institutional legitimacy, potentially undermining stakeholder confidence. Diverse IP ownership approaches and revenue distribution models reflect institutional uncertainty about optimal resource orchestration strategies.

4.1.3 Critical Innovation Gaps Identified

Step 3 progressed analytical focus from seven themes to five critical innovation gaps recognising that identified issues transcended individual themes and required gap-specific coding (**Figures 12-16**). Gap Code RU1 (Constraints in Inventor Participation), emerged from institutional variations in researcher engagement frameworks. UM's policy requires notification before publication and mandatory permission-seeking (UM Centre of Innovation and Enterprise, 2014) contrasted with UTM's Entrepreneurship Encouragement Scheme, enabling special leave, revealing inconsistent approaches to balancing academic and commercial responsibilities.

Gap Code RU2 (Absence of Standardised Definitions, **Figure 13**), was evident as most institutions lack explicit commercialisation definitions, hampering ecosystem communication and coordination. Gap Code RU3 (Fragmented Technology Transfer Support Systems, **Figure 14**), demonstrates universities providing support for the researchers but not for the TTOs. Gap Code RU4 (Inconsistent Revenue-Sharing Frameworks, **Figure 15**) reflects diverse inventor compensation, creating complexity in the revenue distribution. Finally, Gap Code RU5 (Inadequate Commercial Viability Assessment Frameworks,

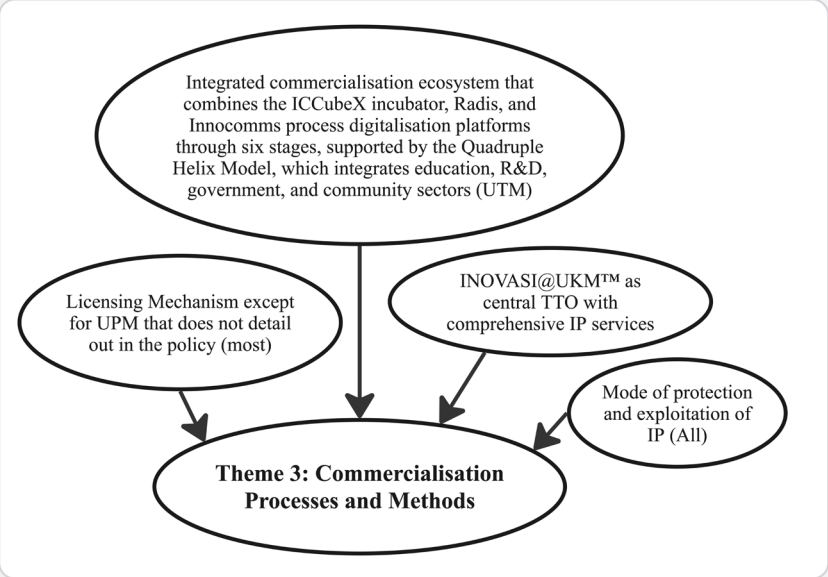


Figure 7. *Initial Thematic Analysis of Theme 3: Commercialisation Processes and Methods*

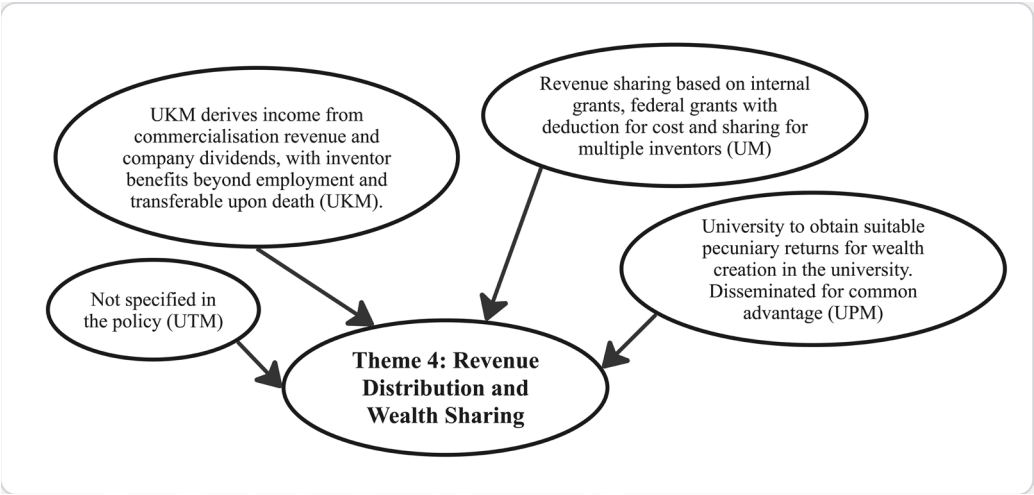


Figure 8. *Initial Thematic Analysis of Theme 4: Revenue Distribution and Wealth Sharing*

Figure 16), highlights absence of standardised evaluation metrics for assessing technology maturity and commercial potential.

This analytical exercise enabled precise identification of systemic barriers that collectively impede Malaysia's research commercialisation effectiveness. Rather than isolated policy flaws, challenges in technology transfer stem from institutional misalignments. "Constraints in Inventor Participation" (RU1) reflect weak organisational cultures that fail to bridge academic and commercial domains, consistent with institutional theory's prediction of conflicting logics. Meanwhile, the "Absence of Standardised Definitions" (RU2) reveals an institutional void, where the lack of shared frameworks hampers inter-organisational coordination and knowledge transfer. The final point to note is that while certain issues remain localised in scope, the critical innovation gaps identified as Gap Code RU2 and Code RU4 have far-reaching implications that significantly impact the national commercialisation rate.

4.2 Stakeholder Interview Results

4.2.1 Tier 1 TTO Insights - Framework Expansion

Tier 1 TTO interviews expanded the framework from five policy gaps to sixteen challenges, revealing complex operational realities beyond policy matters. Key restructuring occurred: RU2 shifted from standardisation issues to "Constraints in Inventor Participation - Lack of Recognition", with standardisation moving to RU3. The

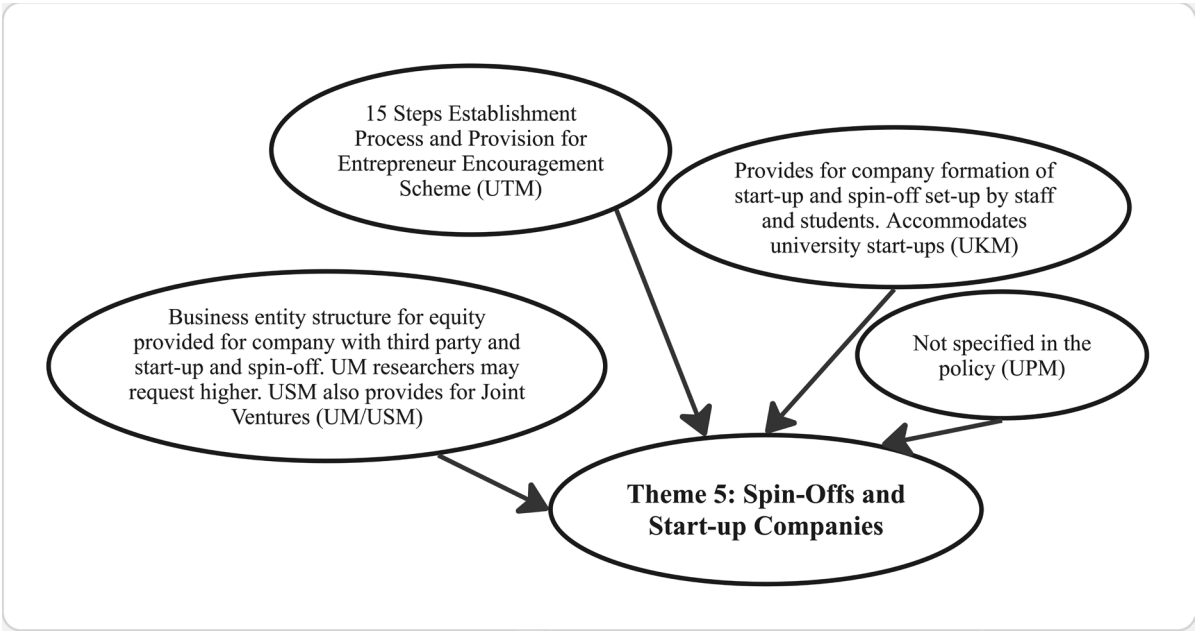


Figure 9. *Initial Thematic Analysis of Theme 5: Spin-offs and Start-up Companies*

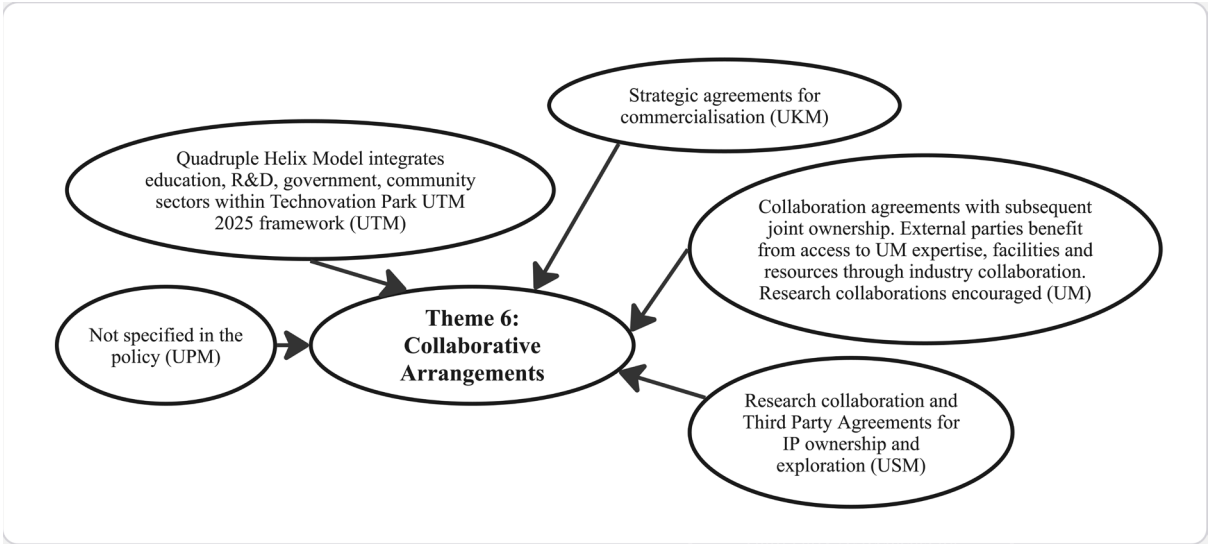


Figure 10. *Initial Thematic Analysis of Theme 6: Collaborative Arrangements*

TTO noted "methodology variance across institutions obfuscated direct comparisons due to absence of standardised protocols".

Nine new gaps (RU8-RU16) emerged, previously unseen in policy analysis such as RU8 (Data for TTO Market Lead Generation Support) due to "current limitations in deal tracking with data analytics capabilities". Resource allocation concerns include RU9 (Inadequate Commercial Viability Framework) and RU10 (Inadequate Technology Maturity Assessment), with universities using "Technology Readiness Level (TRL) scale as self-assessment tool" with no standardised protocols.

Critical industry challenges emerged: RU14 (Lack of Industry Readiness for R&D Adoption) evidenced by industry reluctance towards trial costs and workforce expansion, and RU16 (IP Governance Challenges) where industrial partners bypassed university protocols through direct researcher compensation via honoraria.

4.2.2 Tier 2 TTO Validation and Ranking

The systematic three-tier approach identified and prioritised sixteen innovation gaps using weighted scoring by perceived importance, assigning 16 points to 1st place, down to 1 point for 16th place. The weighted scoring system ranked 16 innovation issues by perceived importance, with SurveyMonkey's algorithm assigning 16 points to 1st place, 15 points to 2nd place, and so on, sequentially down to 1 point for 16th place. Final

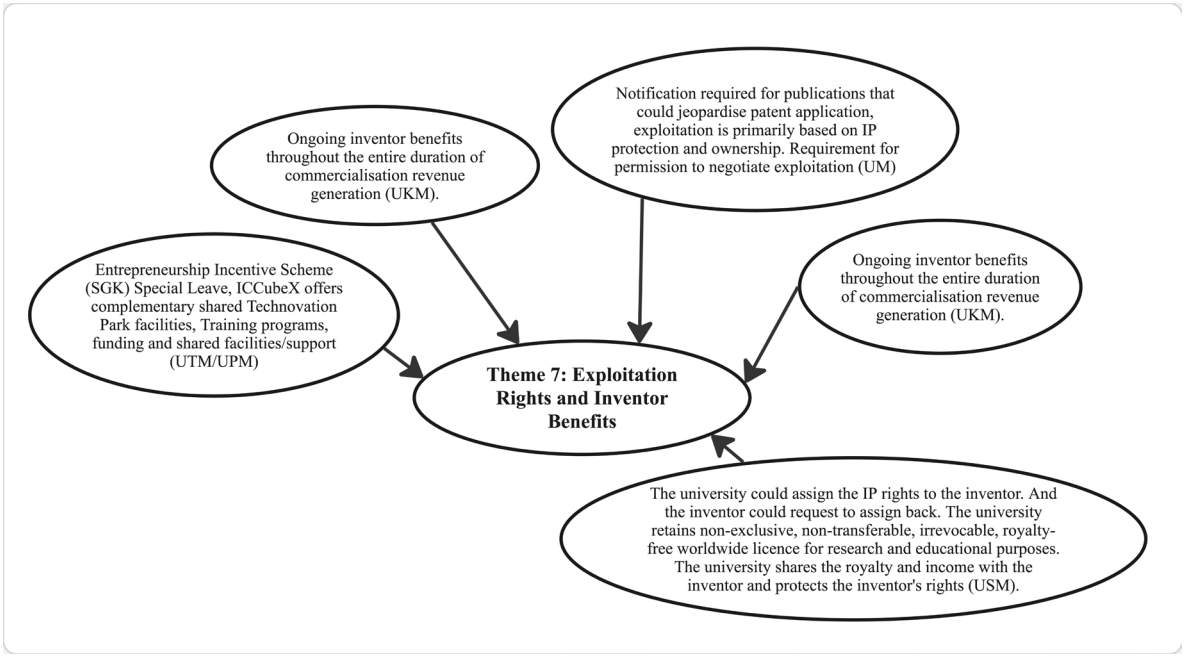


Figure 11. *Initial Thematic Analysis of Theme 7: Exploitation Rights and Inventor Benefits*

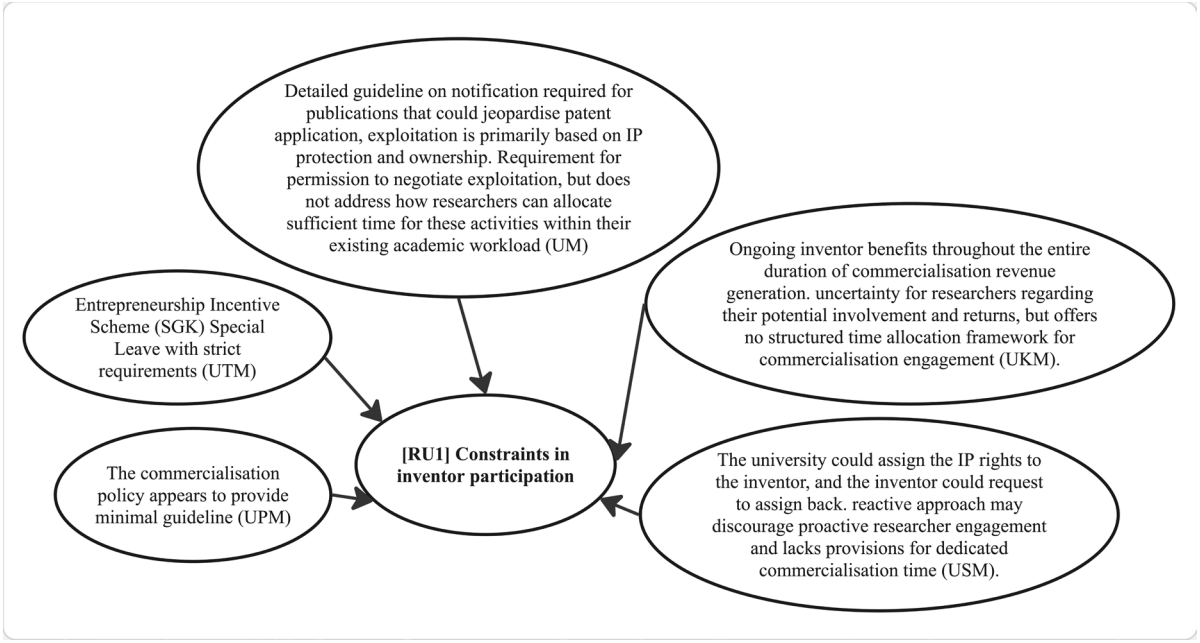


Figure 12. *Final Thematic Analysis of Gap Code RU1*

scores were calculated by multiplying the percentage of respondents who ranked each issue at each position by the corresponding point values for that position, then summing these weighted values across all ranking positions as presented in **Table 11**.

4.2.2.1 First Order List: Complete TTO Priority Ranking

The interview responses from the five Tier 2 TTOs strongly validate the top-ranked innovation gaps, particularly RU1 (Lack of Industry Readiness for R&D Adoption, score: 14.8) and RU2 (Inadequate Commercial Viability Framework, score: 12.4). TTO A explicitly stated they are "looking for more direct engagement with potential markets," while TTO B reported unsuccessful attempts with currently available private or public sector matching platforms.

RU2's commercial viability framework's inadequacy is starkly demonstrated through the dramatic variation in commercialisation rate calculations across TTOs: TTO A reports 10%, TTO B shows 3.94%, TTO C claims 49%, and TTO E indicates <5%. This inconsistency unveils both RU2 and standardisation gaps (RU11 and RU12), as five

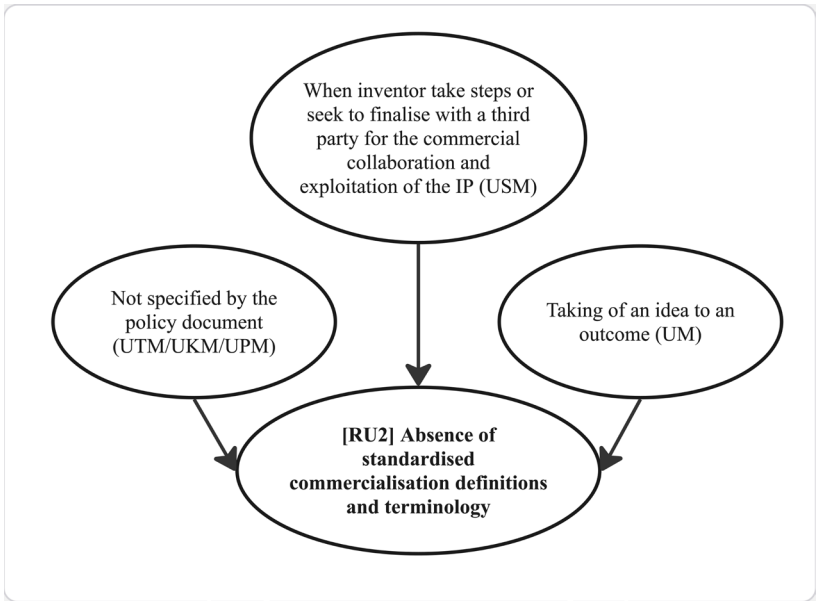


Figure 13: *Final Thematic Analysis of Gap Code RU2*

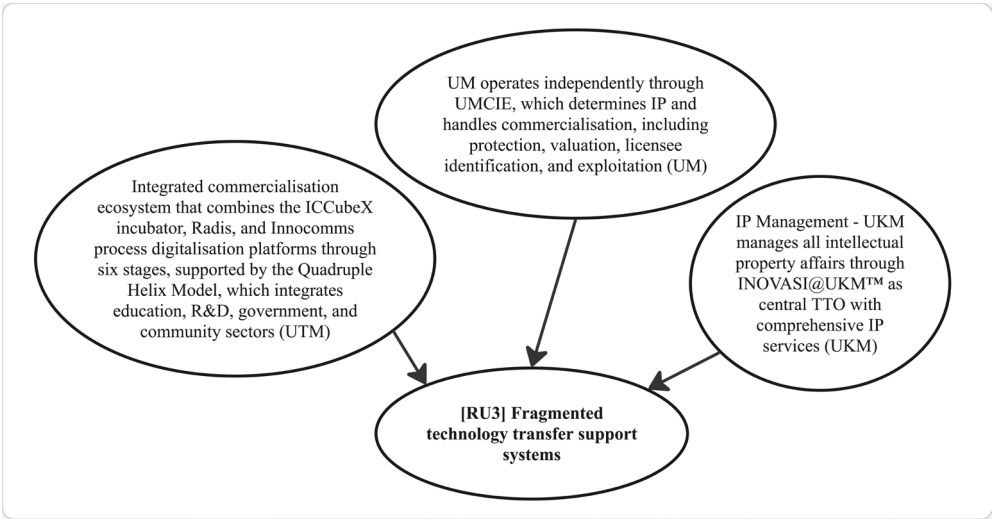


Figure 14. *Final Thematic Analysis of Gap Code RU3*

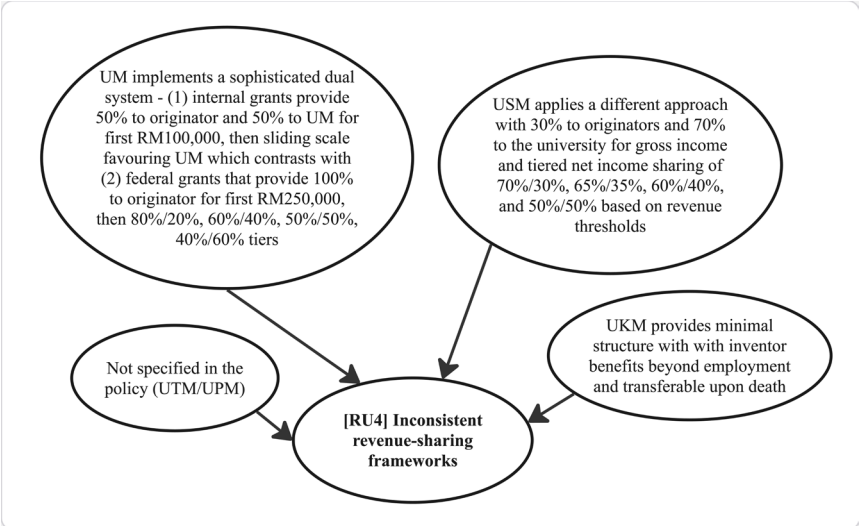


Figure 15. *Final Thematic Analysis of Gap Code RU4*

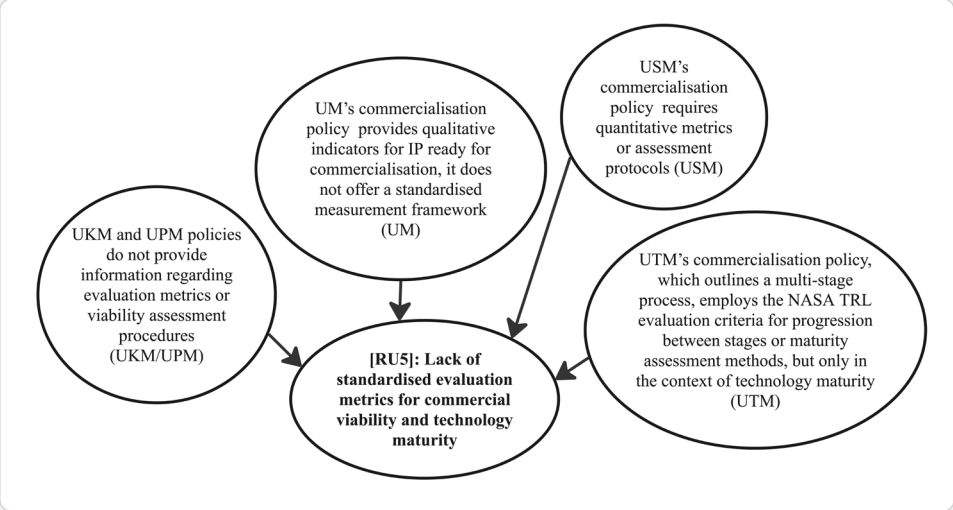


Figure 16: *Final Thematic Analysis of Gap Code RU5*

TTOs indicate five completely different approaches to measuring commercialisation success, verifying the absence of standardised definitions and unified measurement protocols.

Interestingly, the analysis reveals that RU3 (Inadequate Technology Maturity Assessment Frameworks, Score: 12.0) may be less problematic than its ranking suggests, as most interviewed TTOs have included some form of Technology Readiness Level (TRL) framework. TTO A conducts "IP profiling where we profile the IP and determine the TRL level." TTO B uses "NASA TRL (customised)," and TTO D provides a detailed TRL assessment from "basic research (TRL 1) to fully commercialised technology (TRL 9)."

However, the fragmentation challenges (RU5) are evident in TTO B's reliance on multiple disconnected support mechanisms, including government agencies, private and public sector patent platforms, as well as exhibitions. The practical experiences of these TTOs align remarkably well with the theoretical gaps identified, particularly the top-ranked issues around industry engagement and measurement standardisation.

This suggests that the gap prioritisation methodology as presented in **Table 12** accurately reflects real-world challenges facing Malaysian university technology transfer operations.

4.2.2.2 Government Intervention Perceptions: The Critical Filter

Government intervention perceptions served as filter between First and Second Order lists in **Table 12**. "Absence of Standardised Commercialisation Definitions and Terminology" received the highest recognition (60%, n = 3) due to perceived government intervention. This explains its exclusion from the Second Order, despite its significance for government intervention. "Procedural Complexities in Licensing" and "Lack of Industry Readiness for R&D adoption" each received 40% recognition (n=2).

4.2.2.3 Second Order List: Critical Unaddressed Gaps

The Second-Order list in **Table 12** identifies ten critical gaps that require immediate policy attention. Gap Code RU1 "Lack of Industry Readiness for R&D adoption" maintains top ranking (Score: 14.80) despite 40% recognising government initiatives, indicating insufficient current interventions. Gap Code RU2 "Inadequate commercial viability assessment (Score: 12.4), Gap Code RU3 (Inadequate technology maturity assessment" (Score: 12.00) and Gap Code RU4 "Data for TTO market lead generation support" (Score: 11.20) highlight key information and assessment gaps explaining inconsistent assessment practices from TTO A's admission of no formal assessment to TTO E's confirmation of absence of evaluation mechanisms. Additional gaps include Gap Codes RU5-RU10, which address fragmented support systems, standardisation challenges, revenue disparities and procedural complexities.

4.3 Theoretical Integration of Innovation Gaps

Theoretical mapping reveals systematic alignment between established frameworks and empirically-derived commercialisation challenges (see **Table 13**). Resource-based theories address high-scoring technology assessment gaps (RU2, RU3), while Organisation Theory applies across structural and operational challenges (RU4-RU10). Institutional Theory explains gaps involving external pressures and academic-commercial conflicts (RU1, RU5-RU8, RU10), while Social Network Theory addresses relationship-dependent challenges (RU1, RU4, RU6, RU9). The integration demonstrates strong convergence between practitioner-identified gaps and literature-documented barriers across six distinct clusters, with stakeholder &

Table 11: *Scoring of the Tier 2 TTO's Validation and Ranking of Innovation Gaps.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	Score
Constraints in Inventor Participation – Academic conflict	0%	0%	20%	20%	0%	0%	0%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	9.8
Constraints in Inventor Participation – Lack of Recognition	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	60%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9.4
Data for TTO to support the inventor in market lead generation.	0%	20%	20%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	11.2
Absence of Standardised Commercialisation Definitions and Terminology.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	20%	20%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	20%	0%	7
Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System due to the need for TTO's capabilities at a certain standard to support commercialisation	0%	20%	0%	0%	20%	0%	40%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10.8
Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System based on TTO's academic conflict.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	25%	0%	25%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8.25
Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System based on lack of academic recognition for TTO performance.	0%	0%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	25%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9.5
Inconsistent Revenue-Sharing Frameworks from the need for streamlining and accuracy of institutional performance reporting.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	20%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	6.2
Inadequate Commercial Viability Framework from the need to avoid misallocating resources to commercially unviable and projects that lack technology maturity.	20%	20%	0%	20%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	12.4
Inadequate Technology Maturity Assessment Frameworks the need to avoid misallocating resources to commercially unviable projects lacking technological maturity.	20%	0%	20%	20%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	12
Standardisation Challenges in Commercialisation Metrics absence of unified measurement protocols in research commercialisation to calculate the commercialisation rate.	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	20%	40%	0%	0%	0%	6.4
Revenue Distribution Dynamics in Technology Transfer from the multi-stakeholder nature of commercialisation revenue distribution.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	20%	20%	40%	0%	0%	4.4
Procedural Complexities in Licensing as the licensing process encounters significant temporal challenges due to institutional governance requirements.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	20%	20%	40%	0%	3.8
Lack of Industry Readiness for R&D adoption.	60%	0%	20%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	14.8
Critical Challenges in Technology Transfer Operations from lack of industry readiness in ethical dealing with the university.	0%	40%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	20%	0%	9.2
IP Governance Challenges from governance breaches where industrial partners circumvented institutional protocols through direct researcher compensation via honoraria for IP development.	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	0%	60%	3.8

Source: Authors, 2025

Note: An example of the calculation for the scoring, "Constraints in Inventor Participation – Academic Conflict" scored 9.8: 20% ranked it 3rd (14×0.20=2.8), 20% ranked it 4th (13×0.20=2.6), 40% ranked it 8th (9×0.40=3.6) and 20% ranked it 13th (4×0.20=0.8).

Table 12: *Ranking of TTOs' Innovation Gaps – Zero, First and Second Order.*

Gap Code	Innovation gaps (Zero Order)	Gap Code	Innovation gaps (Expanded Zero Order)	Gap Code	Innovation gaps (First Order)	Score	Final Gap Code	Innovation gaps (Second Order)	Score
RU1	Constraints in Inventor Participation - Academic conflict	RU1	Constraints in Inventor Participation - Academic conflict	RU1	Lack of Industry Readiness for R&D adoption.	14.8	RU1	Lack of Industry Readiness for R&D adoption*	14.8
RU2	Absence of Standardised Commercialisation Definitions and Terminology.	RU2	Constraints in Inventor Participation - Lack of Recognition	RU2	Inadequate Commercial Viability Framework from the need to avoid misallocating resources to commercially unviable and projects that lack technology maturity.	12.4	RU2	Inadequate Commercial Viability Framework from the need to avoid misallocating resources to commercially unviable and projects that lack technology maturity.	12.4
RU3	Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System	RU3	Absence of Standardised Commercialisation Definitions and Terminology.	RU3	Inadequate Technology Maturity Assessment Frameworks the need to avoid misallocating resources to commercially unviable projects lacking technological maturity.	12	RU3	Inadequate Technology Maturity Assessment Frameworks the need to avoid misallocating resources to commercially unviable projects lacking technological maturity.	12
RU4	Inconsistent Revenue-Sharing Frameworks	RU4	Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System due to the need for TTO's capabilities at a certain standard to support commercialisation	RU4	Data for TTO to support the inventor in market lead generation.	11.2	RU4	Data for TTO to support the inventor in market lead generation.	11.2
RU5	Lack of standardised evaluation metrics	RU5	Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System based on TTO's academic conflict.	RU5	Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System due to the need for TTO's capabilities at a certain standard to support commercialisation*	10.8	RU5	Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System based on lack of academic recognition for TTO performance.	9.5
		RU6	Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System based on lack of academic recognition for TTO performance.	RU6	Constraints in Inventor Participation - Academic conflict*	9.8	RU6	Critical Challenges in Technology Transfer Operations from lack of industry readiness in ethical dealing with the university.	9.2
		RU7	Inconsistent Revenue-Sharing Frameworks from the need for streamlining and accuracy of institutional performance reporting.	RU7	Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System based on lack of academic recognition for TTO performance.	9.5	RU7	Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System based on TTO's academic conflict.	8.25
		RU8	Data for TTO to support the inventor in market lead generation.	RU8	Constraints in Inventor Participation - Lack of Recognition*	9.4	RU8	Standardisation Challenges in Commercialisation Metrics absence of unified measurement protocols in research commercialisation to calculate the commercialisation rate.	6.4

Gap Code	Innovation gaps (Zero Order)	Gap Code	Innovation gaps (Expanded Zero Order)	Gap Code	Innovation gaps (First Order)	Score	Final Gap Code	Innovation gaps (Second Order)	Score
		RU9	Inadequate Commercial Viability Framework from the need to avoid misallocating resources to commercially unviable and projects that lack technology maturity.	RU9	Critical Challenges in Technology Transfer Operations from lack of industry readiness in ethical dealing with the university.	9.2	RU9	Revenue Distribution Dynamics in Technology Transfer from the multi-stakeholder nature of commercialisation revenue distribution.	4.4
		RU10	Inadequate Technology Maturity Assessment Frameworks the need to avoid misallocating resources to commercially unviable projects lacking technological maturity.	RU10	Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System based on TTO's academic conflict*	8.25	RU10	IP Governance Challenges from governance breaches where industrial partners circumvented institutional protocols through direct researcher compensation via honoraria for IP development.	3.8
		RU11	Standardisation Challenges in Commercialisation Metrics absence of unified measurement protocols in research commercialisation to calculate the commercialisation rate.	RU11	Absence of Standardised Commercialisation Definitions and Terminology.	7			
		RU12	Revenue Distribution Dynamics in Technology Transfer from the multi-stakeholder nature of commercialisation revenue distribution.	RU12	Standardisation Challenges in Commercialisation Metrics absence of unified measurement protocols in research commercialisation to calculate the commercialisation rate.	6.4			
		RU13	Procedural Complexities in Licensing from the licensing process encounters significant temporal challenges due to institutional governance requirements.	RU13	Inconsistent Revenue-Sharing Frameworks from the need for streamlining and accuracy of institutional performance reporting.	6.2			
		RU14	Lack of Industry Readiness for R&D adoption.	RU14	Revenue Distribution Dynamics in Technology Transfer from the multi-stakeholder nature of commercialisation revenue distribution.	4.4			

Gap Code	Innovation gaps (Zero Order)	Gap Code	Innovation gaps (Expanded Zero Order)	Gap Code	Innovation gaps (First Order)	Score	Final Gap Code	Innovation gaps (Second Order)	Score
		RU15	Critical Challenges in Technology Transfer Operations from lack of industry readiness in ethical dealing with the university.	RU15	Procedural Complexities in Licensing as the licensing process encounters significant temporal challenges due to institutional governance requirements*	3.8			
		RU16	IP Governance Challenges from governance breaches where industrial partners circumvented institutional protocols through direct researcher compensation via honoraria for IP development.	RU16	IP Governance Challenges from governance breaches where industrial partners circumvented institutional protocols through direct researcher compensation via honoraria for IP development.	3.8			

Source: Authors, 2025

Note: For the Second Order list, the Innovation gaps with government intervention based on perceptions of TTOs which are marked with (*) under the First Order list were removed. This is with the exception of "Lack of Industry Readiness for R&D adoption" due to the high score of 14.8 as issue rank.

Table 13: *Mapping of Innovation Gaps to Existing Theories and Literature Review.*

Final Gap Code	Innovation Gaps (Second Order)	Applicable Existing Theories	Literature Review Alignment
RU1	Lack of **industry readiness** for R&D adoption.	**Institutional Theory** (external environment shaping industry-university interactions) **Social Network Theory** (industry-university relationship dynamics)	Cluster 5: Stakeholder Coordination and Collaboration Gaps - Weak Cooperation Between Stakeholders (Mudaa et al., 2021)
RU2	Inadequate **commercial viability assessment**	**Resource Based View** (identifying commercially valuable technologies) **Dynamic Capabilities** (developing assessment capabilities) **Resource Orchestration Theory** (strategic resource allocation)	Cluster 6: Market Orientation and Commercial Focus Gaps - Limited Market Research Capabilities (Khademi et al., 2015)
RU3	Inadequate **technology maturity assessment**	**Resource Based View** (assessing technology value and readiness) **Dynamic Capabilities** (adapting assessment methodologies) **Resource Orchestration Theory** (strategic technology selection)	Cluster 6: Market Orientation and Commercial Focus Gaps - Limited Market Research Capabilities (Khademi et al., 2015)
RU4	**Data** to support the inventor in market lead generation	**Resource Based View** (data as strategic resource) **Organisation Theory** (TTO support structures) **Social Network Theory** (market connection networks)	Cluster 3: Financial Constraints – Inadequate Infrastructure (Khademi et al., 2015)
RU5	Fragmented technology transfer support based on **lack of academic recognition for TTO performance**	**Organisation Theory** (support system structures) **Institutional Theory** (academic reward systems and recognition)	Cluster 4: Organisational and Cultural Barriers - Weak Control Systems (Yusof et al., 2012)
RU6	Critical Challenges in technology transfer operations from **lack of industry readiness in ethical dealing with the universit**y	**Institutional Theory** (ethical norms and industry standards) **Social Network Theory** (trust and relationship quality)	Cluster 5: Stakeholder Coordination and Collaboration Gaps - Stakeholder Coordination Issues (Othman et al., 2014)
RU7	Fragmented Technology Transfer Support System based on **TTO's academic conflict**	**Organisation Theory** (internal conflict resolution structures) **Institutional Theory** (competing institutional pressures)	Cluster 4: Organisational and Cultural Barriers - Organisational Culture Barriers (Yusof et al., 2012)
RU8	Standardisation Challenges in Commercialisation Metrics **absence of unified measurement protocols** in research commercialisation **to calculate the commercialisation rate**	**Organisation Theory** (measurement and evaluation processes) **Institutional Theory** (standardisation across institutions)	Cluster 1: Strategic and Policy Gaps - Lack of Policy Uniformity (Mudaa et al., 2021)
RU9	**Revenue distribution dynamics in technology transfer** from the multi-stakeholder nature of commercialisation revenue distribution	**Organisation Theory** (revenue allocation processes) **Social Network Theory** (multi-stakeholder coordination)	Cluster 5: Stakeholder Coordination and Collaboration Gaps - Stakeholder Coordination Issues (Othman et al., 2014)
RU10	IP governance challenges from **governance breaches where industrial partners circumvented institutional protocols** through direct researcher compensation via honoraria for IP development	**Organisation Theory** (governance and control mechanisms) **Institutional Theory** (institutional compliance and protocol enforcement)	Cluster 1: Strategic and Policy Gaps - Protective IP Strategy Limitations (Sarujee et al., 2022; Palfrey, 2011)

Source: Authors, 2025

coordination gaps (Cluster 5) emerging as most prevalent in practice. Notably, multiple theories could apply to each innovation gaps as per the case with Gap Code RU1.

The literature review validation confirms that strategic & policy gaps (Cluster 1) manifest as standardisation and IP governance challenges in practice (RU8, RU10). Organisational & cultural barriers (Cluster 4) translate directly into fragmented support systems and academic conflicts (RU5, RU7). Stakeholder & coordination gaps (Cluster 5) emerge as critical operational challenges across multiple dimensions of industry readiness and multi-stakeholder dynamics (RU1,

RU6, RU9). Market orientation deficiencies (Cluster 6) validate assessment capability gaps in both commercial viability and technology maturity evaluation (RU2, RU3).

This integration validates that stakeholder-identified challenges are multi-dimensional, requiring complementary theoretical perspectives spanning resource management, organisational design, institutional compliance, and network relationships to understand university-technology commercialisation dynamics. The convergence between empirical findings and established literature strengthens the theoretical foundation whilst confirming the practical relevance of documented innovation gaps in Malaysian university commercialisation contexts.

4.4 Global Benchmarking

This comparative analysis examines Malaysia's technology transfer performance against international best practices across Europe, Asia, and the United States. Resource orchestration theory is particularly well-suited for this comparative analysis because it provides a holistic framework that examines how organisations systematically coordinate and leverage multiple resource types simultaneously. The analysis reveals systematic resource orchestration gaps rather than isolated policy deficiencies across four critical dimensions: human resources, social networks, financial configuration, and technology management.

4.4.1 Key Performance Deficits Identified

Human Resource Orchestration: International leaders demonstrate systematic inventor engagement strategies. KU Leuven's 30% revenue distribution model generated more than 124 spin-offs over 50 years. KAIST's systematic training achieved comprehensive patent portfolio management. Malaysia shows fragmented revenue sharing, limited systematic training, and late-stage expert involvement constraining commercialisation to traditional licensing with poor outcomes.

Social Network Integration: EU Policy Support Framework enables KU Leuven's 23-city network with specialised expertise distribution. Japan's Society 5.0 integration achieved ¥230,504M systematic government support with 200+ company partnerships. US Bayh-Dole Act framework generated thousands of licensing agreements. Malaysia demonstrates policy fragmentation across agencies, limited collaborative infrastructure confining commercialisation to narrow sectors, and absence of direct market validation mechanisms.

Financial Resource Configuration: KU Leuven's sustainability model generated consistent revenue over 50 years. University of Florida's Gatorade achieved $300M+ cumulative returns from single innovation. Malaysia shows limited return on investment (ROI) despite substantial government R&D investment (1.5% of GDP), over-reliance on government funding, and narrow IP monetisation strategies missing alternative revenue streams.

Technology Resource Management: FAU's JOSEPHS Open Innovation Lab's direct market testing labs enable immediate market validation reducing development risks. Research Triangle Park supports hundreds of companies with systematic evaluation processes. It is unclear whether Malaysia's technology parks have similar systematic evaluation frameworks, sufficient institutional with capability accumulation, and adequate market intelligence to adopt reactive rather than proactive approaches.

4.4.2 Critical Gap Analysis

Malaysia exhibits performance deficits across resource dimensions, notably in: missing market validation infrastructure (Europe mitigates development risks via immediate feedback), weak evaluation protocols (Asia improves success through systematic filtering), delayed expert involvement (most international universities have recorded higher success with early verifying), and poor market intelligence (international leaders drive proactive technology marketing).

Malaysia's reactive orientation combined with significant institutional experience deficit suggests TTOs lack dynamic capabilities and accumulated organisational learning necessary for sophisticated market intelligence systems. This intrinsically limits ability to identify and cultivate commercial opportunities, constraining the ecosystem to suboptimal performance patterns without deliberate capability-building interventions.

4.5 Innovation Gaps Analysis: Three Challenge Domains

While the literature review identified two primary domains of university-industry innovation challenges, this study's empirical analysis reveals a more complex landscape requiring expansion to three distinct challenge domains. The innovation gaps analysis synthesises multi-theoretical perspectives and quantitative findings to categorise barriers across go-to-market readiness, institutional support systems, and the newly identified third domain of governance and standardisation challenges.

The three domains provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of university-industry innovation gaps and informing targeted intervention strategies for enhancing technology transfer performance.

4.5.1 Go-to-Market and Operational Readiness Challenges

The highest-priority domain centres on market preparation barriers. Industry's lack of R&D adoption

readiness (RU1, 14.8) represents the critical bottleneck. Multi-theoretical convergence validates this finding. Institutional Theory explains this through industry norms that have not evolved for university research interface. Social Network Theory explains this through weak university-industry relationships.

Inadequate commercial viability frameworks (RU2, 12.4) and technology maturity assessment frameworks (RU3, 12.0) highlight systemic resource allocation challenges. Insufficient market intelligence support (RU4, 11.2) stalls effective industry engagement.

4.5.2 Support System and Organisational Framework Challenges

Fragmented technology transfer support systems emerge from lack of academic recognition for TTO performance (RU5, 9.5). Internal academic conflicts contribute as well (RU7, 8.25). These represent controllable institutional policy areas requiring systematic reform.

4.5.3 Governance and Standardisation Issues

Standardisation challenges in commercialisation metrics (RU8, 6.4) create measurement paradoxes. Institutions optimise reported performance through strategic calculation choices rather than substantive improvements. Revenue distribution complexities (RU9, 4.4) and IP governance challenges (RU10, 3.8) affect broader ecosystem functioning.

Performance Measurement Paradox: Dramatic variations in commercialisation rates across institutions expose fundamental standardisation limitations. Rates range from <5% to 49%. This methodological latitude enables institutions to optimise reported performance. They use narrow ratio denominators rather than actual technology transfer effectiveness.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Theoretical Integration of Innovation Gaps

The innovation gaps require theoretical substantiation through integrated framework approaches rather than single-theory solutions. This study's empirical findings validate and extend the six literature-documented innovation gap clusters (Tables 1-6), demonstrating that persistent low commercialisation rates require interventions that must be addressed through multiple theoretical frameworks simultaneously. The convergence between practitioner-identified gaps (RU1-RU10) and established literature clusters confirms the enduring relevance of documented barriers whilst revealing new operational manifestations in Malaysian contexts.

Multi-Theoretical Convergence Analysis: Institutional Theory explains environmental barriers. Industry norms have not evolved for university research interfacing (RU1, 14.8). Academic institutional logics fail to value commercialisation activities (RU5, 9.5). Resource-Based View addresses capability deficits in commercial viability frameworks (RU2, 12.4). It also addresses technology maturity assessment (RU3, 12.0). These indicate absence of valuable assessment capabilities. Organisation Theory reveals structural failures in fragmented support systems (RU7, 8.25). It identifies standardisation challenges (RU8, 6.4) and governance problems (RU9, RU10). Social Network Theory explains relationship-based challenges in industry readiness (RU1). It also explains market intelligence gaps (RU4, 11.2). Dynamic Capabilities Theory addresses adaptation weaknesses in assessment methodologies (RU2, RU3). Resource Orchestration Theory guides strategic resource deployment effectiveness across all priority gaps.

This theoretical mapping reveals important insights as to how Malaysian public universities could address the gaps which are affecting their commercialisation rate. Single-theory approaches prove insufficient for addressing complex, interconnected innovation gaps. The field requires integrated models incorporating variables from multiple theories.

5.2 Sphere of Control Analysis

Romanowski's (2019) three-dimensional success framework clarifies university responsibility boundaries. This framework directly addresses the Financial Constraints (Cluster 3) and Market Orientation & Commercial Focus gaps (Cluster 6) documented in the literature review, recognising that marketing and financial success extend beyond university control. Universities bear primary responsibility for technical success through robust pre-transfer assessment capabilities, which directly relates to the Skills & Competency Gaps (Cluster 2).

This was identified by Mudaa et al. (2021) and Khademi et al. (2015). The reconciliation between success dimensions and six theoretical frameworks reveals complementary relationships. Success dimensions provide outcome frameworks. These frameworks supply processes for achieving outcomes within university control.

5.3 Global Benchmarking Insights

International comparison reveals Malaysia's systematic resource orchestration gaps across four dimensions, validating the Market Orientation and Commercial Focus Gaps (Cluster 6) identified by Khademi et al. (2015): **Commercial Viability Assessment Deficits:** International leaders employ sophisticated multi-layered

assessment systems, directly addressing the "Limited Market Research Capabilities" gap documented in the literature review. Europe's JOSEPHS lab enables real customer testing. This reduces development risks by 60%. Asia's systematic evaluation protocols achieve higher success rates through filtering mechanisms. Malaysia's ad-hoc processes and late-stage expert involvement create structural weaknesses. Resources are invested without systematic validation. This results in low ROI despite substantial R&D investment. **Systemic Performance Deficits:** Malaysia faces performance deficits across all resource management dimensions. The institutional experience deficit compared to global leaders creates compound disadvantages. These particularly affect assessment capabilities.

These findings extend beyond the literature-documented Financial Constraints (Cluster 3) and Organisational & Cultural Barriers (Cluster 4), revealing that Malaysia's challenges encompass systematic capability deficits that compound the individual gap categories identified by previous researchers (Yusof et al., 2012; Mudaa et al., 2021; Khademi et al., 2015).

5.4 Strategic Implications

Priority Focus for TTOs: Industry's limited R&D adoption capacity (RU1, 14.8) represents both simultaneous institutional failures and weak network connections, directly validating the Stakeholder Coordination and Collaboration Gaps (Cluster 5) identified by Mudaa et al. (2021) and Othman et al. (2014). TTOs should therefore develop enhanced commercial viability and technology maturity assessment frameworks, addressing the Market Orientation & Commercial Focus gaps (Cluster 6) whilst building the Skills & Competency capabilities (Cluster 2) identified as critical barriers in the literature review. This requires capacity development approaches combining Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities Theory.

Measurement Reform Priorities: Significant methodological variations demonstrate urgent need for paradigm shift. The shift should move from outcome-based metrics to process-based assessment. This enables systematic evaluation of controllable pre-transfer activities and maintains appropriate accountability boundaries.

6. CONCLUSION

This study validates and extends the innovation gaps literature by empirically confirming all six gap clusters documented in previous research, whilst identifying specific operational manifestations in Malaysian public research universities. This study contributes to the technology transfer literature by identifying and prioritising ten critical innovation gaps that span three challenge domains in Malaysian public research universities which are affecting their commercialisation rates. The Pre-Transfer Market Readiness Gaps Conceptual Framework provides novel multi-theoretical analysis. This advance understanding beyond fragmented single-theory approaches. **Theoretical Contribution:** The study demonstrates that commercialisation challenges require simultaneous application of six complementary theoretical frameworks. Multi-theoretical convergence verifies the complex, multi-dimensional gap nature. The sphere of control analysis distinguishes controllable pre-transfer activities from uncontrollable post-transfer outcomes. This provides practical frameworks for appropriate institutional accountability. **Literature Validation and Extension:** The study confirms the persistent relevance of innovation gap clusters identified across multiple prior studies (Mudaa et al., 2021; Khademi et al., 2015; Yusof et al., 2012; Sarujee et al., 2022; Palfrey, 2011; Othman et al., 2014). The empirical findings demonstrate that Strategic & Policy Gaps (Cluster 1) manifest as standardisation and IP governance challenges in practice, whilst Stakeholder Coordination Gaps (Cluster 5) emerge as the most prevalent operational barriers. This validation strengthens the theoretical foundation whilst revealing that documented innovation gaps require integrated rather than isolated interventions. **Policy Synthesis:** Commercial viability assessment emerges as the highest-leverage intervention point, directly addressing the Market Orientation and Commercial Focus Gaps (Cluster 6) whilst intersecting with Skills and Competency Gaps (Cluster 2) documented by Khademi et al. (2015). The framework's process-based assessment paradigm offers policymakers systematic alternatives to outcome-focused metrics, moving beyond the measurement challenges inherent in Financial Constraints (Cluster 3) identified by Lim et al. (2016). This enables meaningful inter-institutional comparisons while maintaining accountability within appropriate boundaries.

Practical Application: Universities should focus limited resources on adopting systematic pre-transfer assessment capabilities. They should not attempt to influence post-transfer market dynamics beyond their control. **Future Research:** Future research should explore industry readiness factors from market perspectives and develop standardised process-based metrics that bridge outcome and process orientations. Additionally, longitudinal studies should examine how the six literature-documented gap clusters evolve as institutions implement integrated intervention strategies, particularly investigating whether addressing Stakeholder Coordination & Collaboration Gaps (Cluster 5) creates cascading improvements across other gap categories.

This research demonstrates that effective technology commercialisation requires recognising both the individual innovation gaps documented in prior literature and their complex interdependencies in practice. The validation of all six gap clusters (Strategic/Policy, Skills/Competency, Financial, Organisational/Cultural, Stakeholder Coordination, and Market Orientation & Commercial Focus) through empirical data confirms the comprehensive nature of commercialisation challenges whilst focusing institutional efforts on systematically improvable activities within universities' operational sphere. The study advances understanding by demonstrating that innovation gaps identified across different contexts and timeframes remain critically relevant, requiring integrated theoretical approaches rather than fragmented single-gap interventions.

Limitations

This study has several important limitations. First, it examines only public research universities' commercialisation policies. This excludes private universities that may adopt different approaches and face distinct constraints. Second, while TTO perspectives were comprehensively captured, government agency viewpoints were not systematically incorporated into the analysis. Third, relying on interview data introduces potential self-reporting biases. Participants may reflect institutional positions rather than actual practices. Lastly, the existing theoretical frameworks for university technology commercialisation are limited by their tendency to be applied in isolation rather than integrated approaches, their failure to capture the unique tensions between universities' academic and commercial missions, and their inadequate treatment of contextual factors such as timing, cultural differences, and the iterative nature of innovation. Resource-Based View and Institutional Theory are often too static and deterministic, while newer frameworks still struggle to explain how capabilities and networks evolve over time, overlook individual-level factors like academic motivation, and fail to address the complex interplay between technical, market, and organisational factors that determine commercialisation success.

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From Mountain to Metaphor: Purpose, Audience, and Fidelity in Two Intersemiotic Poetic Retellings of 'Puteri Gunung Ledang'

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Intersemiotic translation, the transformation of a text from one semiotic system to another, remains under explored in Translation Studies. This study examines how purpose, audience, and fidelity influence two intersemiotic poetic renditions of the Malay folktale 'Puteri Gunung Ledang', originally documented in prose. **Methods**: The analysis employed Chatman's Narrative Theory (1978) combined with Freytag's Pyramid Model (1863) to identify invariant and variant elements and Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis to classify themes by comparing each poetic version with the source folktale. Vermeer's Skopos Theory (1978) was applied to interpret the translators' stated purposes, gathered through semi-structured interviews. **Results**: Despite multiple variant features introduced in both renditions, a clear invariant narrative core persists, ensuring functional fidelity to the original. Thematic mapping of interview data revealed that the translators' creative choices were shaped by personal experiences, their understanding of the role of art, and their aspirations to transmit cultural heritage to future Malaysian generations. **Discussion**: The findings demonstrate that fidelity in intersemiotic translation is maintained not by literal replication but by preserving a functional core, in line with Skopos Theory. Variations served to adapt the folktale for intended audiences while reflecting the translators' artistic visions and socio-cultural commitments. **Conclusion**: This study highlights how intersemiotic translation balances fidelity and creativity, with translators' purposes and audience considerations guiding variance. Such works serve as both artistic reinterpretations and vehicles for cultural continuity and heritage preservation.

Keywords: Intersemiotic translations, Invariant Core and Variant Features, 'Puteri Gunung Ledang', Skopos Theory, Malay Folklore, Cultural Heritage.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the interlinking of verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems has markedly transformed communication trends, linking cultures across the globe, in ways that previously were not thought possible. In the field of Translation Studies (TS), this has massive implications as the study of translation can no longer be confined to interlingual translations based purely on the verbal linguistic system but must include all forms of sign systems. This is stressed by Marias, who forewarns

that "with technological development, multimodal communication is becoming the norm, and TS will define itself out of existence if it limits its interests to interlingual translation only" (2019, p. 22-23). Marias's concerns have been alleviated by TS coming into the 'era of intersemiotic translation', a phrase used by Fabbri (2000, p. 282), in reference to the "spread of visual and verbal literacy and the intensification of mass communication technologies" (Kourdis and Yoka, 2014, p. 164) resulting in the overlapping of linguistic and non-linguistic semiotic systems.

Introduced by Jakobson (1959) as a triadic division of translation, 'intersemiotic translation or transmutation' is defined as "the interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems" (Venuti, 2012, p. 127). While Jakobson's initial definition of intersemiotic translation was based on the premise of language as the primary mode, Aguiar and Queiroz (2009) stress that intersemiotic translations should include "translations of texts of all kinds" (p. 1) which implies that an intersemiotic transfer can occur between two non-verbal sign systems (i.e., where no written text is involved) for example, a painting being represented as a sculpture or even between two types of verbal systems like prose to poetry.

Gottlieb's (2017) division of intersemiotic translation into three main categories, almost sixty years after Jakobson's (1959) initial definition, further demonstrates the fluidity of this type of translation. The three categories are: diasemiotic (uses different channel(s) than in the original e.g., written into played music categorized as monosemiotic or silent movie into a radio play characterized as polysemiotic), ultrasemiotic (uses more channels than in the original, e.g., novel translated into film) and infrasemiotic (uses fewer channels than in the original e.g., a mime performing a drama which initially had spoken lines)' (p. 51). O'Halloran (2016) maintains that the "definition of intersemiotic translation has been broadened to include translations across non-linguistic semiotic resources" (p. 199) owing to the emergence of multiple semiotic systems in the digital age. The cultural turn in TS has also extended translation activity beyond the domain of language to include cultural and social domains with purpose and functionality becoming key issues in translation theories and research areas.

This paper which focuses on poetic recreations of a folktale implicitly makes a case for poetry arising from prose to be viewed as intersemiotic translation. Two reasons for this research focus are: firstly, poetic translations in the past have not been considered as intersemiotic translations and secondly, intersemiotic renditions of a Malay folktale are yet to be studied in relation to the skopos/purpose of the translator. Before proceeding further, the following explanation provides justifications as to why poetic retellings should be regarded as intersemiotic translations. Although poems and folktales, use similar sign systems i.e., verbal, the shift from a folktale documented in prose to a poem involves the application of different structures and language symbols to express meaning. "Poetry expresses concepts and things by indirection. To put it simply, a poem says one thing and means another" (Riffaterre, 1978, p.1). Thus, when a story with a narrator is translated to a stanzaic poem with a persona there occurs a change in the "semiotic composition" (Gottlieb, 2005, p.11) which signifies a shift in mode and thus qualifies the poem to be an intersemiotic translation.

Furthermore, Sütiste and Torop (2007, p. 203) aptly emphasize that "one and the same verbal text may exist within culture simultaneously as a verbal, multimedial, audiovisual, or audial text," and Damaskinidis (2016) argues that "it is impossible to ignore the relationship between them" (p. 300). In this study, the source text (ST) in prose form exists simultaneously with its target text (TT) in poetic form. Although, there is no change in the explicit verbal sign system between the prose narrative and the 2 poems, there is an implicit shift as the folktale is a straightforward, literal narrative whereas the poems display qualities of visual iconicity to communicate meaning through a range of sensual imagery which includes auditory perceptions.

Since the poetic renditions differ significantly in comparison to the prose ST, this paper aims to firstly, identify the invariant core, namely the elements of the story and the theme/s in the original narrative which have been kept intact in the target intersemiotic rendition, and the variant features, which are the changes (i.e., amplifications, omissions, additions, modifications) that have been made in the intersemiotic TTs when compared with the original folktale recorded in *Sejarah Melayu*/ the 'Malay Annals' (1612). This will reveal the degree of fidelity of the translators to the original folktale. Secondly, it aims to determine the skopos which is the translators' purpose in producing the intersemiotic poetic retellings of 'Puteri Gunung Ledang'; this will provide insight on why their poems are recreated with certain variances.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

An extensive literature review has revealed that intersemiotic research on Eastern literary narratives like novels, epic poems, or plays are generally distinctly fewer than those produced in Western countries, and in relation to folk or fairy tales, the dearth in research is even more evident. Some recent studies on Western fairy tales include Sahakyan (2024) who discusses the intersemiotic interpretations of Brothers Grimm's, 'Hansel and Gretel'

(1812) and H.C. Andersen's, 'The Little Match Girl' (1845) in a series of book illustrations, animated films and movies, Jivanyan (2024) who studies the intersemiotic recreations of de Villeneuve's 'Beauty and the Beast' (1740), and Li and Zlatev (2022) who undertake a cognitive semiotic study to explore the narrative range and force of H. C. Andersen' fairy tale, 'The Little Mermaid' which is represented in Edvard Eriksen's sculpture Den lille Havfrue by in Copenhagen. Bubnášová (2020) has analysed the Slovak radio adaptations of Andersen's fairy tales as intersemiotic translations owing to the transference of the written word to an acoustic mode and provides a case study on Peter Gregor's 1992 radio dramatization of the 'Wild Swans' and Sohár (2019) examines the translation of Brothers Grimm's 'Snow White' (1812) which are represented via language and pictures. All of these studies are centred on Western fairy tales, thus excluding Eastern fairy tales as potential research data for TS.

In relation to folktales, only one study by Liu (2022) was found that focuses on Eastern folktales. He (2022) investigates the intersemiotic transference of Chinese folktales on gods and demons from classical novels like 'Xiyouji' (Journey to the West), 'Fengshen yanyi' (Creation of Gods) and 'Jingshi tongyan' (Stories to Caution the World) into Chinese animated films. Liu's (2022) intersemiotic study on Chinese folktales is a rare find and this underscores the need to extend research on Eastern folktales which are represented intersemiotically. This paper intends to contribute to this lack in research by analysing the popular Malay folktale, 'Puteri Gunung Ledang' also known as 'The Princess of Mount Ophir' and 2 translated versions of this folktale in the form of poems titled 'Puteri Gunung Ledang' (2012) by Ninot Aziz and 'Message of Princess of Mount Ledang to Sultan Mahmud' (2013) by Zurinah Hassan.

As there are 32 variants of the 'Sejarah Melayu' ('Malay Annals') where the written version of this folktale originates from, the ST in this paper refers to C.C. Brown's (1952) English translation of this story which is about 841 words. It is translated from Raffles M.S. 18 which is acknowledged to be the oldest version of the 'Sejarah Melayu' ('Malay Annals') written in 1612. The importance of the 'Malay Annals' lies in it being a prolific text on Malay history and literature as it gives insight into the Malay medieval court, culture, and political system. In 2001, the 'Malay Annals' was listed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme International Register marking it a document of significant heritage with universal value, worthy of preservation.

The earliest reference to the Princess of Mount Ledang is found in Tomé Pires's (1944) travelogue written between 1512-1515. The author describes her as an "enchanted queen in the hill of Malacca called Gunong Ledang (Gulom Leydam) (p. 162)". In his book, 'Description of Malacca' (1613), Godinho de Eredia (1997) compares Mount Ledang to Mount Sibilla in Italy, where at the peak of the mountain lies the Sibyl cave and its sorceress. Eredia states that the princess was Parameswara's consort who retreated to Gunung Ledang and attained immortality by practising magic. Winstedt (1951) in 'The Malay Magician being Shaman, Saiva and Sufi' writes that the princess has the ability to change her appearance according to the time of the day; in the morning, she appears as a girl, in the afternoon as a woman and at night as an old lady.

In the 'Malay Annals' (1612), this folktale begins with Sultan Mansur Shah's quest to find a wife who fits his grandiose status. A delegation is sent out to the mountain to request for the princess's hand in marriage. The princess, however, sets seven implausible conditions for the king to fulfil before he can marry her:

"… let him make for me a bridge of gold and a bridge of silver from Malaka to Gunong Ledang: and for a betrothal gift let there be seven trays of mosquitos' hearts, seven trays of mites' hearts, a vat of young areca-nut water, a vat of tears, a cup of the Raja's blood and a cup of his son's blood. On these conditions I approve the request of the Raja of Malaka…" (lines 36-40). Upon hearing the requests, the king states that "All that she demands we can provide, save only the blood of our son; that we cannot provide, for our heart would not suffer us to take it" (lines 48-49).

The differences between this 500-year-old version against the 19th century intersemiotic poetic translations suggest that intersemiotic translators have high visibility in their works and therefore highlight the need for research to better understand the role of translators as intersemiotic re/creators.

3. METHODS

The study comprises two sets of data: (i) the ST (a narrative prose) and TTs (2 poems) and (ii) the interview responses from 2 poets. The first set of data i.e., the poems were obtained via a thorough internet search carried out multiple times over a period of six months The criteria used to select the poems was firstly, they have to be of international standard, produced by well-known professionals. Table 1 below attests to this.

Secondly, there needed to be an explicit or implicit link between the ST and the intersemiotic recreation and this connection had to be acknowledged by the poets. This confirmation was provided by the translator's response to Question 4 in the interview i.e., What are some important sources that you have used to create your art? How much of the 'Puteri Gunung Ledang' story have you heard/read/watched? Did any of these works have an impact on your own work? Their responses are recorded in Table 2 below.

Table 1: *Selected Intersemiotic Poetic Translations*

No	Mode	Translator	Semiotic Mode	Year
1.	Poem *Puteri Gunung Ledang*	Ninot Aziz (Zalina Abdul Aziz) (Writer) - award winning Malaysian author and poet - specialises in Malay and Asian legends - actively publishes young adult novels based on folktales which have received awards	Verbal (English)	2012
2.	Poem: *The Message from Princess of Mount Ledang to Sultan Mahmud*	Zurinah Hassan (Writer) - Malaysian National Laureate - winner of numerous awards locally and internationally - works translated into English, Japanese, French, Spanish and Russian	Verbal (English)	2013

Source: Author, 2025

Table 2: *Translators Acknowledgement of the Link between the ST and the selected Intersemiotic Translations*

Translator	Response to Interview Question 4
Ninot Aziz (NA)	Puteri Gunung Ledang was something that I grew up with. So, yeah, I grew up with it, you know, it was in the movies so this was the inspiration that I got from …Yes, yeah…that is the PGL I grew up with and err though I did not watch the movie again to write this poem but aah, we tell each other this story all the time in the family, so it is more like oral storytelling yes, so that is how it was….
Zurinah Hassan (ZH)	The first time I come across the story, I was in primary school, aah, so, through kita punya cikgu-cikgu selalu cakap lah [our teachers who always said] and aah then, there is one teacher yang lah macam kata inspiring juga lah aah he told us about, dia kata, he told us PGL ni actually is a social critic…

Source: Author, 2025

The rest of the interview questions focused mainly on insights as to who/what influenced the translators in their decision-making process and the purpose for the creation of these intersemiotic works.

As this study was part of the author's doctoral thesis, the first step was to obtain consent from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the related educational institution. Once the research plan was approved, the participants of the study (for the second data set, i.e., the interviews) were identified based on the criteria above (refer to Table 1 & 2). The complete study included 6 intersemiotic translators of PGL comprising the 2 poets discussed in this present paper, 2 artists, 1 sculptor and 1 exhibitor. Next, a set of interview questions was formulated, focusing mainly on the translator's *skopos* i.e., their purpose and reason for changing or retaining aspects of the original tale in their recreations. A pilot study was also carried out to further restructure and modify the final interview questions. Finally, the participants were contacted and the scope of the study was explained to them. With the participants' consent, the interview was carried out and transcribed for analysis.

For the analysis of the first set of data, the ST and both poems were deconstructed in accordance with Chatman's (1978) narrative framework (Figure 1). Chatman's structuralist model was used as it caters to both verbal and non-verbal narrative texts. The narrative structure of the poems was broken down and further examined in terms of story i.e., the main elements or content of the story and its discourse or how the story is expressed. It was important to combine Freytag's Pyramid Model (1863) with Chatman's as Freytag's model traces the plot or progression of the story which is not included in Chatman's framework. The combination of both these models aided in identifying the invariant core and variant features of the folktale in the intersemiotic poetic translations.

As a first step, the ST (narrative prose of PGL) was deconstructed based on the two models above and the findings were classified as the content (*fabula*) and discourse or forms of expression (*sjuzet*) which included Freytag's plot structure. This was recorded in a table. Likewise, the 2 poems content and discourse were also deconstructed and presented in a table. Following this, the content and discourse which makes up the narrative structure of the poetic TTs were compared with the narrative structure of the ST to identify the invariant core and variant features of the folktale manifested in the 2 poetic retellings. This final table of the findings for data set 1 which relates to research question 1 is presented in Table 3 in the analysis section.

For the analysis of the second data set, i.e., the responses to the interview questions, the interview transcripts were examined using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (2006). Reflexive Thematic Analysis

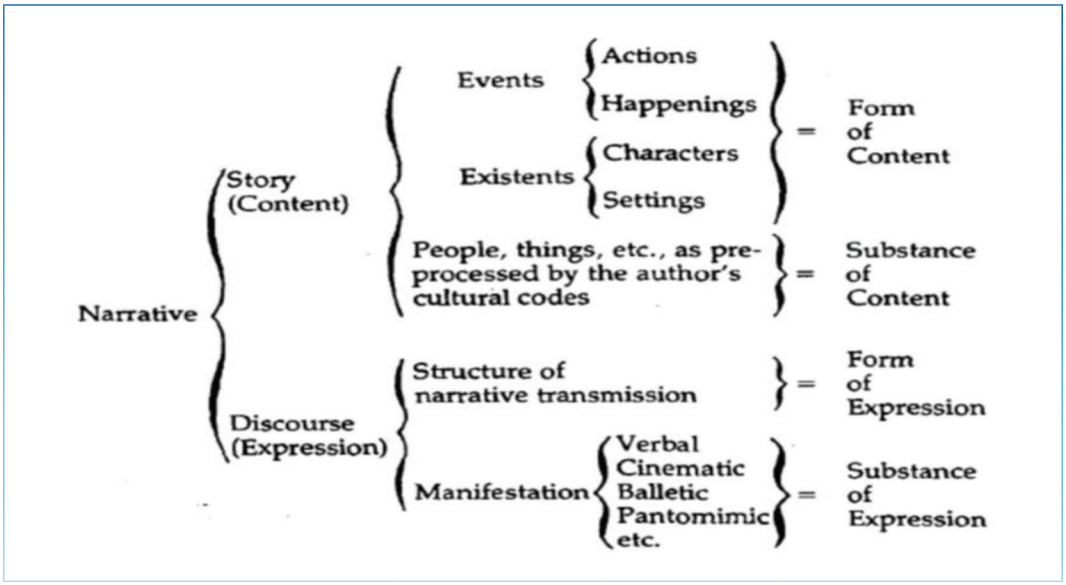


Figure 1. *Chatman's Elements of Narrative Theory (Chatman 1978, p. 26)*

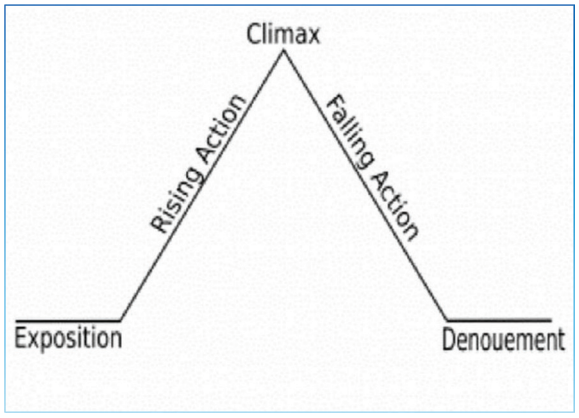


Figure 2. *Freytag's Pyramid Model (Freytag 1900/1863)*

(RTA) is a flexible, interpretative approach to qualitative data analysis which is used to identify and analyse patterns or themes in a data set. It is a six-phase systematic process used to identify specific themes from the interview transcripts which are then coded for analysis. This process, which is crucial to answer research question 2, provides insight into the purpose of the intersemiotic translations and the translators' decision-making process. The coded themes were then studied to identify the degree to which the translators had adhered to the fundamentals of Skopos Theory in reference to the concepts of aim and fidelity. Aim refers to translators' first obligation which is to ensure that translatums fulfil the purpose of the translations (which is determined wholly by a commissioning client or the translator or as a collaborative purpose by both parties) while fidelity is the degree to which the TT features and message match the ST. Here, the fidelity rule is subservient to the Skopos rule which means that the ST plays a limited role in the translation process.

The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed five major themes (C1 - C5) and three minor themes (C6 – C8). Major themes were directly or indirectly related to the skopos of the translator, while the minor themes expressed other aspects of the translator's work or worldviews as a whole. To identify these themes, the interview transcripts were read over multiple times and the utterances with similar themes were coded carefully. Interrater reliability was ensured by the researcher's supervisors; the coding of the interview responses were validated after several rounds of discussion. C stands for code followed by a number which represents a theme while a number in a bracket after these as in C3 (8) refers to the sequence of the utterance in the interview.

The data collection and analyses procedures used in this research were carried out systematically. Triangulation in the form of narrative mappings and interviews were used to validate the research findings. It encapsulates a bottom-up process where data was collected in a realistic setting by conducting interviews which were then analysed using a meaning-making/ interpretative process, with conclusions drawn at the tail-end of the research process.

4. ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The mapping of the ST with the 2 intersemiotic poetic TTs with regard to content of the story (*fabula*) and the discourse or form of expression (*sjuzet*) showed that each poet has kept intact some core aspects (the invariant core) of the ST and simultaneously added multiple shifts (the variant features) to their recreations. Table 3 below shows the summarized analysis of the invariant core and variant features found in the poems when compared to the ST.

Table 3. *Summarized Analysis of the Invariant Core and Variant Features in the Selected Intersemiotic Translations Mapped Against the ST*

Intersemiotic Translators /Translations	*Kernels-Major Events Mostly/Fully Retained from the ST* ***(INVARIANT CORE)***	*Kernels-Major Events Presented Differently or Omitted from the ST* ***(VARIANT FEATURES)***	*Satellites – Minor Events Mostly/ Fully Retained from the ST* ***(INVARIANT CORE)***	*Satellites - Events Presented Differently or Omitted from the ST* ***(VARIANT FEATURES)***
Ninot Aziz (NA)	- King looking for a new wife	- Omission of King's name	- Difficult to climb the mountain	- Addition of dialogues
'Puteri Gunung Ledang' (2012)	- 7 conditions are stated	- King's reaction to the conditions and his decision to sacrifice his son	- Only Tun Mamad reaches the summit - The magical garden on the summit	- Addition of mystical and eerie mood Hang Tuah goes into the forest
	- Depicts the following characters: Princess, King, Tun Mamad, Sang Setia, Hang Tuah	- Depiction of the Princess as a strong persona and the king as a weak persona - Depiction of Tun Mamad as a round character	- Meeting the ladies-in-waiting	
	- Setting is Mount Ledang and Malacca	- Description of the suffering of the people		
	- Meeting the old lady			
Zurinah Hassan (ZH) 'Message of Princess of Mount Ledang to Sultan Mahmud' (2013)	- The identity of the King is given in the title	- The Princess herself meets Tun Mamat, he does not meet the old lady	**NONE**	- Omission of the difficult journey to the mountain
	- King looking for a new wife is implied	- The Princess is the mouthpiece, the main character		- Omission of the magical garden on the summit
	- 7 conditions are stated	- Created based on one event only, the meeting of the Princess and Tun Mamat.		- Omission of meeting the ladies-in-waiting
	- Depicts the following characters: Princess, Tun Mamad	- One-sided dialogue		- Addition of all other princesses that the King has desired
	- Setting is Mount Ledang and Malacca	- Omission of the King's reaction to the conditions		
		- Feminist viewpoint		

Source: Author, 2025

The invariant core shared by both the poems are the 7 conditions that are set by the princess. In terms of fidelity, Ninot Aziz's poem has stayed mostly true to the ST in terms of plot structure. The distinct invariance in Ninot Aziz's poem is introduced through the character of the king. The ST depicts a king who is compassionate and rules according to reason as he does not have the heart to kill his son to fulfil the princess's conditions. However, in Ninot Aziz's version, the king succumbs to his desire as when the king is told what the seven conditions are, he proceeds to wield his power to fulfil the conditions, no matter the cost or lives risked. There is also the otherworldly mood of mysticism that surrounds the princess which permeates throughout Ninot Aziz's poem, adding a supernatural tone which can be linked to Tomé Pires' Suma Oriental (1512-1515) and Godinho de Eredia's writings (1613) in regard to the mystical nature of the princess. In the ST, it is the mystical atmosphere of the mountain the princess resides on that is felt as the king's men ascend Mount Ledang.

In comparison, Zurinah Hassan has produced an entirely new version of the original narrative by using only one aspect of the ST which is the meeting of the messenger with the princess and creates a monologue between the princess and the messenger, Tun Mamat. The princess's aversion regarding the Sultan's proposal dominates the poem entirely. This is a stark difference from the ST where the princess remains mostly voiceless and is unable to directly refuse the king's proposal as was the custom of that time. During that era, to refuse a king's request was akin to treason. Yahaya (1991) states that the "ruler enjoyed the almost unquestionable loyalty of his

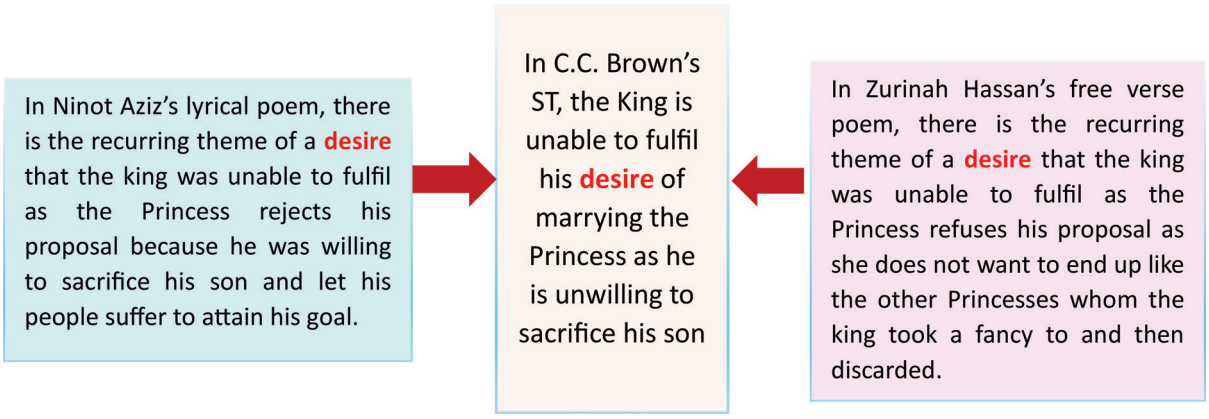


Figure 3. *Link between the ST and Selected Intersemiotic Translations*

subjects" (p.5) which basically means that the ruler had absolute power and authority over everyone. Written from a feminine perspective which are strongly evoked by the poet's personal experiences, Zurinah Hassan's princess markedly differs from the traditional Malay woman as the princess is depicted as a strong, powerful woman who knows her mind and is fearless as she defiantly refuses to fulfil a king's desires, an idea which is not evident in the ST.

The invariant core and variant features in terms of additions, deletions, and amplifications in the intersemiotic translations indicate that the translators had a specific purpose to achieve via their works. This can be related to the idea of the functionality of a text as opposed to equivalence. According to Kelly (1979), all translation theories are underpinned by a theory of language, based either on the instrumental or hermeneutic model. The former stresses on equivalence, word to word translation of a text to keep meaning intact while the latter focuses on functionality of a text. The current findings show that intersemiotic translations are distinctly functional in nature rather than literal as translation is seen as "an interpretation of the source text whose form, meaning, and effect are seen as variable, subject to inevitable transformations [rewritings] during the translating process" (Venuti, 2012, p. 483). It is dependent not only on the nature of the ST but also on the aim or purpose of the translation work. Thus, with regard to both the poetic renditions, it is the hermeneutic approach that predominantly operates with its creators.

When scrutinized further, a consistent core that links the ST and the two intersemiotic poetic renderings was revealed as depicted by Figure 3 above. The link is desire, i.e., of possessing the princess which remains a futile goal for the one who desires her. There is also the notion of how desires when unchecked can lead to detrimental consequences, from losing a nation to losing oneself. By interconnecting the idea of desire with gender, both poets evidently subscribe to a feminist translation perspective. Simon (1996) and Flotow (2011) state that feminist translators tend to make themselves visible in their works as their gender, ideological beliefs and culture shape their translations. This is clearly depicted in both the poetic translations as the voice of the princess is at the forefront, explicitly highlighting feminist themes as opposed to the ST where the princess is rendered voiceless.

As mentioned earlier, Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) approach was used to analyse the interview responses to identify the skopos of the translators, i.e., research question 2. 5 major themes and 2 minor themes were identified (Table 4). There were 2 major themes (C1 and C2) that emerged from the interview responses which were related directly to the translators' skopos (Table 4) while C3-C5 were indirectly related to some of the aspects that influenced the poets' skopoi and decision-making in recreating PGL.

The summary of the poets' interview responses in Table 4 shows that both translators had recasted PGL into poetic narratives with the main purpose of preserving a national heritage and promoting its cultural richness to an international audience. Both translators also view PGL as exemplary in critiquing the social system, the political power wielded by leaders, their reckless desires and the consequences that come with it, not only in the past, but also in current times. Thus, their intersemiotic poetic translations are very much reflective of these issues. The coding of the major and minor themes was also crucial in understanding the decision-making process in relation to the fundamentals of Skopos theory. To this end, some utterances have been extracted from Ninot Aziz and Zurinah Hassan's interview transcripts to highlight their adherence to two main elements of Skopos theory, namely, aim and fidelity.

Utterance NA C1 (3) summarises the main purpose of Ninot Aziz's work: a translational action that started with a personal aim and then developed to include a wider audience and ultimately, the aim was to put it "out there on the international platform" as these tales are

Table 4. *Coding of Major and Minor Themes*

Codes	Translators	
	Ninot Aziz (NA)	**Zurinah Hassan (ZH)**
Coding for Major Themes	• ***SKOPOS* FOR THE WORK (C1):** recognizes the richness of heritage and importance of preserving culture/heritage, proud of the heritage and wants to introduce it to a wider audience	• ***SKOPOS* FOR THE WORK (C1):** recognizes the richness of heritage and importance of preserving culture/heritage, wants to introduce it to an international audience
	• **REASONS AS TO WHY THE FOLKTALE WAS TRANSLATED IN THIS WAY (C2):** wanted to show that the real PGL is a strong character, reason for the choice of language level used	• **REASONS AS TO WHY THE FOLKTALE WAS TRANSLATED IN THIS WAY (C2):** wants the message of the princess to be interpreted according to current times/to give voice to women
	• **THE TRANSLATION PROCESS (C3):** own initiative, explains her reinterpretation of folktale (similar to ST, the king can never have her), gives reason for choice of mode (poem), sees it as intersemiotic translation, long process	• **THE TRANSLATION PROCESS (C3):** own initiative for original work but translated work commissioned by ITBM/DBP, no restrictions, long process, conscious of the changes of meaning/message in translated texts i.e., different intentions in Malay & English
	• **INFLUENCES ON THE WORK (C4):** PGL movie (1961), research, based on personal experience i.e., family background, comes from a lineage of storytellers	• **INFLUENCES ON THE WORK (C4):** based on personal experience and own research
	• **INTERPRETATION OF THE FOLKTALE (C5):** idea of loyalty/patriotism to the king/ the psyche of the people at that time/political issues, focus is on the feminine (the princess)	• **INTERPRETATION OF THE FOLKTALE (C5):** idea of loyalty/patriotism to the king/ the psyche of the people at that time/political issues, focus is on the feminine (the princess), similar to NA
Coding for Minor Themes	• **THE TRANSLATOR'S PROFESSION (C6):** good response/passionate about her work, reference to *skopos* of ST author, satisfaction as a translator as her translations are used in real-life situations i.e., staging a play	• **THE TRANSLATOR'S PROFESSION (C6):** good response/passionate about her work, people's opinions do not matter, does not write for an audience, satisfaction as a translator as she also translates her own work
	• **FUTURE PLANS FOR PGL (C7):** • has plans to do another translation of this folktale	• **FUTURE PLANS FOR PGL (C7):** May or may not do another translation of this folktale in a different form
		• **OPINIONS ON OTHER TRANSLATIONS OF PGL C8):** translations like Tiara's musical deviate from the original ST in terms of message (cons of translations)

Source: Author, 2025

"really, really old" and "our legends are so rich, it deserves to be on the world stage". She reiterates that she writes in English with the hope that people will know these "beautiful legends" and write about them and make them into plays and movies. She has taken a further step in fulfilling this purpose as she now uses her translations in real-life situations; she has storytelling events where children re-enact the stories in her book and talks that she gives to corporate people, international schools, and book clubs regarding these tales. These steps showcase the main purpose of her translations which is to preserve the culture and heritage embedded within these tales and understand the importance of tales such as PGL as a national heritage.

In utterance ZH C3 (8), Zurinah Hassan states that when she first wrote the Malay version, her thoughts were centred on how the ST writer used this folktale as a way of critiquing the Sultan. However, when she wrote the English version, she began to think about it in terms of a feminist viewpoint and used it to create a different persona of the princess. In the later part of the interview, she attributes this development to the fact that the Malay version was written a long time ago and by the time she translated it into English, her mindset had changed, there was depth and maturity in her thinking. Through her work, she aims to reach out to society, especially politicians to highlight social and political issues that are plaguing the nation.

When the *skopoi* of both the translators are compared, it is evident that the poetic retellings have been largely shaped by a personal desire or experience of the translator although their collective aim is to preserve the cultural heritage and historical knowledge that is embedded within this story. Also, by linking it back to the ST, even by a small degree, both translators remind their audience of the political play and consequences that

Table 5: *Selected Utterances from Interview Transcripts*

NA C1 (3) For the book, it' s really this, it's just that our, our…**our Hikayat is so rich**, **why is it that it is not out there on the international platform** as it should be and eh, it is so old actually, really, really old … so my take is, our legends are so rich, it deserves to be on the world stage and **I am writing in English** so that hopefully, it can be one day, that said, I am not saying that you know my work will be out there taking it further, but people need to know, oh, these are beautiful legends, maybe we should write them, maybe we should ehm, **make them into movies, we should make them into plays** ZH C3 (8) …bila semasa I mula-mula tulis, pemikiran I macam mana orang tu kritik Sultan, I berfikir hal itu. Tapi masa I tulis aah, the English version, I duk fikir tentang feminist, feminism… so dia akan jadi different *(when I first wrote it***, I thought about how the original writer critiques the Sultan,** but **in the English version, I was thinking about feminism,** so **the character of the princess became different**)

Source: Author, 2025

can incapacitate a nation if a leader acts according to his whims and fancies and is unable to control his desires.

This study has revealed that the first rule of Skopos theory where a translational action is determined by its skopos or purpose is true in the case of both Ninot Aziz and Zurinah Hassan. Secondly, their poetic retellings are functional in their respective linguistic and cultural settings. As per the third rule, none of these works are reversible which means that their poetic transformations may have different functions in the target culture as opposed to the ST in the source culture. Finally, while Vermeer's Skopos rule which pertains to fidelity, offers no quantitative way of measuring the degree of adherence, the mapping of Chatman's narrative theory onto the ST and target recreations is deemed a relatively effective method in determining the degree of fidelity present in these intersemiotic poetic translations. In terms of fidelity, it is Ninot Aziz's poem that keeps close to the original in terms of the story line, with the ending being the variant element while Zurinah Hassan's poem deviates from the ST plot by using the character of the princess as the mouthpiece to champion women's rights.

Overall, the findings show that both the translators have created their version of the narrative based on the seven conditions set by the princess in the tale of PGL. In terms of variance, both the translators have chosen to change major and minor aspects i.e., kernels and satellites (Table 3) of the ST in accordance with their personal life experiences and belief systems. It is the events and situations that the translators have encountered in their own lives which has propelled them to look at this folktale with a new perspective. In a sense, both translators have resurrected the ST, which fits Walter Benjamin's (1923) notion of how the original text is given an 'afterlife' (Venuti, 2012, p. 76) through translation. Therefore, intersemiotic translations can be conceptualized as being the 'multi-lives' of a ST as aesthetically, there can be countless variations of a ST using different modes existing simultaneously as rightly emphasized by Sütiste and Torop (2007, p. 203).

A study such as this shows that intersemiotic translation which was once an obscure part of Jakobson's (1959) triadic translation theory is now emerging as an important subsection in TS. It goes beyond the language domain to include cultural and social domains thus making subject matters such as purpose, functionality and the role of the translator as key issues to be studied and included in translation theories. Today, research in TS has increasingly become interdisciplinary through the combination of translation in multiple areas like music and dance as exemplified by scholars such as Bennett (2024), Campbell & Vidal (2024) and Vidal Claramonte (2024). Therefore, there needs to be one theory or approach that can be used to analyse intersemiotic translations. Skopos theory is a viable functional approach for intersemiotic research as its versatility allows it to be adapted or merged with various frameworks and strategies from different fields.

Consequently, as seen in this study, Skopos theory allows for a wide research scope. It aids in understanding the role of the translator by analysing his/her decision-making process which is guided by the purpose of the translation, identifying the audience the intersemiotic translations were intended for, and investigating the operation of the concept of fidelity through the invariant and variant features that appear in the works of the translator that are closely related to his/her translational skopos. Furthermore, the consideration of culture and culture specificity which is at the core of Vermeer's *Skopostheorie* also makes it a beneficial theory when studying texts with much cultural value.

5. CONCLUSION

Folktales like 'Puteri Gunung Ledang' are priceless stories which when presented in various semiotic forms over time encapsulate the cultural, ideologies and socio-political aspects of a particular individual and/or era. In some ways, they are documents that record the variations in society. The messages embedded within the translations of folktales carry the power to influence and change

the belief systems of individuals. Within these contexts, translators take on the role of social commentators, guardians and promoters of a nation's literary and cultural heritage. Thus, the translator is the crucial link between the original and the new *translatum*. As Toressi (2008) aptly states, "translators are not just "word-mongers," but text-and meaning-makers" (p.71); they help to make sense of the world around us. In their role as translators, both Ninot Aziz and Zurinah Hassan have embodied this through their intersemiotic poetic retellings. The two poets have opened several vistas to make sense of an old tale in a relevant way for the present times; they have enhanced the life of '*Puteri Gunung Ledang*' by making a tale which has been passed down for generations, not only a literary hypertext with greater cultural value but one that has a valuable lesson for life. In their poems, the princess of the mountain has evolved from being a mystical or legendary figure in Malay literature to being a metaphor for the foolishness of unbridled desire and specifically, the metaphor for the female voice that defies the subjugation of her individuality and identity.

6. LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The scope of this particular paper is limited as it analyses this folktale only in the poetic form when multiple versions of it exist in various forms such as art, sculpture and movies. Thus, modern abstract paintings of PGL by Zulkifli Yusoff, the movie *Puteri Gunung Ledang* (2004) directed by Saw Teong Hin and a musical produced in 2006 based on the movie can be examined using the methodology used in this research. However, as there is no one specific model that can be used to analyse works of intersemiotic translations, frameworks from other areas of study such as film-making can be combined with translation theories for analysis purpose resulting in multidisciplinary research which will broaden the field of TS. Furthermore, since the Malay literary heritage has a treasure trove of folktales which have been 'retold' over the years in various forms, there is immense potential for future research, and it is recommended to conduct comparative studies on local folktales which have been translated intersemiotically. Similar to this study, multiple analysis methods can be devised by combining translation theories with analytical frameworks related to the semiotic mode that a translated form exists in, for example, music or dance. Alternatively, the designing of a specific, conceptual model that can be used to examine all types of intersemiotic translations will enrich this area in TS.

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During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not employ any of the Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies for Language refinement, drafting background section and did not perform any Task of the technology.

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Motivations and Barriers to Part-Time Bachelor's Study Among Insurance Professionals in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

The factors driving and inhibiting insurance professionals in pursuing part-time bachelor's degrees were investigated by this study. Methods: A mixed-methods approach was adopted with quantitative data from 317 questionnaire respondents and qualitative results founded on eight semi-structured interviews. Key findings revealed that internal drivers, in particular personal development, dominated external rewards in the form of salary. Increased motivation was observed among female and lower-income respondents. The most formidable obstacles were the preferred learning style, along with time and logistical constraints; monetary concerns and familial responsibility were less forceful. Statistical modeling confirmed that both motivation and barrier scores can powerfully predict enrollment intentions. The findings bring to light a gap between current provision of education and the needs of working professionals. The findings indicate that institutions of higher education will have to alter program format and learning modalities. It also requires concerted government support to further enhance accessibility, thereby boosting higher education engagement in the insurance sector.

Keywords: barriers, further education, Hong Kong, insurance industry, motivation, working adults.

1. INTRODUCTION

With Hong Kong transforming into a knowledge-based economy, educational qualifications play a progressively important role in achieving long-term professional success. In 2023, a significant proportion of the population (31.7% lower secondary and 33.1% upper secondary) placed significance on the need for higher levels of education (Census and Statistics Department, 2024). Lifelong learning is a critical factor that helps democratize competence to match the evolving labour market and ability to bring down poverty by addressing employability (Edwards-Fapohunda, 2024).

There is a need for continuous learning on the part of practitioners, even specialists and technologists, due to high liquidity in other sectors. Even with expertise, there is a need for continuous learning and skill upgrade because appreciation does not mean improved performance. Employees need to continuously improve their skills to maintain strengths in core skills including adaptability and learning agility, data analytical skills and digital proficiency (Labour and Welfare Bureau, 2024).

Education has a significant role in the growth of abilities (Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2025) as well as social stability. Parents endure harsh living conditions in hopes that education will mean more positive opportunities. Education is what encourages them to work more and gives them hope for a better life since they view it as an escape from poverty (Cho, 2021). However, the current

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education system tends to channel less academically inclined individuals into low-skilled jobs, while more capable students gain access to higher education and elite positions. Public examinations can hinder the potential of creative students, leading to a societal loss of talent. Thus, a diversified education system is essential for preparing the workforce for contemporary demands.

In an effort to remain competitive, industries must encourage creativity (Ambar, 2023) among the workforces. The government can increase investment in subsidized part-time post-secondary education for employed adults. This group already has free or subsidized education in most developed nations. Fewer than 26.5% of the people in 2023 had degrees, indicating that there must be systemic transformation towards embracing better the demands of a creative economy (Census and Statistics Department, 2024).

Education reform is needed, incorporating heuristic and open methods that develop general knowledge and creativity. However, recruitment of highly educated staff does not always mean performance improvement. It needs a more comprehensive approach towards education and human resource development. Overall, expanded education opportunities are crucial to creating an able and adaptable workforce (Jafarov, 2025) in Hong Kong's knowledge economy.

1.1 Problem statement

The insurance industry in Hong Kong is confronted with the need to hire educated employees, particularly as the minimum qualification to become an insurance agent is merely a secondary school certificate with five passes, among which are Mathematics and Chinese or English. Although a degree is not necessary, it can be a strong asset in finding a job. Surprisingly, 29.1% of the insurance agents hold a higher diploma or associate degree at least (Insurance Training Board, 2021). Insurance and risk management graduates are better equipped with industry language, while psychology and marketing graduates are good at consumer behaviour knowledge and are good at selling.

However, the industry is struggling to find people with precise competencies and knowledge for many jobs, leading to difficulties in selecting suitable people from an inadequate talent pool. The problem highlights the importance of lifelong learning on the part of current employees to guarantee the long-term competitiveness of the industry. The hiring of technical personnel is particularly difficult, so companies are forced to employ subcontractors to bridge capability shortfalls.

Providing working adults with the ability to earn part-time bachelor's degrees has the prospect of significantly enhancing their knowledge and skills, boosting social mobility and personal progress as well as averting early retirement. Attaining higher education has a tendency to lead to higher life satisfaction and improved personal life balance. Moreover, accessing the human capital of working adults is imperative for boosting productivity (Saha et al., 2025), enhancing creativity, and enhancing innovation. Amidst a period of rapid economic transformation, an in-sync workforce to meet emerging challenges is necessary. By enhancing educational attainment, the current workforce can better cope with the needs of the labour market and thus spur economic growth (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020) in Hong Kong.

1.2 Research objectives

The present research aims to achieve the following objectives:

a) To establish the key factors that motivate working adults in the insurance industry to undertake part-time bachelor's degree programs for their career and personal development.
b) To examine the factors hindering working adults in the insurance industry from pursuing a part-time bachelor's degree.
c) To investigate the factors influencing the willingness and resolve of insurance industry professionals to undertake part-time undergraduate degrees.
d) To provide actionable recommendations for enhancing motivation among staff in the insurance sector for undertaking part-time degrees.
e) To propose implementable solutions to address the challenges faced by working professionals within the insurance industry when undertaking part-time bachelor's degree courses.

1.3 Conceptual framework

The conceptual model presents the interaction between learning barriers and motivation of working adults in Hong Kong's insurance industry and how these affect their willingness and persistence in pursuing part-time bachelor's degrees. Motivation and learning barriers are taken as independent variables, while willingness and persistence are taken as dependent variables. These interactions are depicted in Figure 1.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theories of Motivation

(a) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Carducci, 2020) separates human needs into five groups: physiological,

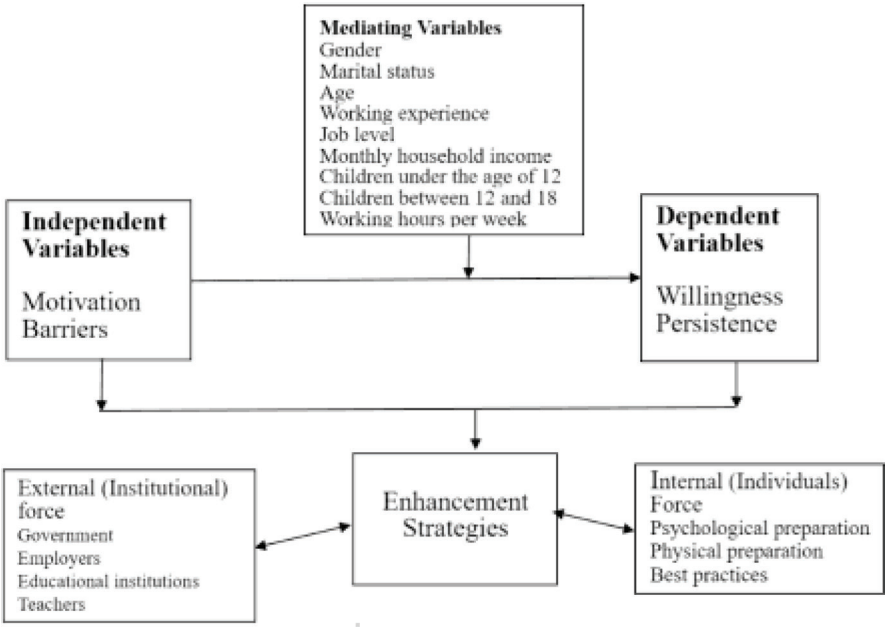


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Source: Author, 2025

safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow argues that motivation needs are caused by influence behaviour and objectives (Shandiz & Kanwal, 2022), which might change based on individual conditions and time. Among the most apparent gaps in the learning environment is the lack of love and self-esteem, which can motivate learners to achieve more accomplishments. Maslow's theory unites extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and therefore is widely used in business, education, and psychology. The hierarchy does not, however, factor in variations among people and cultures (Saif, 2024), which leads to additions such as the theory of understanding and aesthetic needs.

Research indicates that the hierarchy of needs varies across professions and suggests that managers must become familiar with the individual personality of their employees so that they can adopt proper motivational strategies. With challenging tasks and developmental experiences, organisations help employees to unlock their full potential and fulfill their self-actualization needs (Mathew & Sreeya, 2020).

(b) Bandura's Self-efficacy Theory

Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2020), which is part of the social learning theory, addresses people's belief about their ability to perform tasks effectively. Based on extensive empirical research, this concept identifies that human actions are determined by expected results and reinforcement. Bandura assumes that people can learn new behaviours and adopt new behaviours without direct reinforcement because they possess the ability to understand the congruence between actions and their results.

Self-efficacy affects motivation, decision-making in life, and worldwide functioning, as people with greater self-efficacy are more likely to be resilient and self-assured. They are likely to approach challenges, interpret failures constructively, and maintain motivation despite adversity. Belief in personal efficacy not only affects performance at the individual level but also organisational performance, as motivated employees contribute more to work.

Research establishes a strong association between self-efficacy and behaviour outcomes, and hence it is an effective predictor of success. Mickwitz and Suojala (2020) found that perceived autonomy and self-efficacy, along with academic self-regulation, influence school well-being since early educational life. Teachers are hence motivated to support students' perceptions of their abilities and work, as this positively affects motivation, learning environment, and job satisfaction. Students with high self-efficacy are more inclined to embrace challenges and view failures as opportunities for growth, reinforcing their belief that they can achieve success in their learning experiences.

(c) Deci's Self-determination Theory

It deals with human personality and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2024), with a focus on inherent talent and psychological needs and delving into intrinsic motivation and self-determination. It seeks to comprehend individual motivations based on inner workings without outside

incentives, making provision for the participation of intrinsic and certain extrinsic behaviours. It explains how differences between people affect reactions to social situations.

Research on intrinsic verse extrinsic motivation began in the 1970s, but significant research in favour of this theory began in the mid-1980s and became popular in the 2000s in various fields, including education and social psychology. The theory proposes that three basic needs (competence, relatedness, and autonomy) are required for best growth. Fulfilling these needs provides a sense of success and enhances performance, while unfulfilled needs could lead to negative consequences.

Self-determination is associated with the belief in mastery of one's life (Wehmeyer, 2022). Individuals who are high in self-determination are most likely to meet challenges with optimism, believing in their own efforts rather than external reinforcement or avoiding unpleasant outcomes. They are competent in setting goals and are in charge of their behaviours and decisions, recognizing their strengths and weaknesses. This develops autonomy, fueled by social environments, that in turn supports internal motivation. Overall, the theory emphasises the importance of individual agency and the influence of social and cultural forces in shaping personality growth and motivation.

2.2 Motivation of learning for working adults

Adult working learners are motivated to pursue part-time bachelor's degree programs for many reasons, including improved workplace performance, improved work prospects, and funding the education of their children. Motivation is increased when minimal effort generates great rewards, and more resistant and self-assured individuals will find it easier to navigate their learning pathways. Lifelong learning is essential in order to adapt to a world that is constantly changing, to enrich one's life, and to create work prospects.

Learning is a self-directed process and one of needs and objectives, in which internal reinforcers such as self-esteem and self-actualization are the most influential. Individuals with excess resources are better able to deal with life demands, so low margin can lead to stress. Motivation of adult learning is contingent upon maintaining a power surplus.

Self-directed learning came into being with great significance in adult education (Loeng, 2020) with focus on personal development and critical thought. Adults learn effectively when learning is tied to their own life and can be translated into everyday life. Maslow's needs hierarchy presents a theoretical framework through which the motivation underlying human behavior can be explained. In education, Bukhari et al. (2023) emphasized the requirement for intrinsic motivation, an inwards push to acquire knowledge not with the expectation of rewards. Lastly, adults can join part-time programs for personal satisfaction, career development, or skill acquisition, with motivation varying with time and showing little differences by gender or culture.

2.3 Barriers to learning

From Shelton (2021), there are three types of learning barriers among adults: situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers. Situational barriers arise from one's own situation, such as lack of time due to work or caregiving obligations, financial limitations, isolation, health issues, or the nature of their employment. They are normally beyond an individual's control. Institutional barriers are the school practice and policies, including inconvenient schedules, inflexible fees, inappropriately designed courses, and the language of instruction.

Dispositional barriers (Raymer, 2022) refer to the attitudes and perceptions of learners, for instance, a negative academic record, low self-concept, and opposition from employers or family. Maximizing classroom activities to encourage adult learners is essential in enabling personal development. Governments can be of help by providing study grants or loans, while employers can help by giving financial support as well as flexible work timetables.

Although barriers may be restrictive, the lack thereof cannot be taken to provide conducive circumstances. Research indicates that men are more likely to drop out than women (Zengin, 2021). Working students encounter distinct challenges and institutional barriers not typically faced by their full-time counterparts due to different life situations.

2.4 Willingness and persistence of pursuing part-time degree

Intrinsic motivation working adults are genuinely interested in their subjects and believe their talents can be developed through effort. They consciously embrace challenges, seek help when necessary, and maintain persistence in learning, viewing problems as an inevitable avenue of growth. Teachers must connect new material to prior material and establish collaborative learning settings to maintain this motivation. Relevant curriculum content and engaging activities are key to maintaining student interest, and nurturing teacher-student relationships can also motivate learners (Li, Bergin & Olsen, 2022).

Graduation outcomes among working adults are generally better when they have completed rigorous high school programs and achieved outstanding performance on public examinations. The less self-regulated ones who have poor academic backgrounds are at greater risks of

dropping out (Pusztai, Fényes & Kovács, 2022). Notably, the greatest dropout risk lies in the first year of part-time bachelor's degrees due to academic struggle and scheduling conflict. Perseverance is critical to success (Roberson, 2020); students should make realistic study schedules and seek assistance early if they face any issues.

Persistence among working adults is influenced by cognitive abilities, motivation, engagement, and advising relationships (Tinto, 2022). Socioeconomic status and cultural factors also influence their learning persistence. These students should be supported more by institutions, realizing that prior talent and academic performance are the determinants of their success in part-time learning (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2023).

3. METHOD & MATERIALS

This study applies a mixed-methods approach, making use of quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (in-depth interviews) methods. Quantitative emphasis is to understand working adults within the insurance industry pursuing part-time degrees for reasons why. Surveys would provide data on motivational drivers and barriers, whereas qualitative interviews would offer a deeper in-depth insight into participants' experience and attitudes.

Merging the two approaches, the study seeks to leverage their respective strengths at the expense of their respective weaknesses (Oranga, 2025). The study is seeking to establish mechanisms to enhance motivation and counteract challenges for working adults pursuing a part-time degree in the insurance and retail sectors. Thematic interviews are useful in penetrating variables that control motivation and tenacity in pursuing a part-time degree. Lastly, this strategy is anticipated to provide real-world insights to help working professionals pursue their studies in Hong Kong's insurance industry.

3.1 Participants and sampling

The study participants are Chinese working adults aged 18-60 years who work in the insurance industry. A convenience sampling method was employed in selecting participants due to limitations in resources, despite the ideal sample size being 378 for a 95% confidence level (Taherdoost, 2018). Statistical true representativeness of the population is not feasible in convenience sampling. However, researchers can make the plausible representativeness of the sample better to increase credibility. This is accomplished by knowingly selecting the sampling date, time, and location to obtain a diverse cross-section of the population of interest.

While non-probability sampling limits generalizability (Shamsudin, Hassim & Abd Manaf, 2024), it allows for inferences to be made from a homogeneous sample. In-depth interviews were also conducted, with a sample size of 8, according to available resources and study objectives. All participants volunteered, were unpaid, and were free to skip questions or withdraw at any time.

3.2 Data collection

Data for the study were collected using a self-administered online survey with 317 working adults and face-to-face interviews with 8 study participants who were employed in the insurance industry in Hong Kong. The online questionnaire allowed study participants who had read and written English to respond at ease with confidentiality assured using representative codes. Participants were sampled using convenience sampling and offered to participate in the research with the possibility of skipping items or withdrawal at any time.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions that gave the researcher the opportunity to obtain in-depth responses on participants' motivations and challenges in seeking a part-time bachelor's degree. Despite how flexible this method is and the amount of spontaneity, it requires experienced interviewers and can be labor-intensive and less reliable due to the difficulty in assessing open-ended remarks. Interviews were sound recorded with permission, and confidentiality was guaranteed, and the recordings were stored securely and destroyed after October 2025. Participants were entitled to refuse audio recording and to be given copies subsequently.

3.3 Instrumentations

The study collects quantitative information from a self-report online questionnaire of working adults in the insurance industry in Hong Kong without a bachelor's degree. There are three components to the questionnaire: academic study motivation, study obstacles, and demographic information. Motivation is assessed through the Academic Motivation Scale (Zeng & Yao, 2023), and obstacles are assessed through the Deterrents to Participation Scale (Grandone, 2002), which provides nine factors of participation.

The Academic Motivation Scale demonstrates strong reliability, with high internal consistency for its subscales, and established construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis (Souza et al., 2021). Similarly, the Deterrents to Participation Scale exhibits good reliability, with its factors (situational, institutional barriers) showing strong internal consistency. Its validity is confirmed by its clear factor structure and its significant predictive power for enrollment intentions, demonstrating its practical utility. Both scales prove to be psychometrically sound instruments, providing credible measurement of the key constructs under investigation.

In-depth qualitative data is gained from eight participant interviews. The 30-40 minutes audio-recorded semi-structured interviews explore motivation, barriers, and strategies in undertaking a part-time degree. The interviews are transcribed to ensure confidentiality and accuracy. The participants are guaranteed the right to speak freely and may withdraw at any time. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods aims to paint an integrated picture of the challenges facing these working adults in their quest for learning.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS version 25 (Pallant, 2020). It calculated mean and standard deviation scores for the groups on Academic Motivation Scale subscales. T-tests were subsequently applied to examine group differences on the subscales. Results of the t-tests offered the various motivational levels of each group, thereby answering the research questions of the current study.

Thematic analysis is used for qualitative data. After becoming familiar with the data, initial codes were constructed in an organized way. These codes were then assembled into probable themes and explored and elaborated to cover the dataset. It was an iterative process wherein each theme was described and named to capture the essence of the coded data, resulting in a structured analysis of the causes and challenges to the actions of the participants.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Motivation factors for pursuing part-time degree

317 valid questionnaires were obtained by the study, processed through SPSS Version 25. Scores in the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) were calculated wherein "totally disagree" was 1 and "totally agree" was 7. Analysis of the AMS proved that intrinsically and extrinsically motivated working adults in the insurance industry exist, with a statistically significant inclination towards intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment achieved the highest mean score (M = 4.978), whereas extrinsic motivation identified regulation achieved the highest mean score (M = 4.893). Table 1 shows total intrinsic motivation (M = 4.836, **σ** = 1.065), slightly surpassed total extrinsic motivation (M = 4.782, **σ** = 0.973). An independent sample t-test confirmed this difference was statistically significant (p = 0.000). These findings indicate that internal gratification and sense of satisfaction are more powerful motivators for this group than external rewards, though both play key roles in their academic motivation.

The histogram of the motivational scores for the 317 participants is shown in Figure 2. The mean, mode, and median motivational scores were 2.268, 0.00, and 1.250 respectively. It was skewness-positive (0.399) and almost normally distributed.

4.2 Thematic analysis of motivation for learning

Table 2 depicts the thematic analysis of motivation among working adults to register for a part-time bachelor's degree in the insurance industry by in-depth interview in their place of choice at their own convenient time. Four themes were extracted from the qualitative data. Selected participant quotes are displayed as follows.

> "Peer support system can help to establish a respectful relationship and to develop a sense of empathy." (Mr. A)
>
> "Studying will always make you physically and mentally exhausted but getting a bachelor's degree may improve my career prospects." (Mr. B)
>
> "Studying help me to create a new network of friends and contacts. I learned a new way of solving problems." (Mr. C)
>
> "It may increase the chances of promotion and improve my management knowledge and skill." (Mrs. D)

Table 1: The means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis of AMS subscale

Code	Item description	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
IM	Intrinsic motivation	4.836	1.065	-0.172	0.136
IMK	Intrinsic motivation to know	4.883	1.227	-0.212	-0.336
IMA	Intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment	4.978	1.138	-0.368	0.501
IMS	Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation	4.648	1.164	-0.275	0.311
EM	Extrinsic motivation	4.782	0.973	-0.369	1.623
EMID	Extrinsic motivation identified regulation	4.893	1.095	-0.376	0.735
EMIN	Extrinsic motivation introjected regulation	4.673	1.143	-0.296	0.502
EME	Extrinsic motivation external regulation	4.782	1.127	-0.432	0.819
AM	Amotivation	3.785	1.355	-0.261	-0.487

Source: Data from questionnaire

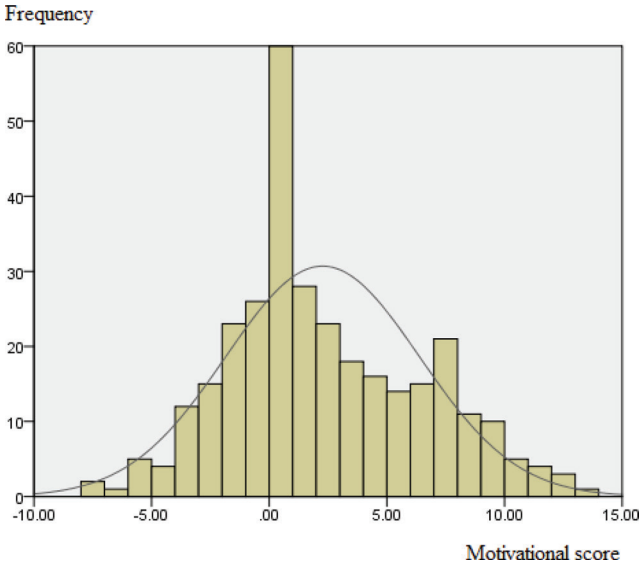


Figure 2: Histogram of motivational scores

Source: Data from questionnaire

Table 2: Thematic analysis of motivation for learning

Codes	Theme
✧ Become a team leader ✧ Take up more responsibilities ✧ Training for new colleague ✧ Improve career prospects	Career Advancement
✧ Intellectual and personal development ✧ Interest in subject knowledge ✧ Passion for the profession ✧ Professional opportunities ✧ Desire for learning	Intrinsic Fulfillment
✧ Sharing ideas and experiences with peers ✧ Sense of belonging ✧ Social involvement ✧ Praise by others ✧ Recognition by seniors or colleagues	Social Validation & Belonging

Source: Author, 2025

"I met peer regularly to participate in a range of learning activities and discuss the requirements of the assignment." (Mrs. E)

"After completing the bachelor's degree, I hope to get more opportunities for promotion or professional qualifications." (Mr. F)

"After studying the bachelor's degree program, I felt more confident for my social interaction in the daily activities." (Mrs. G)

"When you move out of your comfort zone, you reach your potential." (Miss H)

4.3 Barriers in Pursuing a Part-time Bachelor's Degree

King (2002) investigated the extent of nine factors (course quality, perceived inability, time constraints, motivation, family constraints, logistical barriers, personal priorities, learning style, and physical barriers) to ascertain the extent of barriers to academic study.

Cronbach's alpha value for nine barrier factors was 0.886 that indicated high consistency or reliability. Each factor's Cronbach's alpha value is shown in Table 3. If a factor's alpha value is below 0.5, then it has to be altered or removed. If a factor's alpha value is too high, then the factor can be removed. Hayes and Coutts (2020) recommended that the value of alpha should be no more than 0.90.

4.4 Summary of the findings

Intrinsic motivation for students in the study was far higher than extrinsic motivation in pursuing a part-time bachelor's degree, driven by personal growth and learning new things. Women were more motivated than men, and this can be understood in terms of family commitments

Table 3: Cronbach's alpha of nine factors of barriers

Factor	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted
Quality of course	0.873
Perceived inability	0.864
Time constraints	0.874
Motivation	0.865
Family constraints	0.865
Logistical barriers	0.871
Personal priorities	0.873
Learning style	0.894
Physical barriers	0.879

Source: Data from questionnaire

and the belief that a degree would lead to improved job opportunities. Women constitute a vast majority of the program and emphasize flexibility in scheduling to enable them to meet their commitments.

Respondents earning a monthly household income of $25,000 were more likely to obtain degrees than those who earned between $25,000 and $34,999 because adults with lower incomes yearn for education for better work prospects. Perceived inability and family constraints as hindrances were more prominent for married respondents, particularly working mothers. Moreover, workers with 6 to 15 years of work experience were more disturbed than their less experienced colleagues, particularly in coping with job demands and family care. Overall, the research demands special support to eliminate some obstacles for these working adults.

5. DISCUSSION

(a) Motivation to undertake part-time bachelor's degree

While all international studies into adult learning have consistently indicated career advancement and family support as international drivers (Luwei & Huimin, 2024), the evidence of this study indicates their convergence in Hong Kong's insurance sector. Career development is an intrinsic driver, but specifically coupled with familial hopes, like bonding with children. Similarly, while peer support's positive contribution to well-being (Pointon-Haas et al., 2024) is acknowledged everywhere, it is here unveiled in its specific function of opposing this region's hierarchical, high-pressure work culture. Appreciation and compliments also enhance self-esteem and confidence (Brummelman & Dweck, 2020) and lead adults to become more likely to pursue their studies further and confirm their worth in the organization. These findings extend beyond current Western paradigms to demonstrate how global motivators are directed through local socio-familial and institutional configurations, introducing an Asian nuance of insight into comparative research.

The motivations for pursuing a part-time degree (career progression, family support, and peer support) were supported through methodological triangulation. Survey data motivations that were quantified were supplemented by interview testimonies, providing depth and context. For instance, while surveys listed career as a significant influence, interviews revealed this was often combined with a desire to set an example for one's children, demonstrating how quantitative and qualitative data merged to provide a more detailed image.

(b) Barriers to undertaking part-time bachelor's degree

This study confirms that time, financial, and institutional rigidity constraints for working adults in the insurance sector of Hong Kong are consistent with comparative international studies (Smith, 2023). However, it finds a crucial divergence: the strong combination of perceived helplessness after initial failure and in-work barriers constructed by employers yields a distinctive deterrent profile. Whereas commitments at the individual level are universally identified, their role in challenging educational efforts here is uniquely highlighted in a high-stakes professional setting. Sensitive analysis proceeds beyond the recognition of omnipresent obstacles to unearth a locally unique ecosystem of obstacles, proposing a new comparative adult education model for studies within non-Western professional settings.

Triangulation indicated that while surveys ranked logistics highly, interviews indicated it as an indication of deeper institutional inflexibility. By challenging our own bias as students from a conservative perspective, we were able to read the evidence that, employer lack of concern for working adults was a more profound demotivator than a lack of personal time, sustaining these actual themes.

(c) Motivation building strategies

This study supports that well-proven global strategies for adult students (such as timetabling in

an organized manner and making use of travel time for learning) are equally relevant to Hong Kong working adults. But it improves on international debate (Niyibizi & Mutarutinya, 2024) by revealing a critical, context-specific motivator: the central role of an encouraging network. In Hong Kong's market-oriented insurance sector, this network acts not only as an academic support system but as a primary professional buffer against workplace pressures, with a direct impact on perseverance. This finding goes beyond global models of self-management to determine the way socio-professional ecosystems (Kochoni et al., 2023) generally mediate academic attainment in particular regional economies.

Quantitative results confirmed that peer support groups were linked with increased persistence rates. Interviews then illuminated the mechanism for providing accountability and normalizing difficulty. This combination of data types uncovered that successful approaches are those that address both the academic and affective aspects of the part-time learning trajectory.

(d) Strategies to overcome the challenges

Though international research (Lutz, 2020; Halilsoy, 2024) supports self-efficacy and organizational support as the foundation for successful adult learners worldwide, this study records their unique synergy in Hong Kong's financial services sector. It demonstrates that resilience among such professionals is less an individual trait but more a socially negotiated outcome whereby peer and professional networks are the first line of defense against work-related pressures, a factor less highlighted in Western models. Besides, the strategic experimentation of learning styles takes place not only for the purpose of educational enrichment but as an immediate response to a controlling, high stakes work environment. These findings introduce a critical non-Western, profession-based perspective, which describes how global success factors are strategically adapted to distinctive socio-economic contexts.

(e) Strategies to improve will and perseverance

Whereas global literature names work relevance and family support as cross-cultural adult learner motivators, this Hong Kong insurance industry study names a singular, interdependent system of motivators. It demonstrates how, among this population of professionals, society's values and teacher-planned formats like study buddy programs are not merely supportive but are core to motivation maintenance (Jones et al., 2025). These dimensions syncretically bridge the intersection of workplace ambition and familial duty, a space that is not as central in individualistic Western paradigms. To this end, this research provides a culturally contextualized model to comparative adult education, highlighting how collectivist social values and active institutional pedagogy are central to motivation within East Asian professional settings.

(f) Other issues to consider in pursuing part-time bachelor's degree

Working adults have a number of concerns to note when they decide to pursue a part-time bachelor's degree, and most of them were not addressed by the quantitative and qualitative strategies employed in the study.

(i) Since 95% of the people who participate in Hong Kong's insurance sector are Chinese, the English language of instruction is a serious problem, and language barriers do exist to impede understanding and interaction in scholarly work.
(ii) Adults aged 35 to 44 often have greater barriers through fears of competing with younger peers and lower self-efficacy. This age group may overestimate their own ability and fear returning to school, despite equal potential for success.
(iii) Willingness to study further is influenced by gender, marital status, and prior educational experience. Beliefs, as well as work commitment, can also affect assessments of barriers.
(iv) Adults resist altering set habits of working, requesting employers to include learning goals in personal development planning.
(v) Harsh experiences in education reduce learners to unwillingness to engage in additional studies lest they fail or be embarrassed in academic settings.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Recommendations for stakeholders

Short-term recommendations

a) Teachers should integrate real-world case studies and professional scenarios from the insurance industry into curriculum in order to relate theory directly to students' life experience.
b) Teachers should establish a mechanism for providing timely, constructive, and actionable feedback on assignments.
c) Teachers should establish a positive classroom climate by acknowledging expressly the challenges working professionals experience and promoting collaborative learning.
d) Students should cctively negotiate with instructors about work-life-study conflicts and clarify course requirements.

e) Students should actively utilize available institutional support services, such as academic advising, writing centers, and library services.

Medium-term recommendations

a) Institutions should develop and launch a variety of flexible modes of course delivery, such as hybrid, evening, and intensive weekend modes.
b) Institutions should re-engineer curriculum design to offer more modular and stackable credential pathways that facilitate personalized learning pathways.
c) Employers should establish formal communication channels for determining employees' learning ambitions and negotiating supportive practices.

Long-term recommendations

a) Government should conduct a fundamental review of national lifelong learning policy and funding models.
b) Government should launch public awareness campaigns to promote the value of ongoing professional education and upskilling.
c) Employers should integrate educational support into key talent management and succession planning processes.
d) Employers should create a culture of trust and lifelong learning through formal reward and recognition for skill acquisition and academic achievement.

6.2 Suggestions for future research

Research would focus on working adults pursuing part-time bachelor's degrees in the insurance industry, their motivations and challenges specific to this category in Hong Kong.

a) It can conduct research on a much broader scale with a diverse range of working adults from different industries.
b) It can explore the methods employed by working adults for enhancing motivation and overcoming challenges for pursuing a part-time bachelor's degree.
c) It might examine how different industries would have similar outcomes. It might conduct the study from a more optimistic point of view.
d) It might examine what is working to attract more mature adults into a part-time bachelor's degree instead of examining what keeps adults from achieving.
e) It might compare motivation and obstacles in this student population to those in student populations served by other types of adult programs.
f) It can explore the different recruitment approaches of part-time bachelor's degree program by institutions.
g) It can explore how institutions design and organize part-time higher education programs with a view to increasing the level of working adults' participation.
h) It can conduct more in-depth studies by employing mixed methods with a high number of participants or informants in data collection.

7. CONCLUSION

The research indicated that female participants are encouraged to enroll in bachelor's degree programs due mainly to an imperative to enhance job opportunities or enable a transition into new areas of employment. These findings attest to the importance of collaborative relationships being constructed amongst employees, employers, and higher education institutions, as the work environment is a central locale where adult learners need to be encouraged and facilitated. Rapid changes in the labour market necessitate many individuals to upgrade their abilities and expertise, compelling them to seek part-time degrees to improve self-worth and competitiveness.

However, institutions typically cater to traditional full-time students, so it is necessary to understand the unique needs and experiences of working adults. They are academically engaged but less involved with peers and faculty and generally view their campus cultures as unproductive. Work and family responsibilities typically disrupt their study pursuits, creating concerns about balancing assignments and feeling inadequate in terms of age or ability to complete programs.

Family, teacher, and peer encouragement is essential to their achievement, as well as to address financial concerns with education expenses and return on investment. Educational programs must be directed towards meeting students' needs and expectations, where they are aware of the potential income linked with their investment. Financial aid workshops and counseling can also promote awareness of the resources available.

This study examined the motivation, constraints, and studying strategies of employed adults pursuing part-time bachelor's degrees in Hong Kong's insurance industry. The study validated existing motivational scales to be reliable, with evidence they are real and pragmatic

in this population. The findings revealed a clear positive link between intrinsic motivation (such as personal development and accomplishment) and the intention to pursue undergrad studies further. Conversely, some obstacles, primarily institutional rigidity and lack of employer support, were inversely related to persistence. The strong role of peer networks to resist workplace pressures, a nuance not entirely captured in Western frameworks. This provides a vital, context-specific contribution to the international literature on adult learning.

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An Assessment of Students' Needs in Tertiary Education in Malaysian Universities

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In the context of globalisation, declining interest in higher education and persistent dropout rates have raised concerns about the adequacy of student support and programme relevance in Malaysian universities. **Methods:** An ethical approval was obtained from the Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. This study employed a quantitative survey design involving 30 tertiary students from Malaysian universities. A survey comprising Likert-scale items across four constructs: University, Society Influence, Family Influence, and Student was administered to the students. The survey items were reliable because the Cronbach's alpha value was 0.936. **Results:** The majority of participants agreed with items across all four constructs, indicating that institutional reputation, societal expectations, family support, and individual factors jointly influence students' decisions to pursue and persist in tertiary education. **Conclusion:** The findings suggest that multifaceted influences shape students' higher education choices in Malaysia.

Keywords: Choices, factors, higher education institutions, survey, tertiary students' needs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many higher education institutions (HEIs) face the problems of unprepared students. The education system has changed after the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) struck the world (Agbonlahor, Lamidi, Gibbs, & Nash, 2024; Lim & Ho, 2022). This causes the students to lose interest in studies, and some would likely drop out of their university.

The goal of education undoubtedly shifts as societal demands do, but improving students' learning domains has always been the main priority for all age groups (Mantai, Swain, Bearman, & Brew, 2023). It is important to find out the tertiary students' needs to strategise programme approach and marketing their needs. The higher education authorities will need to investigate the factors influencing students' choices and decisions. This will attract students to pursue their higher education at colleges and universities after secondary education, as well as review and develop appropriate strategies. By doing so, it will promote particular institutions through

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better knowledge by focusing on the key factors that could significantly affect university choices (Khairani & Razak, 2013).

Understanding the key factors that influence tertiary students to remain in the university can enhance decision-making for students, ensuring they choose educational routes that match their abilities and goals (Khairani & Razak, 2013). By obtaining accessibility to HEIs, tertiary students could create a more promising future since tertiary education provides both theoretical knowledge and practical skills vital for their personal and professional development (Mantai, Swain, Bearman, & Brew, 2023). This aids individual students and supports them while also contributing to the nation's future since they are leaders, innovators and workforce essential for the country's advancement. Their advancement is closely connected to the broader progress of society, resulting in a more knowledgeable, skilled and thriving populace.

However, the studies about students' needs are not analysed in detail, especially the cases of low intakes and continuous drop-outs in the HEIs. Most of the studies examined the tertiary students' needs in pursuing their studies (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Khairani & Razak, 2013; Sarkodie, Asare, & Asare, 2020). Understanding the factors that influence the low intakes and continuous drop-outs can help improve decision-making processes for students, ensuring they pursue educational paths that align with their skills and aspirations.

This study seeks to analyse how these factors can impact the students' decisions, as well as investigate the programmes offered, the HEIs' recognition and reputation, as well as the choice made by students to enroll in Malaysian private HEIs. This study intends to fill in the gap by addressing these factors through targeted policies and student-centered interventions may enhance enrolment and reduce attrition rates in higher education institutions. This is because it is alarming to notice that 17,613 tertiary students left university, while 5,165 more were suspended according to data from the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) (Atat & Abd. Majid, 2024). In addition, this study aims to explore and identify the factors that influence HEI students in their decision to choose their higher education courses. To ensure that the research objective is fulfilled, a research question, which is framed in this current study is as follows: "What are the factors influencing the students' decision to continue their studies at higher education institutions?"

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia practises dualistic tertiary education system by permitting participation from both public and private HEIs. The statistics from the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia forecasted that the potential growth of revenue that is expected to be generated from these HEIs will be around RM65 billion (USD14.8 billion) by 2026, and with many alternative institutions for students, there is a high level of competition among the tertiary education institutions to attract students (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Sarkodie, Asare, & Asare, 2020).

Students' Needs in Tertiary Education

In the age of globalisation, only universities that are aiming for quality education will endure (Salfi, Khurshid, Saleem, Saeed, Ahmad, Jabeen, Mehmood, & Ahmad, 2015). Nowadays, the function of universities is similar to that of industries in terms of their instruction, with students representing the products, customers being the students, and teachers acting as sellers or salespersons. The students will enroll only in those universities that offer quality education through valuable courses at the lowest price. Furthermore, the guidance given to them is suitable in the open market. This kind of quality instruction relies on two factors, namely, need-based courses or skills and efficient teaching or instruction.

Higher education institutions are expected to prepare students for a career in a fast-changing society (Bullock & Wilder, 2016; Lucas, 2016). It no longer suffices that students learn a fixed body of knowledge. Rather, students are expected to be proficient in competences or skills that allow them to keep up with these changes and make a positive contribution to society (Baartman, Bastiaens, Kirschner, & van der Vleuten, 2006). It is fundamental to know the younger generations' wants and needs in their tertiary education. This will guide in strategising programme approach and marketing to cater to the students' needs (Vaessen, 2021).

Assessment on students' needs in tertiary education aims to foster learning, guarantee rigour in HEI choices, as well as equip students with resources and experience for showcasing their employability (Baartman & Quinlan, 2023). Consequently, it provides a resolution to three primary issues encountered by the sector and, more broadly, the improvement of learning and teaching quality (Baartman, Bastiaens, Kirschner, & van der Vleuten, 2006). In summary, this assessment has the potential to revolutionise HEIs which can be tailored to three essential objectives, which are learning, maintaining standards and enhancing employability.

Factors Influencing the Students' Decision to Continue Their Studies at Higher Education Institutions

Some institutions are known for producing graduates who excel in certain industries, which may

enhance job prospects. For example, The One Academy is dubbed as "Oscars" of Malaysian advertising industry and is Malaysia's leading art and design colleges. For some, a university's mission, values and alignment with personal beliefs, such as sustainability or religious affiliation can influence choices too (Aydin, 2015).

Cost Factors

There are other factors, such as cost factors that include primary expenses of tuition fees, living expenses of accommodation, meals, transportation, and personal expenses, books and supplies, as well as other hidden costs, such as books, software, labs and materials (Aydin, 2015; Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Cynthia & Chong, 2023; Harahap, Amanah, Gunarto, & Purwanto, 2021; Zhao & Kanjanapathy, 2024). Financial aids or scholarships leading to less student loan debt are crucial as students would need to consider the affordability of the institution alongside the potential for financial aid (Aydin, 2015; Patnaik, Dicko, Subudhi, & Parhi, 2024).

Reference Groups Factors

There are reference groups which include teachers, friends, siblings, peers, and relatives (Aydin, 2015; Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Stephenson, Heckert, & Yerger, 2016). Julaihi and Mohamadin (2024) highlighted personal decisions and family influence play significant roles in shaping students' programme choices, which are consistent with previous research emphasising the crucial role of family and peers in educational decision. This is because a family's budget or financial support affects the choice of the university, which relates to cost, as well.

Location Factors

There are also some of the factors that influence students' preference. Strategic location, whether the institution is in a big city, suburban area, or rural location, is important for the students to enrol in HEIs. The accessibility to nearby convenience stores and in terms of transportation, being closer to home for familial or personal reasons, studying abroad versus domestically, taking into account the lifestyle, culture, and future job opportunities in each location are the key factors for students to decide their HEIs (Aydin, 2015; Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022).

Accessibility to Facilities Factors

Accessibility to research facilities, laboratories, study resources, counselling and mental health services, academic support along with high end technology and infrastructure - well-equipped campuses with modern technology and learning spaces can greatly influence the student experience. On top of that, additional care and security for students influence college choice decisions, especially among parents (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Zhao & Kanjanapathy, 2024).

External Factors

The social environment, student organisations, extracurricular activities, recreational programmes can influence the students' decisions to continue their studies at the HEIs. The presence of clubs, societies, sports, which are relevant to the students' interests can influence how well students feel they would fit in elevate their lifestyle expectations (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022; Zhao & Kanjanapathy, 2024).

Studies on Students' Needs in Tertiary Education

Some studies show the growing competition in higher education which emphasised that the aim of the growing competition between universities was to increase the number of students, get research support, find faculty members, and receive financial contributions (Aydin, 2015; Sarkodie, Asare, & Asare, 2020). With the variety of courses offered, it is difficult to understand how students select colleges or universities of their choice (Julaihi & Mohamadin, 2024). Julaihi and Mohamadin (2024), as well as Khairani and Razak (2013) mentioned that better understanding on the influential factors is needed to restrategise their marketing strategies to attract and retain students. Hence, more studies in this field need to be conducted before a clearer picture of the education industry in Malaysia emerges (Sidin, Hussin, & Tan, 2003).

The reputation and ranking, both national and global, of specific academic programmes can influence and sway students' decisions, especially if they are interested in a particular field or students seeking prestige or recognition as it is a brand reputation, as well (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022). This is also prevalent in Khairani and Razak's (2013) study that evidenced that university's image is the most influential factor followed by the university's environment, facility provided and courses offered by the university. Studies by Connie et al. (2022) and Sidin et al. (2003) showed there is a significant relationship between programme, university reputation, academic quality, employment opportunity, pricing, security, education and campus facilities, surrounding campus, events, location, peers, mentoring, as well as personal characteristics, like income. This was echoed by Sedahmed et al. (2019) as educational Institution related factors, such as diversity

of study, quality of education, education facilities and feasibility strongly were the highest influencing students' enrollment factor at 50 per cent. Results from survey done by Sarkodie et al. (2020) also rated reputation of institution as a major factor followed by parental factors, while the least factors were peer and media influences. This shows that the legitimacy and reputation of the institution provide the students' confidence that they will be able to obtain job opportunities (Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022).

It is important to take note that the perception of the university where branding, advertising and marketing is done through advertisements, social media and outreach programmes can affect the appeal. However, media influence was the least factor in Sarkodie et al.'s (2020) study. The perceived ability of the institution to help graduates secure good jobs in their field of study can strongly influence decisions (Aydin, 2015; Connie, Senathirajah, Subramanian, Ranom, & Osman, 2022). This is indeed proven in Mukanziza and Singirankabo's (2022) research as employment or job prospect is the most important factor.

On top of that, Quecano, Rincon and Moreno (2024) conducted a study to examine the drop-outs in postgraduate programmes. The research aimed to determine which personal, educational, socio-economic, and organisational factors affect student drop-outs at the postgraduate level (Master's and Doctoral) via a scoping evaluation. Forty research papers were analysed for bibliometric insights, focusing particularly on explanatory factors related to postgraduate dropout. Within the personal determinant, factors that explain include nationality, gender, age, relationship status, familial assistance, family and job responsibilities, and levels of motivation. Socio-economic factors include the student's earnings, job situation, and the overarching national economic atmosphere. In the educational setting, essential factors include previous knowledge, educational achievement, learner satisfaction, independence, self-efficacy and interest in research. Finally, factors like inadequate financial resources, institutional regulations, teacher-student engagement, student assistance, academic facilities, and curriculum development are crucial in the institutional domain. In conclusion, the research deepens the comprehension of postgraduate attrition, providing essential understandings for the scholarly community and governments to create approaches that enhance retention rates and decrease drop-outs rates in graduate education. Quecano, Rincon and Moreno's (2024) study is different compared with this current study because it is a study to investigate the drop-outs in postgraduate programmes via a scoping review. Nonetheless, this current study examines the factors that influence the tertiary students in their decision to choose their HEIs.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A needs analysis was applied in this research. This research utilised a self-administered survey via Google Form. A needs analysis is a test carried out within a small scale of sample size which aims to evaluate the quality of the instrument employed in the actual study (Altman, Burton, Festing, Hutton, & Playle, 2006). To address the research gap, a survey for needs analysis was created to investigate about the students' needs in tertiary education in Malaysian universities to reduce students' drop-outs from the university. Factor analysis and reliability testing were conducted to identify relevant factors and variables and to ensure the instrument's validity and reliability. Hence, the survey was created using the current literature and consisted of four constructs: University, Societal Influence, Family Influence, and Student (Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019). It was found that the items were reliable because the Cronbach's alpha value was 0.936 (George & Mallery, 2003). To examine the validity of the instruments, the survey was reviewed by two inter-raters based on the items listed in Table 1 (Sutha & Nurhanani, 2023). These two inter-raters had the expertise about assessment on students' needs and they have been teaching at HEIs for 10 years. These inter-raters were contacted via email to give their comments or feedback pertaining to the survey items. The survey items were then modified by incorporating the inter-raters' comments or feedback.

Samples

Bujang et al. (2024) and Hair et al. (2003) elucidated that the sample size of 5 to 30 participants is sufficient to test the reliability of the survey. The target participants for this study were 30 current existing tertiary students enrolled at universities offering tertiary student programmes in Malaysia. A sample size of 30 is considered a standard guideline that is adequate in quantitative research (Bujang, Omar, Diana, & Yoon, 2024; Hair, Babin, Money, & Samouel, 2003). The inclusion criterion of the samples was that the students would be at the age of 18 years and above. However, the exclusion criterion of the samples was that the students could not be 30 years of age and above. The inclusion and the exclusion criteria were added because the target group of students encompassed undergraduate students. There were 17 female and 13 male students who were in the age range of 18 and 30 years old who participated in this study. These students are from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman which is a private university in Malaysia.

Table 1. *Criteria for Items Construction*

No.	Item
1	Instructions for questions
2	Use of simple language
3	Clearly constructed questions
4	No spelling errors
5	Constructed questions to measure the content and objectives of the study
6	Appropriate instrument format with each item consists of clear information

Source: Sutha and Nurhanani, 2023

Convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods were employed to recruit 30 tertiary students from these universities. Convenience sampling offers various built-in advantages, like being economical, time-efficient, and easy to implement it, but it also has limitations, such as susceptibility to sample biases, systematic inaccuracies, lack of representativeness and limited generalisation of the research results (Golzar, Noor, & Tajik, 2022). Snowball sampling was also employed to recruit the tertiary students. A limited set of initial contacts who met the research criteria were asked to participate in the study (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019). The 15 willing participants were requested to suggest 15 other contacts who met the research criteria. Researchers, consequently, utilised their social networks to create initial connections, with sampling momentum arising from these, capturing an expanding chain of participants.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The researchers set forth a clear research objective and question. An ethical approval was obtained from the Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. The survey was developed based on the existing literature and comprised four constructs: University, Society Influence, Family Influence, and Student (Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019). There were 15 items under the construct of university, 3 items under the construct of Society Influence, 2 items under the construct of Family Influence, and 26 items under the construct of Student. The survey items were adapted from Davis's (2021) and Katz's (2019) studies following the four constructs and the number of items. The scale used for all the four constructs was a 5-point Likert-type scale, with participants indicating their level of agreement on a Strongly Disagree - Disagree - Neutral - Agree - Strongly Agree continuum. Under the construct of Student, there were also two open-ended items on the credit hours that the participants took in a semester and the time spent to study. There were also five items, in which the participants would have to rank them from the most serious problem at the university to the least serious problem at the university under the construct of Student. The survey was distributed to university students in Malaysia via Google Form after getting the approval for the research ethical clearance from Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. The survey was sent out via the Google Form due to its quick access, as well as easy process and analysis. In total, 30 self-administered surveys were disseminated, and the data collected were analysed descriptively by obtaining the frequency and percentage for the items of the four constructs using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 25.

4. RESULTS

Based on the four constructs of the survey, the majority of the participants responded with "Agree" to the items. The results would focus on the majority of responses to the survey items instead of the frequency of each of the five responses.

a. University

Table 2 shows the description of the items under the construct of university.

From Table 2, for university needs, most of the participants responded with "Agree" that they would go to the university because they would want to explore a variety of career opportunities (70.0%) and learn more about career interests (60.0%). They also elucidated that they would want to go to the university learn more about job applications (60.0%), resumes (50.0%), and job interviews (56.7%). They would also want to learn more about the university admission processes (60.0%), different universities (40.0%), and different programmes of study (63.3%), as well as university costs (66.7%). From the majority of the responses which responded with "Agree", the highest percentage was displayed by Item 1 (70.0%), while the lowest percentage was displayed by Item 7 (40.0%). Items 2, 3 and 6 revealed the similar percentage of 60.0 per cent.

However, the majority of them responded with "Neutral" when they stated that they would go to the university to visit more universities (36.7%) and learn

Table 2. *Items from the Survey under the Construct of University*

No.	Description	Majority of the Responses (%)		
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral
UNIVERSITY NEEDS				
1	I would go to the university because I would want to explore a variety of career opportunities.		70.0	
2	I would go to the university because I learn more about career interests.		60.0	
3	I would go to the university because I learn more about job applications.		60.0	
4	I would go to the university because I learn more about resumes.		50.0	
5	I would go to the university because I learn more about job interviews.		56.7	
6	I would go to the university because I want to learn more about the university admission processes.		60.0	
7	I would go to the university because I want to learn more about the different universities.		40.0	
8	I would go to the university because I want to learn more about the different programmes of study.		63.3	
9	I would go to the university because I want to learn more about the university costs.		66.7	
10	I would go to the university to visit more universities.			36.7
11	I would go to the university to learn more about how to pay for the university.			40.0
SELF-MANAGEMENT FACTORS				
1	My living environment makes studying difficult.			43.3
2	I have very little time to study because of university			43.3
3	My family responsibilities take up most of their time.			50.0
4	I have little time to sleep because of university.	46.7		

Source: Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019

more about how to pay for university (40.0%). Based on the majority of the responses which responded with "Neutral", the highest percentage was shown by Item 11 (40.0%), while the lowest percentage was shown by Item 10 (36.7%).

For self-management factors, the most of participants responded with "Neutral" that their living environment made studying difficult (43.3%). They also responded with "Neutral" that they had very little time to study because of university (43.3%), and their family responsibilities took up most of their time (50.0%). This shows that the highest percentage was demonstrated by Item 3 (50.0%), while the lowest percentage was demonstrated by Items 1 and 2 (43.3%). Nevertheless, they agreed strongly that they had little time to sleep because of university (46.7%).

In short, the majority of the responses for the items under the construct of university fell under the "Agree" response which exhibited the highest frequency for most items, followed by the "Neutral" response and lastly, the "Strongly Agree" response.

b. Society Influence

Table 3 displays the item descriptions under the construct of Society Influence.

From Table 3, for support system factors, the majority of the participants responded with "Agree" that their friends encouraged them to complete their university degree (36.7%), at least one person at university has shown real interest in their success (50.0%), and they would probably see a counsellor if they could afford one (43.3%). Based on the findings, it illustrated that Item 2

Table 3. *Items from the Survey under the Construct of Society Influence*

No.	Description	Majority of the Responses (%)
		Agree
SUPPORT SYSTEM FACTORS		
1	My friends encourage me to complete my university degree.	36.7
2	At least one person at university has shown real interest in my success.	50.0
3	I would probably see a counsellor if I could afford one.	43.3

Source: Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019

exhibited the highest percentage (50.0%), while Item 1 exhibited the lowest percentage (36.7%).

In sum, the majority of the responses for the items under the construct of Society Influence fell under the "Agree" response.

c. Family Influence

Table 4 illustrates the survey items for the construct of Family Influence.

Table 4 shows that for support system factors, most of the participants stated that they strongly agreed that their family encouraged them to complete their university degree (53.3%). Nonetheless, most of the participants responded with "Neutral" that their parents helped them to understand their studies better (43.3%).

The table portrays that the majority of the responses for the items under the construct of Family Influence fell under the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses.

d. Student

Table 5 presents the item descriptions from the survey for the student construct.

Based on Table 5, for personal needs factors, most of the participants agreed that they went to the university because they learned to deal with conflict in a positive manner (63.3%) and how their self-esteem affected their behaviour (76.7%). Additionally, they went to the university because they accepted greater responsibility for their actions (53.3%), learned to make good choices (56.7%) and developed stronger leadership skills (43.3%). Item 2 demonstrated the highest frequency (76.7%), while Item 5 demonstrated the lowest frequency (43.3%).

With regards to academic needs factors, most of the participants concurred that they went to the university because they learned how to complete and turn in their assignments on time (50.0%) and to obtain better grades in university (60.0%). The findings presented the highest frequency by Item 2 (60.0%). On a contrary, most of the participants had a split response between "Neutral" (40.0%) and "Agree" (40.0%) that they went to the university because they took tests better with less anxiety.

Table 4. *Items from the Survey under the Construct of Family Influence*

No.	Description	Majority of Responses (%)	
		Strongly Agree	Neutral
SUPPORT SYSTEM FACTORS			
1	My family encourages me to complete my university degree.	53.3	
2	My parents help me to understand my studies better.		43.3

Source: Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019

Pertaining to study needs factors, most of the participants agreed that they went to the university because when they missed class, they would get a copy of the notes from that day (40.0%), and they could turn in all their assignments (63.3%). They also remarked that when they read the course materials, they took notes (70.0%), and the notes that they took effectively prepared them for the examinations (60.0%). Item 3 had the highest frequency (70.0%), while Item 1 had the lowest frequency (40.0%).

For time management factors, the majority of the participants agreed that they went to the university because they used their syllabus as a guide to each course (66.7%), they studied more than two days before an examination (63.3%), and they set aside specific times each week to study (40.0%). On top of that, they successfully balanced their social life and study time (46.7%), as well as used a day planner or calendar to organise their weekly routine (43.3%). The highest frequency was noted by Item 1 (66.7%), while the lowest frequency was noted by Item 3 (40.0%).

In respect of expectation factors, the majority of the participants responded with "Neutral" (30.0%) and "Agree" (30.0%) that they were satisfied with merely passing all their courses. Besides that, they responded that they agreed that they were frustrated that they could not seem to make "A's" in university (43.3%), and while taking examinations, they felt a high level of anxiety (36.7%). Items 6 and 9 showed that they had the highest percentage (56.7%), while Item 1 had the lowest frequency (30.0%). However, they disagreed that their university grades were lower than their high school grades (36.7%).

Apart from that, under Factors, the majority of the participants responded with "Agree" that they went to the university because they could deal with peer pressure (40.0%), and they could get along with students who were different than them (56.7%). They also went to the university because they could manage personal stress (43.3%). Other than that, they went to the university because they could handle conflict at university (40.0%), and they could fit in at their new university (56.7%). The findings showed that Items 2 and 5 exhibited the highest frequency (56.7%), while Items 1 and 4 exhibited the lowest frequency (40.0%).

For the open-ended item on credit hours that the students took in a semester, the majority of them remarked that they had between 15 and 20 credit hours in a typical semester. Pertaining to the time spent to study, they mentioned that they would study for about four to six hours per day. With regards to the five items, in which the participants would have to rank them from the most serious problem at the university to the least serious

Table 5. *Items from the Survey under the Construct of Student*

No.	Description	Majority of the Responses (%)		
		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
PERSONAL NEEDS FACTORS				
1	I would go to the university because I learn to deal with conflict in a positive manner.	63.3		
2	I would go to the university because I learn how my self-esteem affects my behaviour.	76.7		
3	I would go to the university because I accept greater responsibility for my actions.	53.3		
4	I would go to the university because I learn to make good choices.	56.7		
5	I would go to the university because I develop stronger leadership skills.	43.3		
ACADEMIC NEEDS FACTORS				
1	I would go to the university because I learn how to complete and turn in my assignments on time.	50.0		
2	I would go to the university because I learn to obtain better grades in university.	60.0		
3	I would go to the university because I take tests better with less anxiety.	40.0	40.0	
STUDY NEEDS FACTORS				
1	When I miss class, I would get a copy of the notes from that day.	40.0		
2	I would go to the university because I could turn in all my assignments.	63.3		
3	I would go to the university because when I read the course materials, I take notes.	70.0		
4	I would go to the university because the notes that I take effectively prepare me for the examinations.	60.0		
TIME MANAGEMENT FACTORS				
1	I would go to the university because I use my syllabus as a guide to each course.	66.7		
2	I would go to the university because I study more than two days before an examination.	63.3		
3	I would go to the university because I set aside specific times each week to study.	40.0		
4	I would go to the university because I successfully balance my social life and study time.	46.7		
5	I would go to the university because I use a day planner or calendar to organise my weekly routine.	43.3		
EXPECTATION FACTORS				
1	I am satisfied with merely passing all my courses.	30.0	30.0	
2	I am frustrated that I could not seem to make "A's" in universities.	43.3		
3	While taking examinations, I feel a high level of anxiety.	36.7		
4	My university grades are lower than my high school grades.			36.7
BELIEF FACTORS				
1	I would go to the university because I could deal with peer pressure.	40.0		
2	I would go to the university because I could get along with students who are different than me.	56.7		
3	I would go to the university because I could manage personal stress.	43.3		
4	I would go to the university because I could handle conflict at university.	40.0		
5	I would go to the university because I could fit in at my new university.	56.7		

Source: Davis, 2021; Katz, 2019

problem at the university, most of the students illustrated that the least serious problem at the university would be problems with students who were different than them in terms of race, money or religion. However, they stated that the most serious problem at the university would be violence, especially bullying, controlling anger and fights in or out of the classroom. All the aforementioned responses from the students would determine whether the students would continue to be motivated to study at the university or lose interest in their study, thus causing drop-outs at the university.

It was noted that the majority of the responses for the items under the construct of Student fell under the "Agree" response which exhibited the highest frequency for most items, followed by the "Neutral" response and lastly, the "Disagree" response.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this study pinpoint the elements that affect students' decisions to attend HEI. By providing information on the factors influencing the decision to pursue university education, the study's findings also help

to close the knowledge gap, as well as enable education institutions and even the Education Ministry inputs for better planning.

Results from this study showed that most of the participants agreed (70.0%) that they would go to the university because they would want to explore a variety of career opportunities as supported by Connie et al. (2022), Cynthia and Chong (2023), Mukanziza and Singirankabo (2022), Sarkodie et al. (2020), as well as Sedahmed and Noureldien (2019). This study adds to employment opportunities and career desire influence have influence on student choice of programme which are consistent with studies by Aydin (2015), Connie et al. (2022), Cynthia and Chong (2023), Rababah (2016), as well as Sedahmed and Noureldien (2019). This is also an important factor for government as they would need to provide job opportunities to graduates.

The results displayed that 60.0 per cent of participants also would want university admission processes, which included the admission requirement as stated by Sedahmed and Noureldien (2019). Choice of programmes was a high factor at 63.3 per cent, which supported the statement from Cynthia and Chong (2023) that programme and course structure offered could be one factor influencing the students' choices to study at private HEIs. Some programmes are appealing because they offer qualifications recognised internationally, allowing students to work abroad. They could also be because it is related to the students' career aspirations and long-term goals. Students are influenced by the potential and stable high-paying jobs and the likelihood of finding employment post-graduation.

Besides that, costs were seen as a major factor as survey results yielded a 66.7 per cent (Cynthia & Chong, 2023; Haron, Hamid, Jamaludin, & Azan, 2017; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Migin, Falahat, Yajid, & Khatibi, 2015; Sedahmed & Noureldien, 2019; Yaacob, Sobri, Nasir, Norshahidi, & Husin, 2020; Patnaik, Dicko, Subudhi, & Parhi, 2024). This study adds that costs are a pertinent factor taking into account their family income and affordability. Rudhumbu (2017) stated that as parents are the financiers of their children's education, they have a significant influence on where their children go for higher education.

Majority of the participants responded with "Agree" that their friends (36.7%) and family (53.3%) which could be also named as peer influence that impacts perceptions, preferences and choices in several ways that encouraged them to complete their university degree. Several studies, such as Aydin (2015), Mukanziza and Singirankabo (2022), as well as Sedahmed and Noureldien (2019) supports the importance of peer influence. In some cultures, career desires are heavily influenced by societal norms or parental expectations, which in turn affect programme selection. For example, medicine and engineering are two of the most sought-after professions in India (Gaurav & Sheikh, 2020).

Quecano, Rincon and Moreno (2024) conducted a study to examine the factors that cause drop-outs in the postgraduate programmes. These factors are personal, educational, socio-economic, and organisational factors that are not consistent with this current study that analyses four factors, which are university, society influence, family influence, and student. In other words, factors like society influence and family influence were not investigated in Quecano, Rincon and Moreno's (2024) research. Furthermore, their study did not focus on the students' needs in the tertiary student level which are fundamental for the tertiary students to be aware of the importance of completing their studies at HEIs.

6. CONCLUSION

The decision to pursue higher education is increasingly influenced by a complex interplay of university offerings and students' psychological factors. Questions, such as "Should I study?" and "Where should I study?" have become more challenging due to stiff competition in the higher education sector. This study explores how various factors impact students' choices, including university attributes, society and family influences, and personal considerations. Students prioritise institutions that offer strong career prospects and a healthy study-life balance. Encouragement from friends and family plays a crucial role in motivating them to continue their education. They seek universities that foster the development of interpersonal skills, enhancing their overall personal and professional growth. Additionally, self-esteem is a key factor as it drives students to embark on their higher learning journey. Understanding these factors can enhance students' decision-making processes, ensuring they choose educational paths aligned with their skills and aspirations. Accessibility to higher education enables students to build a brighter future as it provides theoretical knowledge and practical skills that are essential for personal and professional growth. The findings of this study will also help authorities, management and administrators of the universities to understand better the key issues underlying the selection and decision-making process by clarifying what matters most to students. Consequently, authorities, management and administrators of the universities can refine their marketing strategies for student recruitment, as well as deliver a more holistic teaching and learning experience. Besides that, the findings of this study will determine the students' needs and expectations in order to strategise programme marketing approach and university

offerings to cater to their needs. To ensure students are motivated to continue their education at HEI, it is crucial to comprehend the factors affecting their decisions, such as university, society and family influences, as well as student. This is due to students favouring schools that provide excellent career opportunities and a good study-life balance. Support from friends and family is vital in inspiring them to pursue their education further. They also look for universities that promote the enhancement of interpersonal skills, contributing to their overall personal and professional development. The university offerings can be further enhanced by improving the infrastructure and facilities to fulfil the students' needs and wants. Moreover, self-esteem plays a crucial role as it motivates students to pursue their higher education paths. For future research, the constructs which are factors analysed in this study can be analysed further based on different students' community groups, like public and private university students, as well as school leavers. The results obtained can provide a base for comparative analysis.

Limitations and future directions of the study

The findings could still be interpreted considering their limitations. This study included only 30 tertiary students from Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, with a small sample size skewed towards students from the Klang Valley region. As a result, the findings are not representative of the broader tertiary student population (Ramachandiran, Dhanapal, & Salman, 2023). Conducting a replication of this study with a larger and more diverse sample from various regions across Malaysia or other universities would be beneficial. Future research could also incorporate additional factors, such as family upbringing and cultural influences. A follow-up study with a larger sample size is recommended to enhance accuracy, and future investigations could expand to areas not covered in the present research.

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not employ any of the Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies for Language refinement, drafting background section and did not perform any Task of the technology.

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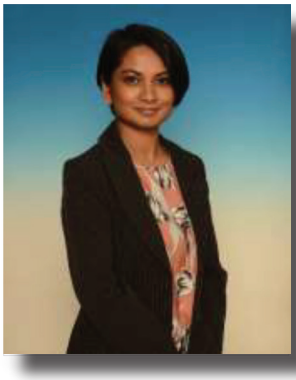


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Is Time Accelerating? Interdisciplinary Insights from Perception, Stress, Energy, and Physics

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary society, many individuals experience a subjective sensation that "time is accelerating." Based on 164 valid questionnaires covering individuals aged 15–55, this study examines key factors influencing personal time perception from an interdisciplinary perspective encompassing psychology, philosophy, physics, and energy metabolism. Findings indicate that, first, media usage duration shows a significant positive correlation with perceived time acceleration. Immersive short-video and social media environments reshape individuals' temporal perception structures. Second, psychological stress exhibits a significant positive correlation with time anxiety; individuals under high stress are more likely to feel "there aren't enough hours in the day." Finally, high-focus activities such as mindfulness, meditation, artistic creation, and exercise mitigate perceived time acceleration to some extent, offering practical intervention pathways. This study reveals shared temporal distress among adolescents and adults, underscoring the importance of actively regulating life rhythms. Despite limitations in sample size and cross-sectional design, its findings offer insights for education, mental health, and daily living, while laying groundwork for future cross-cultural research integrating physiological data.

Keywords: Energy, Interdisciplinary. Perception, Physics, Psychological Stress, Time

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern society, we increasingly encounter a common refrain in everyday conversation: time seems to be passing ever more rapidly! Many share this perception: childhood felt interminably long, yet as adolescence and adulthood arrived, time began to accelerate. Similarly, social media platforms host extensive discussions on the theme of 'time speeding up.'

Physics defines time as a continuous, uniform and measurable dimension, which is one of the basic references for the operation of the universe. Einstein, a scientist, said in his theory of relativity that time is relative under the conditions of gravity and speed, but in human daily life, the flow rate of time is almost constant.

The research objectives of this paper are to employ an interdisciplinary approach to uncover the underlying mechanisms of the subjective experience known as the 'acceleration of time,' and to explore practical interventions that may mitigate this phenomenon. Consequently, the objectives encompass four distinct dimensions across different disciplinary levels:

Firstly, based on psychology, philosophy, physics and energy metabolism, this paper analyzes the various factors that cause the feeling of "time acceleration". From the psychological level, we can explore the influence of people's concentration distribution, cognitive load and emotional state changes on time perception and experience. The exploration from the philosophical perspective can help us to better reflect on the theoretical and ideological problems of time existence.

Secondly, explore the characteristics of people's perception of time in today's high information

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density social background and psychological pressure environment. For this reason, this paper conducted a questionnaire survey on people aged 15-55. These groups' perception of time can provide clues for the formation of "fast-paced anxiety" and provide better support for mental health intervention.

Third, explore the effectiveness of highly focused activities such as meditation and artistic creation and energy management methods in restoring the "slow time" experience. These practices can not only improve concentration, but also restore individual balance from the way of psychological energy construction. Studying the influence of these activities on time perception can help relevant people to provide more practical psychological intervention methods.

Finally, this paper demonstrates the validity of the hypothesis through questionnaire survey and independent analysis, and based on this, puts forward feasible suggestions to improve time anxiety and individual energy imbalance. Based on the above four goals, this paper not only focuses on promoting the interdisciplinary research of time perception from a theoretical perspective, but also hopes to provide individuals and groups with inspiration and intervention tools from the practical application level, thus realizing the dual values of scientific research and social care.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Psychological Perspectives

Psychology has developed considerable maturity in research concerning the perception of time. Among these, the most classic theoretical framework of time perception was proposed by Zimbardo (1999), categorising individuals' temporal outlooks into future-oriented, past-indulgent, present-indulgent, present-fatalistic, and past-negative types. Zimbardo's theory emphasises that individuals' decision-making and experience processing are modulated by their intrinsic temporal orientation. For instance, future-oriented individuals typically excel at delaying gratification and prioritise long-term objectives, whereas present-hedonistic individuals tend to immerse themselves in immediate pleasures. These divergent temporal perspectives exert direct influences on learning styles, consumption habits, and psychological wellbeing.

In addition, the distribution of concentration and multi-task parallelism are also hot research directions in psychology. Studies have shown that when individuals process information in a multi-task environment, their subjective time will be lengthened or compressed (Buonomano, 2017). Especially in the state of highly distracted attention, the perception of time is more fragmented, and individuals may even have the feeling of "time disappearing". On the other hand, if you focus on a single goal, the individual's time experience may be extended and even enter a state of flow. This mechanism well explains the reason why people's perception of time has become faster in the digital society environment: there are too many fragmented information, and attention is highly dispersed, so that it is impossible to form a continuous time clue in the brain, and naturally time will fly.

According to developmental psychology, age affects individuals' perception of time. When children's cognitive development is immature, it is impossible to accurately perceive the length of time; Teenagers are very sensitive to short-term stimuli because of the rapid development of nervous system, and it is easy to have a "fast" experience; Middle-aged and elderly people will subjectively feel that time is speeding up because they pay more attention to the passage of time (Block et al., 1999). In recent years, more and more studies have emphasized the influence of digital media on teenagers' time perception. Teenagers who have been immersed in short video content for a long time are estimated to spend significantly less time in the experiment, and the fragmentation of attention will also aggravate the time experience (Haliti-Sylaj, T., 2024).

2.2 Philosophical Perspective

Philosophy primarily offers existential reflection on individual perceptions of time and space. The theory of "intra-temporal consciousness" posits that all human conscious experiences are inherently temporal (Husserl, 1928). Whether observing a moving or stationary object, we experience time through a triadic structure of "retention, present, and anticipation". Time is not an externally quantifiable clock, but rather a dimension unfolding within consciousness itself. Husserl's theory informs us that the perception of accelerated time does not stem from an actual change in the external flow of time, but rather from the disruption and fragmentation of our internal temporal consciousness.

Heidegger (1927) demonstrated the relationship between time and existence in Being and Time. He believes that human existence is a kind of "being to death", and people feel that the urgency of time stems from the finiteness of existence. The accelerated experience of modern society also reflects the anxiety of individuals in the pursuit of meaning in a limited life. It can be seen that time is not only a measuring tool, but also a fundamental structure to reveal the way of existence. In eastern philosophy, Buddhism's theory of moments is the most typical. Buddhism believes that all phenomena are born and die in an instant, and time is not a continuous entity, but consists of countless moments (Kalupahana, 1992). The theory of moments emphasizes the impermanence

of time, and always reminds human beings that "long-term" and "constant" experiences are illusions. With regard to the discussion of the sense of time acceleration, the theory of moments reveals that subjective anxiety comes from the persistence of eternity and persistence. Through practice, individuals can return to the present and experience "slow time". In recent years, more and more scholars have begun to pay attention to the changes of digital life on time experience. Lee (2022) proposed that digital accelerated culture is changing the individual's "inner time". He believes that the way of individual existence has been reshaped, which has spawned a new "digital anxiety". This study adds contemporary context to traditional philosophical thinking.

2.3 Physics and Quantum Speculation

The study of physics provides a solid scientific foundation for the ontology of time. Einstein's theory of relativity points out that time and space constitute a whole of time and space, and the flow rate of time will change with speed and gravity (Einstein, 1916). The internal time of a high-speed object will be relatively slow, but this effect is almost imperceptible in human daily life, so it cannot be used to explain the current phenomenon of "time acceleration". In the field of quantum physics, some scholars have pointed out that there is a correlation between consciousness and quantum process, and time may also have a multidimensional structure. However, these conjectures remain highly speculative and have not been empirically verified (Rovelli, 2018).

In contemporary discussions, there is a "spiritual upsurge", often uses quantum language metaphorically to explain consciousness or to claim that "thoughts can alter time." It is worth noting that the above explanation has not gained support from mainstream physicists and should be regarded as speculative or metaphorical in nature, not as an experimental finding. Such interpretations, lacking mainstream physics endorsement, should be viewed as speculative or metaphorical rather than experimental discoveries.

Many scholars have criticized the concept of "quantum consciousness," pointing out its lack of testable hypotheses and empirical foundation (Tegmark, 2000; Reimers et al., 2014). Therefore, the quantum consciousness-related concepts addressed in this study are limited to exploring the effects of time perception within established scientific frameworks such as Einstein's relativity and circadian rhythm biology. Quantum interpretations remain philosophical extensions or speculative analogies. Nevertheless, interdisciplinary research offers valuable perspectives—the intersection of neuroscience and quantum information theory may stimulate conceptual exploration, but should not be conflated with validated physiological mechanisms.

2.4 Research on Time Perception of Energy

In recent years, more and more studies have introduced the energy perspective into the discussion of time perception. Dijk & Archer (2009) found that the level of physiological energy affects cognitive efficiency, and the generation of ATP and the fluctuation of circadian rhythm determine the activity of the brain. The more energetic, the higher the efficiency of individual information processing, and the smoother the time experience; When the energy is low, the more concentrated the individual's stress and anxiety are, the more time flies. Psychological energy dimension is also very important. Emotional state affects subjective time. For example, positive emotions will make time longer and richer. Negative emotions or stress anxiety will compress time and produce anxiety of insufficient time (Fredrickson, 2001). In modern society, high-intensity information flow and continuous performance pressure will overdraw personal psychological energy, and more and more people feel that "time is accelerating". Research shows that meditation, mindfulness and other focused training can effectively restore psychological energy, and then extend subjective time experience. Chen et al. (2022) concluded through experiments that after 56 days of mindfulness training, participants' subjective sense of time became more balanced. Activities that require deep concentration, such as artistic creation and meditation, can also help individuals alleviate feelings of time anxiety and restore energy and mental clarity. (Mishra et al. (2024)

The concept of "energy" in this study refers solely to an individual's "subjective psychological energy," encompassing perceived vitality, alertness, and the availability of mental resources—not objective physiological output. Operationally, self-report scales can be used to record and assess perceptions of vitality, sustained focus, and emotional stability, such as "I maintain sufficient energy and concentration throughout the day." The above concept is adapted from empirically validated scales of subjective energy and vitality (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Shirom, 2011), maintaining consistency with psychological concepts.

It is particularly important to note that this concept of "energy" differs from behavioral frequency and perceived efficacy, such as the frequency of meditation/artistic creation/exercise mentioned in Q14, and the efficacy referenced in Q15. Behavioral frequency reflects activity patterns, while subjective energy captures an internal psychological state that either regulates or mediates the relationship between such time-based activities and time

perception. It is reiterated that this study focuses solely on self-perceived energy independent of physiological indicators like cortisol or heart rate. Any related inferences remain theoretical and do not constitute empirical claims.

The research of psychology and physiology shows that energy is the intermediary of time perception and the adjustment tool of time. High-concentration activities such as meditation, creation and exercise can restore psychological energy and enable individuals to enter the "slow time" state faster (Davidson & Kaszniak, 2015). It can be seen that the inclusion of energy mechanism not only expands the theoretical framework of time perception, but also provides a new direction for practical psychological intervention.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Objectives and Hypotheses

This paper examines the characteristics of time perception among individuals across different age groups (15–55 years) within modern high-information-density and high-stress environments. It analyses the impact of psychological stress, media usage habits, and energy regulation strategies on the phenomena of 'accelerated time perception' and 'time anxiety'. Distinct from prior research focusing solely on adolescents, this study encompasses a broader age range to compare similarities and differences in time perception across life stages. Based on literature review and empirical observations, three hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Individuals who frequently use short videos or social media (regardless of age) are more likely to perceive 'time passing quickly'.

H2: Individuals with higher psychological stress levels are more likely to report anxiety about 'time running out'.

H3: Individuals with habits of meditation, artistic creation, or exercise are less likely to experience the sensation of accelerated time or time anxiety.

This study employed convenience sampling, targeting school students and their parents, corporate employees, and others, with online communities serving as distribution and collection channels. This approach enabled me to rapidly gather sample data from diverse regions and demographic profiles within a short timeframe. Nevertheless, the geographical and demographic characteristics of my sample remain relatively concentrated, potentially limiting the representativeness of the findings across broader populations.

Therefore, rigorous consideration of the findings' generalizability is essential for interpretation and practical application. Should this topic be revisited in future research, adopting a more randomized and cross-regional sampling approach would be necessary to enhance external validity.

3.2 Research Methodology

Sample: This study employed a questionnaire survey method, distributing research questionnaires to households, schools, and online communities. Participants ranged in age from 15 to 55 years, encompassing secondary school pupils and working adults. All questionnaires were completed anonymously.

Tools: Unless otherwise specified, all questionnaire items employed a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree/Never, 5 = Strongly agree/Always). The questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1.

Analysis Plan: Regarding primary variables and constructs, this study employs media duration, distraction levels, stress index, energy/art/mindfulness frequency, subjective energy, and age group as independent variables; the Time Acceleration Index (PTAI) serves as the dependent variable.

The scoring rules for independent/dependent variables are as follows:

The Time Perception Acceleration Index (PTAI) is the average of items 10, 11, 12 and item 13 (reversed: 6−raw score), ranging from 1 to 5;

The Stress Index is the average of items 7 and 8;

The Time Anxiety Index is the score for item 9; Attention Distraction Index is the average of items 5 and 6; Media Duration is item 4, coded1-5: <1h=1, 1–2h=2, 3–4h=3, 5–6h=4, ≥7h=5; Subjective Energy = average of items 16 and 17 (reverse-scored: 5−raw score); Energy/Art/Mindfulness Frequency (Question 14) coded 0–3: Never = 0, Occasionally = 1, 1–2 times weekly = 2, ≥3 times weekly = 3; Question 15 serves as a reference for subjective sense of efficacy. Age groups: 15–24 = 1, 25–40 = 2, 41–55 = 3 (three groups total), may be used as a grouping variable if required.

This study employs descriptive statistics and group comparisons to contrast the mean values, standard deviations, and frequency percentages of various indicators within the report. Mean values for PTAI and time anxiety are presented by age group. Comparisons of PTAI and time anxiety across the three age cohorts were analysed using t-tests/one-way ANOVA or non-parametric tests. Correlation tests examined associations between media duration, stress indices, and distractibility with PTAI/time anxiety, thereby validating the proposed hypotheses.

3.3 Ethics statement

This study strictly adheres to ethical standards for social science research. All participants were explicitly

informed of the research objectives beforehand and were granted the right to withdraw at any time. All participants remained anonymous and confidential.

The online questionnaire for this study was distributed on August 24, 2025, via online channels to recruit participants including international and domestic high school students, parents, and corporate employees residing in Hangzhou, Jiangsu, Shanghai, and other regions within China.

This study did not collect or identify any personally identifiable information.

3.4 Caregiver Consent Statement

Some participants in this study were under the age of 18. Prior to their participation in completing the questionnaire, written or verbal consent was obtained from their parents or legal guardians.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Combining descriptive statistics, variance analysis, correlation analysis and hypothesis testing, this part discusses the relationship between media use, psychological stress, distraction, mindfulness/art/exercise habits and time acceleration and time anxiety.

4.1 Description of sample characteristics

In this study, a total of 164 valid questionnaires (n=164) were collected, and the age distribution was 15-55 years old, which were divided into three groups, as follows:

Juvenile group (15-24 years old), with 28samples (n = 28), accounting for 17.1%;

Youth group (25-40 years old) with 62 samples (n = 62), accounting for 37.8%;

Middle-aged group (41-55 years old), with74 samples (n = 74), accounting for 45.1%;

After testing each scale dimension using Cronbach's α coefficient, the results indicate overall good reliability. As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's α for the Attention Distraction dimension was 0.688, with all items exhibiting a corrected item total correlation (CITC) of 0.527, indicating high internal consistency. The α coefficient for the Stress Index dimension was 0.605, with a CITC value of 0.434, suggesting acceptable inter-item correlations. The α coefficient for the subjective energy dimension was 0.579, with a CITC value of 0.408, indicating slightly lower reliability but still within an acceptable range. The overall α coefficient for the Perceived Time Acceleration Index (PTAI) was the highest (0.695), with CITC values for individual items ranging from 0.242 to 0.631, indicating good internal consistency for this dimension. Overall, Cronbach's α for all subscales met the commonly accepted reliability standard in psychological research (>0.6). The scale demonstrates good internal consistency and measurement stability, making it suitable for subsequent statistical analysis.

Through visual scatter diagram analysis, the distribution of samples in the perception of media usage duration and time acceleration is shown in Figure 1.

It can be seen that the time acceleration index (1–5) of the sample media increases significantly with the

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Analysis

Dimension	Item	CITC	Deleted α coefficient	Cronbach α
Distracted	When studying or working, I often multitask simultaneously (e.g., chatting while solving problems or handling office tasks).	0.527	-	0.688
	I'm often interrupted by phone notifications while working on tasks.	0.527	-	
Pressure index	Over the past two weeks, I have often felt overwhelmed by academic or work pressure.	0.434	-	0.605
	I often feel anxious about progress/deadlines.	0.434	-	
Subjective energy	I usually feel energetic and find it easy to concentrate during the day.	0.408	-	0.579
	(Reverse) I often feel tired during the day and have difficulty sustaining my attention.	0.408	-	
PTAI	I often feel that "time flies by."	0.515	0.615	0.695
	In recent months, I've felt time accelerating more frequently.	0.631	0.524	
	I find daily events feel more fragmented, as if time itself is compressed.	0.582	0.564	
	(Reverse) I rarely experience the sensation that "time is accelerating."	0.242	0.779	

Source: Author, 2025

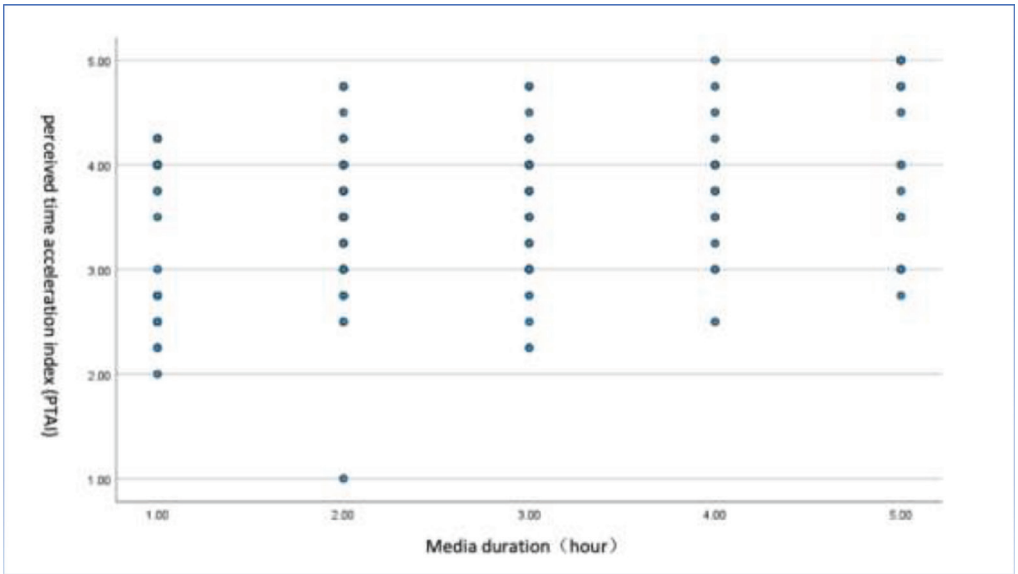


Fig. 1: Scatter plot of sample media exposure duration versus perceived time acceleration index (PTAI)

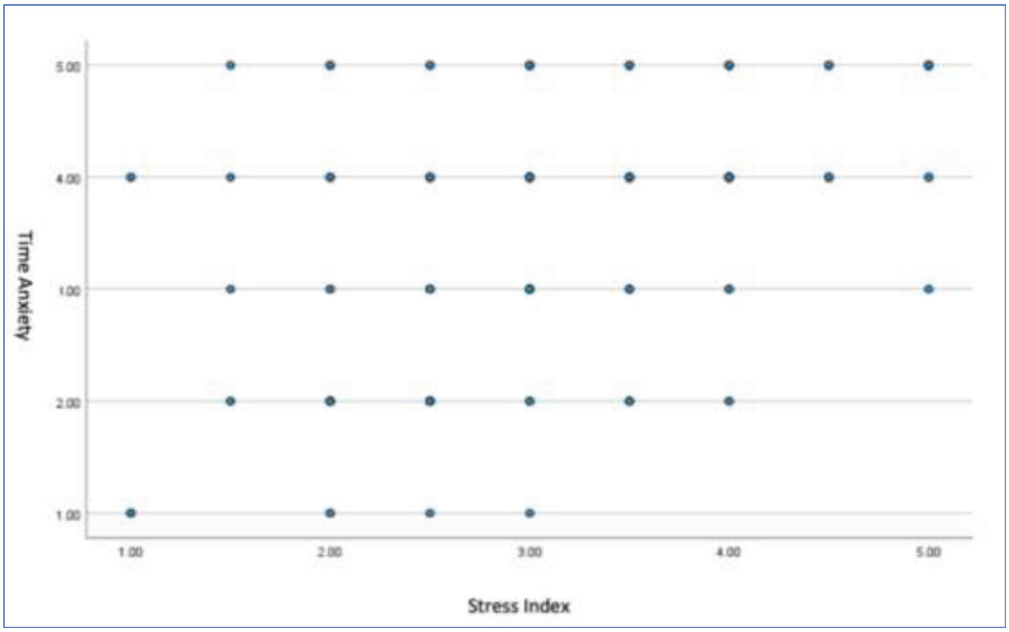


Fig. 2: Scatter Plot of Time Anxiety and Stress Index

increase of its contact with the market (0-4/ hour). This shows that there is a positive correlation between media contact duration and time acceleration index. Through the visual scatter chart 2, the distribution of time anxiety value (1-5) and stress index (1-5) can also be seen. When the stress index is greater than 4, the participants' anxiety about time also increases obviously. It can be seen that psychological stress also has a certain correlation and influence on the individual's perception of time.

4.2 Descriptive statistics

In order to further show the descriptive analysis results of each variable, this paper makes a descriptive analysis of the independent variables and dependent variables that affect individual perception time acceleration, as shown in Table 2.

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the primary variables. Results indicate:

The mean subjective energy score was 3.20 (SD = 0.86), reflecting a moderate level;

The mean energy/art/mindfulness frequency score was 1.48 (SD = 0.99), indicating a low frequency of related behaviors;

The mean time anxiety score was 3.59 (SD = 1.14), with a median of 4.00, suggesting respondents generally experienced a certain degree of time pressure;

The mean stress index score was 3.18 (SD = 0.98), comparable to time anxiety;

Table 2 Descriptive analysis

Name	Sample	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Median
Subjective energy	164	1.000	5.000	3.201	0.861	3.000
Energy/Art/Mindfulness Frequency	164	0.000	3.000	1.476	0.994	1.000
Time anxiety	164	1.000	5.000	3.585	1.140	4.000
Pressure index	164	1.000	5.000	3.180	0.977	3.000
Distraction	164	0.000	5.000	2.991	1.100	3.000
Media duration	164	1.000	5.000	2.720	1.241	3.000
Media Use and Attention	164	1.000	5.000	2.890	0.876	3.000
Psychological Stress and Time Anxiety	164	1.000	5.000	3.315	0.889	3.333
Time acceleration index	164	1.000	5.000	3.649	0.737	3.750

Source: Author, 2025

The average score for attention distraction was 2.99 (SD = 1.10), indicating mild to moderate distraction during tasks for most individuals;

The mean media duration score was 2.72 (SD = 1.24), indicating moderate frequency of media use among participants;

The mean score for media use and attention was 2.89 (SD = 0.88), comparable to the level of attention distraction.

The combined average score for psychological stress and time anxiety dimensions was 3.32 (SD = 0.89), while the time acceleration index showed a higher mean (3.65, SD = 0.74), suggesting most respondents subjectively experienced a pronounced sensation of "time speeding up."

Overall, the distribution of variables was reasonable, indicating that the sample group exhibited moderately high levels across energy states, attention, stress, and time perception.

4.3 Differential Analysis

1. Age Differences

Table 3 shows the results of variance analysis of time acceleration index in different age groups. Age groups (15-24 years old, 25-40 years old, 41-55 years old) have no significant influence on the time acceleration index (F = 0.270, p = 0.764), indicating that the differences in time acceleration perception among different age groups are not statistically significant. The average value of time acceleration index of each age group is close (15-24 years old: M = 3.571, 25-40 years old: M = 3.694, 41-55 years old: M = 3.642), and the standard deviation also shows that the distribution of participants in each group is relatively consistent. It shows that age has no significant effect on time acceleration perception.

2. Differences in Mindfulness/Art/Exercise Frequency

Table 4 shows the results of variance analysis of energy/art/mindfulness frequency versus time acceleration index. The analysis shows that the influence of energy/art/mindfulness activities with different frequencies on the time acceleration index is significantly different (F = 8.585, p < 0.001). Specifically, individuals who frequently engage in these activities (1-2 times per week and ≥3 times per week) have lower scores on the time acceleration index (1-2 times per week: M = 3.391, and ≥3 times per week: M = 3.341), while individuals who occasionally engage in (≤1 time per week) and those who do not engage in such activities (never: m = 4 This shows that positive mindfulness/art/exercise habits may help alleviate the subjective perception of "time goes by too fast".

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were used to analyze relationships among key variables. Results indicate that the time acceleration index significantly correlates with most psychological variables. Specifically, the time acceleration index correlates with time anxiety (r = 0.618, p < .001), stress index (r = 0.377, p < .001), attention distraction (r = 0.268, p < .001), media duration (r = 0.346, p < .001), and the composite indicator of

Table 3: Analysis of Variance Results by Age Group

	Age (mean ± SD)			*F*	*p*
	15–24 (*n*=28)	25–40 (*n*=62)	41–55 (*n*=74)		
Time acceleration index	3.571±0.707	3.694±0.885	3.642±0.607	0.270	0.764

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$

Source: Author, 2025

Table 4: Results of Analysis of Variance

	Energy/Art/Mindfulness Frequency (Mean ± SD)				*F*	*p*
	Never (*n*=27)	**Occasionally (≤1 time/ week) (*n*=65)**	**1–2 times/week (*n*=39)**	**≥3 times/week (*n*=33)**		
Time acceleration index	4.102±0.833	3.773±0.596	3.391±0.522	3.341±0.886	8.585	<0.001***

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$

Source: *Author, 2025*

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Analysis

	Mean	**SD**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Time Acceleration	3.649	0.737	1								
Subjective Energy	3.201	0.861	-0.148	1							
Energy/Art/ Mindfulness Frequency	1.476	0.994	-0.358***	0.253**	1						
Time Anxiety	3.585	1.140	0.618***	-0.171*	-0.112	1					
Pressure index	3.180	0.977	0.377***	-0.271***	-0.120	0.450***	1				
Distraction	2.991	1.100	0.268***	-0.194*	-0.125	0.251**	0.437***	1			
Media Duration	2.720	1.241	0.346***	-0.234**	-0.185*	0.212**	0.272***	0.256***	1		
Media Use and Attention	2.890	0.876	0.238**	-0.263***	-0.083	0.222**	0.419***	0.905***	0.515***	1	
Psychological Stress and Time Anxiety	3.315	0.889	0.540***	-0.272***	-0.136	0.757***	0.924***	0.427***	0.290***	0.402***	1

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$

Source: Author, 2025

psychological stress and time anxiety ($r = 0.540$, $p < .001$). This indicates that individuals experiencing accelerated time perception often exhibit higher levels of anxiety, stress, and attention distraction. Conversely, the time acceleration index showed significant negative correlations with subjective energy ($r = −0.148$, $p < .05$) and energy/art/mindfulness frequency ($r = −0.358$, $p < .001$), indicating that individuals with higher energy levels and more frequent mindfulness activities experienced weaker subjective time acceleration.

Furthermore, subjective energy negatively correlated with stress ($r = −0.271$, $p < .001$), distraction ($r = −0.194$, $p < .05$), and media duration ($r = −0.234$, $p < .01$), suggesting that higher energy levels are associated with lower stress and distraction. Distractibility and media use showed extremely strong correlations with attentional focus ($r = 0.905$, $p < .001$), indicating high consistency in the psychological processes they reflect. Both variables also significantly positively correlated with time anxiety, stress index, and total psychological stress (all $p < .001$), demonstrating that attentional issues are closely linked to temporal pressures. Finally, the composite variable of psychological stress and time anxiety showed the strongest positive correlations with time anxiety ($r = 0.757$, $p < .001$) and stress index ($r = 0.924$, $p < .001$), validating its effectiveness in reflecting overall psychological stress levels.

Overall, the results indicate a strong positive association between time experience, anxiety, stress, attentional distraction, and media use, while energy levels and mindfulness activity frequency exert a protective effect to some extent.

4.5 Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis1: Individuals who frequently use short videos or social media (regardless of age) are more likely to perceive that “time flies.”

As shown in Table 6, this study conducted a linear regression analysis for Hypothesis 1, which posits that “individuals who frequently use short videos or social media (regardless of age) are more likely to perceive ‘time passing quickly.’” The regression analysis revealed a significant positive effect of media duration on the time acceleration index ($\beta = 0.346$, $p < 0.001$). The unstandardized coefficient of 0.206 indicates that the perception of time acceleration increases significantly as media usage time increases. The model’s R^2 was 0.120, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.115, indicating that media duration explains approximately 11.5% of the variance in perceived time acceleration. The F-value was 22.084 with a p-value less than 0.001, confirming the model’s statistical significance. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported, demonstrating that media duration

significantly influences individuals' perception of time acceleration.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals with higher levels of psychological stress are more likely to report feelings of anxiety about "not having enough time."

Table 7shows the results of linear regression analysis for hypothesis 2. Results indicated overall good model fit with statistical significance: $F(1, 162) = 26.852$, $p < .001$. The coefficient of determination was $R^2 = 0.142$ (adjusted $R^2 = 0.137$), suggesting psychological stress explains approximately 14% of the variance in time anxiety. The regression coefficient for the stress index on the time acceleration index was $B = 0.284$ ($SE = 0.055$, $\beta = 0.377$, $t = 5.182$, $p < .001$). This indicates that higher psychological stress levels correlate with individuals' greater tendency to perceive time as passing too quickly or to experience the subjective sensation of "not having enough time." This result supports hypothesis 2, indicating that higher psychological stress level is related to stronger perception of time anxiety.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals who engage in meditation, artistic creation, or exercise regularly score lower on measures of "time acceleration" and "time anxiety."

Table 8 presents the linear regression analysis for Hypothesis 3, examining the effect of meditation, artistic creation, or exercise habits (energy/art/mindfulness frequency) on the time acceleration index. The regression results indicate that energy/art/mindfulness frequency significantly negatively influences the time acceleration index ($\beta = -0.358$, $p < 0.001$). Specifically, the unstandardized coefficient of -0.265 indicates that as energy/art/mindfulness frequency increases, the perception of time acceleration significantly decreases. The model's R^2 is 0.128, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.122, suggesting that energy/art/mindfulness frequency explains approximately 12.2% of the variance in the time acceleration index. The F-value was 23.739 with a p-value less than 0.001, indicating the model's statistical significance. In summary, energy/art/mindfulness frequency significantly reduced individuals' perception of time acceleration, partially supporting Hypothesis Three.

To examine the predictive role of individuals' energy/art/mindfulness frequencies on time anxiety, a linear regression analysis was conducted with time anxiety as the dependent variable. As shown in Table 9, the overall model was not significant ($F(1, 162) = 2.054$, $p = 0.154$) and exhibited low explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.013$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.006$), indicating limited predictive capacity for time anxiety. The regression coefficient for the independent variable Energy/Art/Mindfulness Frequency was B =

Table 6: Results of Linear Regression Analysis (n=164)

	Non-SD Coefficient		SD Coefficient	*t*	*p*	Collinearity Diagnosis	
	B	**Sd error**	***Beta***			**VIF**	**Tolerance**
Constant	3.090	0.131	-	23.643	<0.001***	-	-
Media Duration	0.206	0.044	0.346	4.699	<0.001***	1.000	1.000
R 2	0.120						
Adjust R 2	0.115						
F	F (1,162)=22.084,p=0.000						
D-W	0.949						

Note: Dependent variable = Time acceleration index

** p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001*

Source*:* Author, 2025

Table 7: Linear Regression Analysis Results (n=164)

	Non-SD Coefficient		SD Coefficient	*t*	*p*	Collinearity Diagnosis	
	B	**Sd error**	***Beta***			**VIF**	**Tolerance**
Constant	2.745	0.183	-	15.035	<0.001***	-	-
Stress Index	0.284	0.055	0.377	5.182	<0.001***	1.000	1.000
R 2	0.142						
Adjust R 2	0.137						
F	*F* (1,162)=26.852,*p*=0.000						
D-W	0.291						

Note: Dependent variable = Time anxiety

** p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001*

Source*:* Author, 2025

Table 8: Linear Regression Analysis Results (n=164)

	Non-SD Coefficient		SD Coefficient	*t*	*p*	Collinearity Diagnosis	
	B	Sd error	*Beta*			VIF	Tolerance
Constant	4.041	0.097	-	41.787	<0.001***	-	-
Energy/Art/ Mindfulness Frequency	-0.265	0.054	-0.358	-4.872	<0.001***	1.000	1.000
R 2	0.128						
Adjust R 2	0.122						
F	*F* (1,162) =23.739,*p*=0.000						
D-W	0.268						

** p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001*

Note: Dependent variable = Time acceleration index

Source: Author, 2025

Table 9: Linear Regression Analysis Results (n=164)

	Non-SD Coefficient		SD Coefficient	*t*	*p*	Collinearity Diagnosis	
	B	Sd error	*Beta*			*B*	
Constant	3.775	0.159	-	23.712	<0.001***	-	-
Energy/Art/Mindfulness Frequency	-0.128	0.090	-0.112	-1.433	0.154	1.000	1.000
R 2	0.013						
Adjust R 2	0.006						
F	*F* (1,162)=2.054,*p*=0.154						
D-W	1.309						

Note: Dependent variable = Time anxiety

** p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001*

Source: Author, 2025

−0.128 (SE = 0.090, β = −0.112, t = −1.433, p = 0.154), failing to reach statistical significance. This indicates that the frequency of participation in mindfulness and artistic activities does not significantly predict time anxiety.

4.6 Discussion

Based on data from 164 questionnaire respondents, this study explores differences in time perception and influencing factors across age groups (15–55 years) in modern society, substantiating the following hypotheses:

First, longer individual media usage significantly enhances the perception of accelerated time, indicating that an "immersive media environment" impacts individuals' temporal perception structures.

Second, psychological stress and time anxiety are positively correlated, revealing that psychological pressures arising from fast-paced social environments can alter individuals' temporal perception structures.

Finally, mindfulness, meditation, and high-concentration activities like artistic creation or exercise demonstrate positive effects in mitigating accelerated time perception, offering viable intervention pathways. However, when we try to analyze the influence of the frequency of energy/art/mindfulness activities on time anxiety, the results in Table 9 tell us that these activities can alleviate people's sense of acceleration of time, but the influence on time anxiety is not obvious.

Beyond validating these hypotheses, the findings suggest new approaches: both adolescents and adults grapple with accelerated time perception. Actively adjusting the pace of life-through exercise, meditation or focused creative pursuit-may become a new strategy to alleviate time anxiety, although its direct impact on time anxiety needs further study.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the interdisciplinary perspectives of psychology, philosophy and physical energy metabolism, this paper studies the sense of "time acceleration" generally perceived by individuals in today's society. Based on the previous literature review and questionnaire survey, it is found that the individual's perception of time is closely related to the external environment, the individual's internal psychological state, energy level and existence consciousness. Psychology shows that the type of time view, individual stress level and distraction degree are the core factors that cause individual subjective time acceleration. From the philosophical perspective, the

way of individual existence and inner consciousness have a deep regulating effect on the perception of time. The study of energy and circadian rhythm shows that the lack of psychological energy and physiological energy will directly compress the individual's perception of time and make people feel anxious about "not enough time". From a practical point of view, this paper provides a reference for the intervention of education, mental health and lifestyle. Teenagers and youth groups need to strengthen their concentration management and the frequency of using digital media, limit the fragmented input of information, and cultivate their deep concentration to alleviate their time anxiety and sense of time acceleration. Middle-aged people, on the other hand, need to pay attention to their own energy management and psychological energy healing, and construct and restore psychological energy and physiological energy with high concentration activities such as mindfulness, meditation training and artistic creation and regular life rhythm, so as to extend their subjective time experience. For educators and professional mental health people, it is necessary to provide personalized strategies in combination with individual time view types to help different groups balance their own pressure and anxiety. From the perspective of academic research, this paper once again explains the importance of interdisciplinary integration. It is difficult for a single discipline to fully explain the complexity of time perception, and the integration of psychology, these and energy research provides systematic support for the ubiquitous time frame in modern society. The questionnaire and independent research methods in this paper provide a reference model for future empirical research, which is helpful to deepen the study of time perception differences among different groups of people with different ages, cultures and lives. The sense of time acceleration is not only a sign of the accelerated pace of modern life, but also the result of psychological pressure and energy overdraft. Through interdisciplinary understanding and targeted intervention, individuals can recover the "slow time" experience, thus improving life satisfaction, mental health and creativity. Future research can further combine physiological indicators (such as EEG and circadian rhythm monitoring) with long-term longitudinal data to verify the actual effect of energy management and attention training in alleviating the sense of time acceleration, thus transforming theoretical findings into operational daily strategies.

5.1. Limitations & Future Research

The hypothesis put forward in this paper is supported by some data, but it still has some shortcomings. On the one hand, the scale and representativeness of the sample need to be improved. The data of 164 questionnaires collected in this paper is limited, and it can't fully represent a wider range of people by convenient sampling. In addition, considering that the research methods used in this study are convenient sampling and cross-sectional research design, it will have a certain impact on the universality of the research results, thus limiting the feasibility of deducing causality from observed correlation. Therefore, it is necessary to be cautious in the interpretation of the correlation between psychological pressure, media utility and time perception, and it is impossible to directly infer the causal relationship.

In the future, we should expand the samples as much as possible with the labels of regions and occupations to enhance the universality of the research. Secondly, the data in this paper focus on a single cultural and regional background, without cross-cultural comparison. In fact, different social rhythms and cultural values will also have a significant impact on individual time perception. This study is a one-off cross-sectional survey, which fails to fully capture the dynamic development process of time perception in different life stages or social environment changes. In the future, longitudinal follow-up research may be used to reveal the evolution track of time perception. In addition, in the study of the relationship between "energy level" and time perception, this paper only stays at the psychological level, but fails to start from physiological indicators such as heart rate, brain waves and cortisol levels. In the future, we can combine the psychological and physical dimensions to build a more three-dimensional analysis model.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not employ any of the Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies for Language refinement, drafting background section and did not perform any Task of the technology.

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Appendix: Survey Questionnaire

Uniform Scale Instructions: Unless otherwise specified, all scales use a 5-point Likert scale

(1 = Strongly Disagree/Never, 5 = Strongly Agree/Always).

(I) Basic Information and Grouping (Single Choice)

1. Age: 15–24 / 25–40 / 41–55
2. Status: Student (High School/University) / Working Professional / Other
3. Average Sleep Duration in Past Week: <5h / 5–6h / 6–7h / 7–8h / >8h

(II) Media Usage and Attention (H1 Related)

4. Total daily time spent on short videos or social media in the past week: <1h / 1–2h / 3–4h / 5–6h / ≥7h
5. When studying/working, I often multitask (e.g., chatting while doing homework/work).
6. I am frequently interrupted by phone notifications during tasks.

(III) Psychological Stress and Time Anxiety (H2-related)

7. Over the past two weeks, I often felt significant academic or work pressure.
8. I frequently feel anxious about progress/deadlines.
9. I often feel there aren't enough hours in the day. (Core item for time anxiety)

(IV) Perceived Acceleration of Time (Core Dependent Variable)

10. I often feel that "time flies by quickly."
11. In recent months, I've felt time accelerating more frequently.
12. I feel daily events are more fragmented, as if time is compressed.
13. (Reversed) I rarely experience the sensation that "time is speeding up." (Reversed scoring)

(V) Energy Regulation and Habits (H3-related)

14. Do you have any of the following consistent habits (lasting at least 4 weeks): meditation/mindfulness, artistic creation (painting/music/writing/dance), regular exercise?

Never / Occasionally (≤1 time/week) / 1–2 times/week / ≥3 times/week

15. After engaging in these activities, I find it easier to focus on the present moment. (1=Yes, 2=No, 3=No such habit) (Responses marked 3 are excluded from statistical analysis)

Note: If item 15 is selected as "3," it is treated as missing in corresponding indicators and excluded from averaging.

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Yixuan Yu (b.2008) is a Grade 12 student and senior at a county high school in Jiangxi, China. She has a passion for art, and explores the sense of acceleration of subjective time in interdisciplinary research.

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Blades and Banners: Sacred Iconography and Political Identity in Sikh and Iranian Traditions

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ABSTRACT

A comparative study of the Sikh Khanda and Iranian state symbols has been undertaken to examine the relationship between religious symbolism and the development of political identity in two distinct cultural contexts. The study investigates how sacred iconography serves as a means of expressing authority, resistance, unity, and cultural memory. The Sikh Khanda represents the synthesis of spiritual and temporal authority through its components. It embodies the Khalsa ideal of the saint-soldier. The intricate balance between religious authority and national identity is also reflected in Iranian official symbols, which range from the antiquated Faravahar to modern emblems that use Islamic calligraphy and pre-Islamic themes. This multidisciplinary study uses historical contextualization, theological interpretation, and visual analysis to comprehend how these symbols act as compact repositories of cultural meaning. The obtained results show how sacred iconography serves as a link between temporal governance and spiritual devotion, in both ancient and modern contexts.

Keywords: Cultural identity, Ethnography, Faravahar, Iconographic analysis, Islamic calligraphy, Khanda, Political identity, Religious symbolism.

1. INTRODUCTION

In religious settings, the use of symbols to convey and communicate cultural and spiritual meanings is known as religious symbolism. These symbols carry deep spiritual and cultural significance, and are more than just ornaments or arbitrary images. They can bridge linguistic and cultural divides, thereby fostering understanding and emotional resonance among individuals from various backgrounds. In this way, religious symbols are necessary for communicating religious practices and beliefs, particularly where abstract ideas that can be challenging to describe in words or a concrete form. For example, one of the most important symbols in Christianity is the cross, which represents Jesus Christ's crucifixion and his atonement for humanity's sins. By exhibiting or wearing a cross, Christians can show their commitment to their faith. Thus, the use of this religious symbol by Christians affirms their personal faith and helps them to participate in a shared religious identity ("Religious symbolism - A comprehensive guide," 2023). Another example of religious symbolism is the lotus flower. It is frequently associated with Buddhism as a symbol of overcoming hardship, purity, and enlightenment. Buddhists are reminded of their capacity for development and change when they meditate on the lotus blossom (Barrett, 2023; Richie, 2014). These examples illustrate how symbols do more than represent; they inspire, uplift, and motivate people to take action and undergo transformation.

To further understand the impact and depth of such symbolism, we turn to the field of *iconography*, which is the study of pictures and symbols and their complex meanings. Understanding what images represent, the

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narratives they deliver, and the messages they convey is the goal of iconography (Chung, 2025). Deciphering the layers of information concealed within an image is more important than simply identifying it. Iconography helps us to quickly and intuitively comprehend visual information in various contexts, including digital design, art, religion, and culture. These visuals, whether digital icons, religious symbols, or cultural motifs, carry meanings influenced by social context, history, and tradition (Kalra, 2025; Goldammer, 1999). Through this lens, religious symbolism becomes part of a broader system of meaning-making, one that transcends visual appearance to engage with memory, belief, and identity.

Indeed, religious symbols (Singh, 2022) can serve as potent mediators between the transcendent and the temporal. These symbols serve as markers of political identity and cultural belonging in addition to encoding intricate theological ideas (Newman, 2020). An active area for interdisciplinary study is the junction of state symbolism and religious iconography. It shows how societies balance political power with spiritual authority (Eliade, 1959). This relationship is vividly illustrated in the comparison of the Sikh Khanda and Iranian state symbols. Both of these symbols are used to articulate and sustain distinct yet interconnected religious and political identities.

The Sikh Khanda (Figure 1), a composite symbol featuring a double-edged sword flanked by two curved swords and encircled by a steel ring, embodies the fundamental Sikh principle of *miri-piri*, the unity of temporal and spiritual authority established by Guru Hargobind in the early 17th century (McLeod, 1989; Dogra & Mansukhani, 1997). From its beginnings in Sikh religious practice, this symbol has developed into a key emblem of Sikh identity around the world, adorning diaspora community centers, gurdwaras, and individual artifacts. The theological complexity of Sikh doctrine, which holds that seeking spiritual liberation is inextricably linked to working for worldly justice, is reflected in its visual complexity (Singha, 2005). Thus, the Khanda is not only a religious icon but also a visual statement of resistance, resilience, and the Sikh community's enduring commitment to justice.

Similarly, Iranian state symbols present a fascinating palimpsest of cultural memory, incorporating elements from Zoroastrian, Islamic, and pre-Islamic Persian traditions. From the ancient Faravahar symbol to the contemporary emblem of the Islamic Republic (Figure 2), Iranian iconography demonstrates the ongoing negotiation between competing claims to legitimate authority (Abrahamian, 2008). A major turning point was the Revolution of 1979, when new symbols arose that attempted to harmonize Persian cultural identity with Islamic theological principles, resulting in a distinctive synthesis that is still developing today (Asad, 2003; Hjarvard, 2011).



Figure 1. *Khanda*



Figure 2. Iranian Emblem

This comparative analysis attempts to demonstrate how sacred symbols function as political communication tools by carefully examining their capacity to encode resistance, express solidarity, and preserve cultural memory across time and space (Gill & Angosto-Ferrandez, 2018).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach drawing from visual anthropology, historical analysis, and religious studies methodologies to examine the Sikh Khanda and Iranian state symbols as sites of sacred and political meaning-making. The research design incorporates three primary analytical frameworks: iconographic analysis, historical contextualization, and diaspora ethnography.

The iconographic analysis follows Panofsky's (1955) three-tiered approach, examining pre-iconographic description, iconographic analysis, and iconological interpretation. This method enables systematic decoding of symbolic elements, their conventional meanings, and their more profound cultural significance. Primary visual sources include historical manuscripts, architectural decorations, official state documents, and contemporary community materials from both traditions.

Historical contextualization employs archival research and secondary literature analysis to trace the

evolution of these symbols across different political regimes and social contexts. This approach examines how changing political circumstances, cultural exchanges, and religious reforms impact symbolic meanings. Examples of sources include colonial records, religious texts, historical chronicles, and contemporary political documents.

The diaspora ethnography component uses semi-structured interviews and participant observation with community members in North American contexts. By analyzing the interplay between traditional religious significance and modern political mobilization, this methodology investigates how symbolic meanings change in transnational contexts. Fieldwork was conducted in gurdwaras, cultural centers, and community gatherings, with particular attention to generational differences in symbolic interpretation.

Data analysis employs thematic coding to identify recurring patterns in symbolic usage, meaning attribution, and identity construction. The study maintains ethical considerations through informed consent procedures and community approval for research activities. Limitations include geographic constraints on fieldwork and the challenge of representing diverse perspectives within heterogeneous religious communities.

3. RESULTS

Religious symbols may not be powerful in and of themselves, but over time, societies give them meanings that give them strength. They serve as graphic representations of shared identities, histories, and profound values. Spiritual meditation, group togetherness, and emotional resonance can all be evoked by a symbol such as the Cross or the Khanda. They can also be used to convey togetherness, legitimacy, or resistance. Symbols frequently serve as focal points for group action in politics and social movements. Their capacity to concisely convey complex concepts across generations and cultural divides, connecting the past, present, and future, is what gives them their power.

Religious symbols can be adapted to serve the social and cultural needs of various groups. This can be done by allowing them to represent layered meanings. For symbols like the turban or the Khanda, Sikh diaspora communities can signify both faith and civic engagement in their new homelands. Bridges with wider societies are facilitated by these symbols, which present Sikh values such as equality and service as universal principles. Symbols serve as both legacy identifiers and instruments for intercultural communication and respectful assimilation.

3.1 Historical Evolution and Theological Foundations

In Punjab during the 17th century, a particular historical setting of religious innovation and political resistance gave rise to the Sikh Khanda. Guru Hargobind institutionalized the concept of miri-piri by establishing the Akal Takhat (known initially as Akal Bunga) in 1606. It later became fundamental to Sikh identity, representing a revolutionary synthesis of temporal and spiritual authority (Cole, 1998; Grewal, 1991). This theological idea is embodied in the Khanda symbol's composite structure, in which each component has unique yet related meanings.

Sirdar Kapur Singh (2001), in Parasaraprasna, explains that the Khanda, a double-edged sword, was used in the Khalsa initiation *(Khande di Pahul*) by Guru Gobind Singh for its profound symbolic resonance. Archaeological parallels are drawn to the Buddhist Bodhisattva Manjusri, who is often depicted wielding a similar sword representing the power of knowledge to cut through ignorance. Thus, the Khanda represents both *Shakti* (sovereign authority) and *Gian* (spiritual insight). Guru Gobind Singh utilized it to establish a community founded on divine authority and moral clarity. By aligning the Khalsa identity with the principles of justice, bravery, and enlightened action, it helped establish a new spiritual-political order.

The central double-edged sword (Khanda), which symbolizes the transformational power of spiritual wisdom, is a representation of divine knowledge that cuts through ignorance and falsehood. Its dual-edge, which reflects a deep theological understanding of divine attributes, represents the dual nature of divine justice: creative and destructive, merciful and wrathful (Singha, 2005; Dogra & Mansukhani, 1997).

The circular *chakkar's* steel composition highlights strength and purity while symbolizing the eternal, endless nature of divine reality. The dual duties of the Khalsa: spiritual elevation *(piri)* and temporal justice *(miri)*, are symbolized by the two curved swords *(kirpans)* that flank the central sword.

Although Iranian state symbols have evolved over millennia rather than centuries, they exhibit the same intricate theological negotiations. Originating in ancient Persian religious traditions, the Faravahar (Figure 3) has been continuously reinterpreted in Zoroastrian, Islamic, and contemporary secular contexts. The winged



Figure 3. *Faravahar*

disk, human figure, and tail that make up its three-part structure originally symbolized the three paths of Zoroastrian ethics: good words, good deeds, and good thoughts (Boyce, 1979).

The Islamic Republic's use of altered pre-Islamic symbols is an interesting example of cultural continuity and religious tolerance. The modern Iranian emblem retains geometric designs evocative of pre-Islamic Persian art while incorporating Islamic calligraphy spelling "Allah." This synthesis shows that, as opposed to total symbolic rupture, religious authority can be asserted through symbolic innovation.

3.2 Political Functions and Authority Claims

Both symbolic systems function as mechanisms for asserting legitimate authority, though they operate through different political logics. Conventional divisions between the religious and political domains are challenged by the Sikh Khanda's emphasis on the unity of spiritual and temporal power. The Sikhs' historical experience of religious persecution and the resulting rise of militant religiosity as a survival tactic are reflected in this integration (Oberoi, 1994).

The symbol's political power resides in its ability to assert claims to political autonomy while bringing disparate Sikh populations together around common theological beliefs. During the Punjab crisis of the 1980s, Khanda served as a major hub for Sikh political movements. It demonstrated its ability to promote caste and class harmony. The symbol's ongoing use in diasporic contexts is proof of intercommunal solidarity and political consciousness (Nishan Sahib, n.d.).

Iranian state symbols maintain cultural continuity while also legitimizing particular state formations within a given political framework (Werbner, 2020). The Islamic Republic has a sophisticated understanding of how to recontextualize traditional symbols in order to achieve new political goals, as evidenced by its symbolic strategy. Shi'a Islamic components and Persian cultural themes are combined to produce a distinctive synthesis that speaks to both religious and nationalistic feelings (Amir-Moezzi & Jambet, 2013)

The ability of Iranian symbols to withstand regime changes and adjust to new ideological demands is proof of their political efficacy. The fact that some symbolic elements have persisted throughout the Islamic Republic and Pahlavi monarchy indicates their profound cultural significance and political usefulness.

3.3 Diaspora Adaptations and Transnational Meanings

Because traditional symbols take on new meanings in transnational contexts, diaspora contexts demonstrate



Figure 4. The Sikh Flag *(Nishan Sahib)*

the dynamic nature of symbolic meaning-making (Turner, 1967). The creative applications of the Khanda symbol by Sikh communities in North America and Europe demonstrate both the preservation of traditional meanings and adaptation to contemporary political contexts.

In diaspora contexts, the Khanda encourages assimilation into multicultural communities and acts as a symbol of cultural distinctiveness (Bhandari, 2021). The symbol, which serves as both a religious identification (Banki & Adhikari, 2024; Ullah 2024) and a community center marker, is prominently displayed in gurdwaras (Figure 4) in major cities. Sikhs of the second and third generations say the symbol maintains ties to religious identity in multicultural societies (Chahal, 2022; Attrey et al., 2022).

The symbol's use in political advocacy contexts demonstrates its ongoing significance for contemporary social justice movements (Li, 2024). Sikh organizations have demonstrated how traditional religious symbols can be mobilized for secular political goals by using the Khanda in campaigns for civil rights protection, hate crime prevention, and religious accommodation.

Here are four distinct and thoughtful perspectives on the Sikh symbol, the Khanda, as expressed by individuals from different age groups and genders within the Sikh community, based on a sample of 20 persons interviewed, all of whom are based in the GTA, Ontario, Canada. Each viewpoint reflects their personal, spiritual, cultural, and emotional connections with the symbol. Names have been changed to maintain anonymity.

1. S. Amrit Pal Singh, a young Sikh, University Student (Age: 20 years):

"To me, the Khanda is more than just a symbol; it is a constant reminder of my identity, especially in a world where it is easy to forget who you are. As a student navigating university and modern challenges, the Khanda keeps me grounded. It reminds me of Guru Gobind Singh Ji's message: to be brave, fair, and to stand up for what is right. The double-edged sword in the center inspires me to cut through ignorance, within myself and in society. The circle, the Chakkar, teaches me that God is beyond time

and form, and that my actions must reflect inclusiveness. I wear the Khanda with pride, not as an ornament, but as a declaration of my commitment to truth, justice, and Naam."

2. Mrs. Gaganjot Kaur, a Sikh Woman Entrepreneur, (Age: 30 years)

"As a Sikh woman, the Khanda symbolizes strength and equality for me. In a world that often sidelines women, the Khanda, especially with its martial elements, reminds me that our Gurus envisioned a society where women stand shoulder to shoulder with men, both in spiritual and worldly realms. The Khanda empowers me as a mother, a professional, and a Sikh to raise my voice when needed and to protect the values of compassion and courage. It connects me with Mata Sahib Kaur and Mai Bhago, women warriors who embodied the essence of this symbol. It is not just about battle, it is about balance, justice, and love rooted in divine awareness."

3. S. Bhajan Singh, a Sikh Man and Religious Scholar (Age: 50 years)

"For me, the Khanda is the legacy of the Khalsa Panth. It is a comprehensive representation of Sikh philosophy, Miri-Piri, encompassing both temporal and spiritual sovereignty. At 50, I have seen the world change, but the message of the Khanda remains constant. The two kirpans on either side show me that as a Sikh, I must serve society while staying deeply connected to Waheguru. The Khanda at the center represents the power of truth, and the Chakkar reminds me of the oneness of humanity and the eternity of God. I see it as a seal of commitment to live with discipline, humility, and courage. When I see the Khanda hoisted on a Nishan Sahib, my heart fills with reverence; it is our call to serve."

4. Ms. Harman Kaur, Sikh Girl, High school student (Age: 15 years)

"The Khanda makes me feel proud. When I see it on our Gurdwara or our school banners, I feel like I belong to something special. I love how it shows strength and peace together. In school, when people ask me about it, I explain that it stands for justice, kindness, and equality. I may not understand everything about it yet, but I know that it means standing up for what is right. It reminds me of the stories of the Gurus and how brave they were. Someday, I want to live by the values the Khanda teaches, being strong and kind at the same time."

Similar patterns of symbolic adaptation are seen in Iranian diaspora communities. Their experience is complicated, though, by the political division surrounding the Islamic Republic. Different diaspora factions place different emphasis on different aspects of Iranian symbolic heritage. While some groups still use Islamic iconography, others place more importance on pre-Islamic symbols.

Here are four personalized perspectives on the Iranian state symbol (located in the center of the Iranian flag), expressed by Iranians of different age groups and genders, from a sample of 18 persons interviewed, based in GTA, Ontario, Canada. The symbol, stylized as a calligraphic representation of the word "Allah" (meaning God), incorporating elements of unity, strength, and spirituality, carries varied meanings for different individuals, depending on their generational, political, and cultural experiences. Names have been changed to maintain anonymity.

1. Mr. Aadel Mohammadi, a young Iranian, University Student (25 years)

"To be honest, the symbol on our flag is complex for me. I recognize it as a powerful piece of calligraphy representing 'Allah', but I also associate it with the Islamic Republic, which has shaped every aspect of life in Iran for decades. As someone raised in a post-revolution Iran, I respect its spiritual roots, but I also question what it has come to represent politically. For me, it's not just a religious symbol; it's also political, and that dual meaning makes it difficult for me to fully embrace. I hope one day it can symbolize a more inclusive Iran that respects all beliefs and voices."

2. Mrs. Mahnoor Ali, an Iranian housewife (Age: 40 years)

"The emblem on our flag reminds me of how faith and nationhood are deeply entwined in Iran. Its design is beautiful—elegant calligraphy formed into a tulip-like shape, symbolizing both Allah and the martyrs who died for Iran. But as a woman, I have mixed feelings. The same state that adopted this symbol also restricts our rights in its name. I want to honor the cultural and spiritual history behind it, but I cannot ignore the way it's been used to justify limits on freedom—especially for women. To me, the symbol is a reminder of both beauty and struggle."

3. Mr. Farhad Hosseini, an Iranian engineering professional (Age: 52 years)

"I remember the flag before 1979. This symbol replaced the lion and sun after the Islamic Revolution. At first, the new emblem felt like a fresh start, a return to faith and identity rooted in Islam. It combines the sword, the word 'Allah', and the idea of martyrdom, which means a lot to those who lived through the Iran-Iraq war like I did. For me, it symbolizes resistance and faith. However, I also recognize that for younger generations, it does not carry the same meaning. They see it more as a state symbol than a national one. I think it is important

we do not lose the deeper meaning behind it, even if we reimagine its use."

4. Ms. Jannat Ahmadi, an Iranian Girl, High school student (Age: 18 years)

"The symbol on our flag is beautiful when you learn about its design. It is composed of five strokes that represent the five principles of Islam, and it is shaped like a tulip in remembrance of the blood of the martyrs. However, in school and on the internet, I see different meanings. Some of my friends think it is outdated or only represents one version of Iran. I feel caught between admiration for the art and a desire for change. I want a future where national symbols represent everyone, not just one ideology. Still, I think the flag can be something we reclaim and redefine, not just reject."

These shifting uses of religious symbols in diaspora communities, whether for social justice activism, identity preservation, or navigating challenging political contexts, highlight the adaptability and resilience of cross-border cultural expression. Nevertheless, these symbols have a strong aesthetic and visual component that speaks to deeper levels of meaning in addition to their practical functions in politics and society. The artistic reinterpretations of symbols such as the Khanda and other Iranian emblems demonstrate how form, structure, and artistic interpretation construct collective identity in addition to reflecting theological and cultural beliefs. To better understand this, we now turn to a visual analysis of these symbols, exploring how their artistic evolution embodies the spiritual and political ideals they continue to represent.

3.4 Visual Analysis and Artistic Evolution

Both symbolic systems' imaginative development shows how aesthetic decisions convey spiritual and political ideals. The geometric accuracy of the Khanda is a reflection of Sikh faith, which emphasizes discipline, order, and heavenly perfection. Its symmetrical arrangement reflects the theological balance between spiritual reflection and practical involvement by establishing visual harmony while preserving dynamic tension among its component parts.

While preserving essential symbolic components, modern artistic renditions of the Khanda exhibit inventive adaptation. Diaspora artists have proven the symbol's ongoing importance for artistic expression by using it in various media, for example, traditional painting and digital art. The variety of the modern Sikh experience is reflected in these variations, which frequently highlight various facets of the symbol's meaning.

The historical continuity of Iranian symbolic art is striking. Religious shifts and political upheavals have not altered its imaginative themes. Iranian art is characterized by geometric patterns that use mathematical relationships and spatial arrangements to encode theological ideas (Figure 5). It has symbolic and ornamental uses.



Figure 5. Tricolor Flag of Iran

The artistic output of the Islamic Republic demonstrates a deep comprehension of the ways in which visual culture influences political consciousness. Official symbols create a distinctive aesthetic that supports the construction of both national and religious identity by fusing Islamic calligraphy, modern design principles, and traditional Persian artistic elements (Abrahamian, 2008).

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Several noteworthy trends are observed in the way holy iconography operates in political situations by comparing the symbolic systems of the Sikhs and Iranians. Both instances show how religious symbols are remarkably flexible, retaining their essential theological meanings while gaining new political importance in response to shifting historical contexts. This adaptability implies that symbolic systems are dynamic traditions rather than static repositories of meaning.

The concept of condensed symbols, as developed by Turner (1967), proves especially relevant for understanding how both the Khanda and Iranian state symbols operate. These symbols encapsulate historical chronologies, intricate theological concepts, and political aspirations into visually appealing forms. These forms can be quickly recognized and emotionally engaged with by community members. The Khanda's synthesis of many symbolic elements creates an especially dense and meaningful structure that can be interpreted at multiple levels of theological complexity.

The political effectiveness of both emblems derives from their capacity to bridge sacred and secular domains. It provides religious communities with tools for maintaining spiritual authenticity within the context of political mobilization. This bridging action turns out particularly significant in the circumstances where

religious communities face pressure to assimilate culturally or political marginalization. The emblems serve as rallying points for collective action while maintaining connection to transcendent values.

The transnational dimension of contemporary symbolic politics is revealed in diasporic contexts. This happens as religious symbols develop new meanings in multicultural societies, though maintaining their traditional importance within religious communities. This twofold role suggests that successful religious symbols must have adequate semantic flexibility to act across different cultural contexts while retaining their core identity markers.

The gender dimensions of symbolic interpretation arise as an important factor in both cases, though they act differently within each tradition. The interpretation of the Sikh emblem has been influenced by the Sikhs' theological commitment to gender equality. Therein the Khanda serves as a symbol accessible to both men and women in religious and political contexts. In contrast, the Iranian symbolic politics reflects the more complex gender dynamics of Islamic governance. Therein, women's relationship to state symbols is mediated through religious jurisprudence.

The role of artistic production in maintaining and transforming symbols should not be underestimated. Both traditions exhibit how artistic creativity serves to renew symbolic meanings for contemporary audiences while preserving traditional forms. This artistic dimension emphasizes that in order to maintain their cultural importance, symbols require ongoing creative effort.

The comparative analysis also emphasizes the importance of institutional support in preserving symbolic values. Different interpretations of the meaning of the Khanda have been made possible by the Sikh tradition's decentralized religious authority structure. On the other hand, more standardized, albeit possibly less adaptable, symbolic meanings have been produced by Iranian official control over symbolic production.

The results of the study add to more general theoretical debates concerning the connection between political power and religious symbolism. According to both examples, effective religious symbols must balance the conflict between transcendent meaning and temporal application in order to preserve their sacred qualities and serve as effective political tools for identity formation and community mobilization.

5. CONCLUSION

The intricate ways that religious imagery is employed to inspire communities and forge political identities are illustrated by this comparison between the Sikh Khanda and Iranian official emblems. Ancient religious symbols demonstrate the dynamic interplay between religious meaning and political utility by retaining their theological significance while adapting to modern political situations.

Semantic density that allows for multiple levels of interpretation, aesthetic accessibility that facilitates rapid recognition and emotional connection, and sufficient adaptability to change with the political landscape while retaining essential identity markers are all characteristics of effective religious symbols, according to the study's findings. The capacity to bridge sacred and secular domains emerges as particularly crucial for symbols that must function in both religious and political contexts.

The diaspora dimension reveals the transnational character of contemporary symbolic politics, as religious communities maintain a connection to traditional meanings while developing new interpretations relevant to their contemporary circumstances. This transnational adaptability suggests that religious symbols will continue to play important roles in global cultural politics as migration and communication technologies create new forms of community connection across national boundaries.

The disciplines of visual anthropology, political science, and religious studies can all benefit significantly from this multidisciplinary investigation. It examines the role that religious symbols, such as the Iranian national emblem and the Sikh Khanda, play in shaping identities and conveying political messages. Whereas visual anthropology derives from the iconographic and ethnographic study of symbolism in diasporic contexts, political science benefits from its understanding of the significance of religious symbols in the context of governmental legitimacy and opposition. Theological meanings and transhistorical continuity of these symbols enhance religious studies. The study as a whole serves as an example of how visual religious forms act as living agents that influence collective memory and inspire communities.

Examining symbols such as the Buddhist dharma wheel, the Islamic crescent, or the Christian cross enables one to apply this comparative paradigm to various religious traditions. Through the use of comparable techniques, historical contextualization, ethnographic fieldwork, and iconographic analysis, researchers can assess how these symbols function in diverse political, geographical, and temporal contexts. The Christian cross, for example, might be examined in the civil rights movements of both medieval Europe and contemporary America. The importance of the Islamic crescent in pan-Islamic

identification or Buddhist symbols in peace action should also be studied. This method sheds light on the intricate relationship that exists between transnational religious expressions, sociopolitical identities, and holy images. Future studies could look at how digital technologies are changing religious communities' symbolic communication or how traditional religious symbolic systems are encoding environmental and climate change issues.

In the end, the study shows that sacred symbols are much more than ornamental features or cultural relics; they are active participants in the creation and preservation of collective identity, acting as links between spiritual devotion and time-based participation in a world that is becoming more complicated by the day.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not employ any of the Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies for Language refinement, drafting background section and did not perform any Task of the technology.

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Role of *Sanskrit* in Shaping Cultural Identity and Peaceful Coexistence in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

Language has an influence on our thoughts, behaviours, and sense of belonging. Around the world, languages have influenced the evolution of civilizations through everything from legislative decrees to prayers and hymns. Their ability to create common cultural frames and encourage peaceful cohabitation is what makes them so effective at bringing people together across racial and geographic divides. Incorporating secondary sources such as historical texts and peer-reviewed journal articles, this review takes a qualitative, interpretive approach. Using Southeast Asia as a case study, this essay explores how world languages, especially Sanskrit, contribute to the formation of cultural identities and the promotion of peace. A powerful example of language as a tool of soft power is the expansion of Sanskrit in this area, which was driven by trade, religion, and pure admiration rather than conquest.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Language and Society, Multilingualism, Peaceful Coexistence, *Sanskritization*, Southeast Asia

1. INTRODUCTION

During the course of time, language has not only served as a means of communication, but also as a source to store the culture, memories, and values. It is through language, a civilisation is able to communicate its emotions, thoughts, and values from one generation to another. It is not just letters or sentences but how a person or a community conveys their ideas, either verbally or non-verbally. It is impossible to think about a world without language. The use of language also promotes social cohesion, whereby people feel as if they belong and have a sense of unity within the community.

Because of globalization, migration, and cultural interaction, multilingualism has become more important than ever. To understand each other's culture, it is important to understand the importance of multilingualism. Multilingualism not only promotes cross-cultural understanding but also fosters empathy, and helps break down prejudices.

India is one of the diverse countries among all the nations owing to its diversity of languages and cultures. Over 22 languages are included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, representing the concept of "unity in diversity" throughout the country.

Sanskritization in South East Asian countries is an important example of how language served as a carrier of culture, religion, and identity. We can observe that Buddhist monks, Indian traders, brahmin's started crossing the Bay of Bengal. As early as the first century C.E., Buddhist monks, Indian traders, brahmin's crossed the Bay of Bengal. The Silk Route allowed them to not only transport goods but also the intangible resources like culture and religion. It is with the help of language, traders exchanged the values of India, including the Mahabharata and Ramayana stories.

This article will explore how does world languages will build cultural identity and promote peaceful coexistence taking the example of *Sanskritization* in Southeast Asia. This study aims to highlight the importance of language and the role it plays in carrying culture and promoting peaceful coexistence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous scholars have worked and explored about the historical significance of *Sanskrit* in Southeast Asia emphasising the cultural exchange in terms of social interaction, political influence and cultural transmission. Pollock, S (1996) calls this phenomenon as the "*Sanskrit* cosmopolis," cultural space between 300 and 1300 CE where *Sanskrit* was the predominant language for political, religious, and intellectual discourse across the regions. *Sanskrit* was utilised in holy texts, court poetry, and inscriptions, but it was never spoken as a vernacular. This promoted mutual recognition and ideological unity by enabling leaders and elites in Cambodia, Java, Thailand, and other areas to engage in a shared cultural code. (Bronkhorst, 2015). This shared language and symbolic vocabulary brought together different Southeast Asian communities (Jain & Mohanan, 2020).

Chattopadhyay has emphasised how *Sanskrit* temple texts and inscriptions in Cambodia, especially in Angkor Wat, not only linked local customs with Brahmanical cosmology but also legitimised kings (Bunthorn, 2010).

Southeast Asian populations, particularly the Mon, Khmer, and Cham, bear evidence of South Asian heritage, whereas more isolated groups do not. This pattern is consistent with language: groups whose languages were used by Indianized states have higher genetic and cultural linkages to India. The study also reveals similarities between speakers of Austronesian and Kra-Dai, indicating strong historical linkages between language families. These findings underscore the importance of language in carrying and moulding Indian influence, alongside trade and migration, in spreading ideas and identity throughout the region (Changmai et al., 2022).

The adaptation of Indian scripts and terminology into regional languages like Old Javanese, Khmer, and Thai is another example of *Sanskrit* 's contribution to linguistic unification. *Sanskrit* words, particularly those pertaining to law *(dharma)*, art *(citra)*, language *(bhāṣā)*, and governance *(rāja)*, were incorporated to form a pan-regional vocabulary that strengthened a shared intellectual legacy (Suwignyo, 2023). Recent works indicated how multiple languages can coexist peacefully and also help in sustaining ethnic attachment in diverse societies.

Additionally, the adoption of Indian scripts and terminology into regional languages like Old Javanese, Khmer, and Thai has demonstrated *Sanskrit* 's role in linguistic unification. The Khmer language was enhanced by epic, philosophical, political, and poetic aspects found in *Sanskrit* inscriptions, which promoted regional unity and cultural coherence. Hoogervorst (2021) highlights that the most evident South Asian impact in Southeast Asia is in language, where many Sanskrit and Pali terminology have been incorporated into local vocabularies, particularly in religion, governance, and elite society.

Acri, A. (2015) explains this with the example How Sanskrit religious and literary traditions spread over the Malay world is demonstrated by the Tanjung Tanah codex. This combination of Indic textual methods with Malay explanations illustrates a cultural diffusion process in which information from India was not only transported but also modified by local interpretation, resulting in a shared but regionally different manuscript culture spanning Sumatra, Java, and Bali.

Another example of how *Sanskrit* promoted multicultural harmony is the localised renditions of the *Sanskrit* epics, including the Ramayana and Mahabharata, such as the Javanese shadow puppet shows (*wayang kulit*) and Thai *Ramakien*. In Southeast Asian contexts, these texts—which have their roots in Indian myth—were reinterpreted to represent common ethical themes and uphold communal norms (Ladna, 2025).

3. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative and comparative review technique is applied in this article, which includes:

Source Selection: To include both traditional and contemporary viewpoints on the subject, peer-reviewed papers, historical monographs, and epigraphic studies were chosen.

Thematic Analysis: Themes such as identity, multilingual cohabitation, *Sanskritization*, and religious syncretism were used to analyse the sources.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Sanskrit inscriptions started to occur in Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam around the fourth century CE, indicating that the governing classes

voluntarily adopted the language. *Sanskrit* was selected for its symbolic validity, which connected rulers to local power structures and divine cosmologies, rather than being imposed by imperialism (Pollock S, 2006). Sanskrit spread because it was associated with Brahmanism rather than just because it was a common language or because it was beautiful. Priests and counselors known as Brahmins spread Sanskrit throughout Southeast Asia and India. Sanskrit was a high-status, sacred language that demonstrated social and religious might, in contrast to regional tongues. The Brahmins' authority had a direct impact on its spread Bronkhorst (2015).

In the areas of administration, astronomy, and religion, Southeast Asian languages adopted *Sanskrit* vocabulary. Translations or hybridisations of *Sanskrit* into regional languages were common. For example, the Ramayana was adapted into Old Javanese as Kakawin Ramayana, which incorporated regional themes (Suwignyo, 2023).

Both Buddhism and Hinduism spread through *Sanskrit* scriptures without eliminating indigenous beliefs (Jain, 2021). The resulting cooperation, which can be seen in temples like as Angkor Wat and Borobudur, is an example of how language promoted interfaith communication rather than confrontation. Sanskrit acted as a link or bridge throughout the Southeast area. Unlike many cultural effects that are transmitted through political power, Sanskrit's influence was achieved through peaceful cultural interchange.

5. CONCLUSION

The review reveals how world languages, particularly those that are freely accepted and locally modified, can significantly influence cultural identity and promote harmonious cohabitation. The introduction of *Sanskrit* throughout Southeast Asia without the need for political conquest provides a compelling historical example of language serving as a bridge between cultures rather than as a colonial instrument.

Living in an era where people are fighting among themselves in the name of religion and language, the story of Sanskritization in Southeast countries shows the importance of cultural identity and language. This example encourages educators and policymakers to value linguistic pluralism, mutual tolerance, and cultural memory in a time of growing linguistic nationalism and identity struggle.

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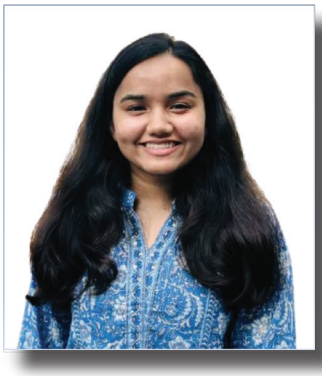
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Sustainable Innovation and Last Mile Delivery: Enhancing Logistics Performance in Oman

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the growth of e-commerce and urbanisation has led to increased challenges in the logistics sector, especially in last mile delivery (LMD). This study investigates the role of sustainable solutions and technological innovation in enhancing delivery performance (DP) in the Sultanate of Oman. By focusing on LMD, a critical, complex, and costly component of the logistics chain, the paper identifies the key factors that influence service quality, and which lead to customer satisfaction. The study examines the effects of sustainable transportation, recyclable packaging, and route optimisation, alongside core LMD service quality dimensions such as delivery efficiency, reliability, and timeliness. Through an empirical analysis using data collected from logistics professionals in the Sultanate of Oman, the study offers insights into how innovative practices and sustainable strategies can transform delivery operations, reduce environmental impact, and meet growing consumer expectations. This paper holds significant practical value for both private logistics providers and government policymakers aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

Keywords: Sustainability, Logistics, last-mile delivery, Supply chain, Transportation, Delivery Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Delivery performance (DP) (Li et al., 2021) has become an essential metric in today's competitive logistics environment (Taufiq et al., 2023). The rise of global commerce and urban density has intensified the need for efficient last mile delivery (LMD) the final link in the supply chain that directly impacts end-user satisfaction (Kelly, 2023). In Oman, where infrastructure is developing and cities like Muscat are growing rapidly, logistics plays a vital role in national economic

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development (Oman vision, 2022). The research focuses on understanding how DP can be enhanced through sustainable solutions (Velazquez & Chankov, 2019) and moderated by technological innovation (Zhao et al., 2020). As conventional delivery methods face constraints like high cost, inefficiencies, and environmental impact, the research aims to identify viable alternatives that ensure timely, reliable, and quality delivery services (Taufiq-Hail et al., 2023). The introduction of electric vehicles (Awwad et al., 2019), drones, and smart routing systems has opened new avenues for improving LMD while aligning with global sustainability goals (Al-Wahaibi, 2019). In light of Oman Vision 2040, which aims to diversify the economy beyond oil by strengthening logistics and transportation sectors, this study is both timely and critical (Al Lawati, 2022). It explores how sustainable logistics practices and innovation can contribute to national goals while addressing customer demands for speed, transparency, and reliability in delivery services (Al Mahrooqi & Backhouse, 2020).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the era of rapid development, the need for new solutions (Ranathunga et al., 2021) is greatest for businesses to meet customer needs (Du, 2021). Not just for business needs, even though the governments want this to be solved, as currently in society around the world, they force the governments to find solutions for city traffic (Nolz, 2021). City traffic impacts individuals and the environment (Li et al., 2021).

Delivery Performance is a global concern (Milewski & Milewska, 2021) as it is one of the things that most people seek (Abrar et al., 2020), as well as one of the trending topics in the logistics field (Kaspi et al., 2022). The COVID-19 virus spread around the world at the start of the year 2020, and people are suffering from lockdowns (Nyaaba & Ayamga, 2021) as most shops, retailers, and manufacturers close, and people are not allowed to move or leave their homes, and others are afraid of going out and becoming infected by this disease (Alan, 2020).

The need for improve delivery performance (DP) exists because the price of LMD is currently very high, sometimes even higher than the price of the goods that people purchase (Zhao et al., 2020), and the delivery place cannot always be where the person expected (Maurya et al., 2021), as many times you need to collect it from the nearest office (Maluleke et al., 2020), and if it is after working hours, you need to collect it the next working day (Buldeo Rai et al., 2019).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Philosophy is the study of knowledge, reality, and existence; it includes general theoretical concepts (Melnikovas, 2018), cognitive processes, viewpoints, and self-awareness (Moon et al., 2019). The way a researcher designs and carries out their research is influenced by how they view reality.

This study is grounded in a positivist research paradigm, which asserts that reality is objective and can be measured through observable and quantifiable facts. Consistent with this paradigm, a quantitative research design was employed, using a survey strategy to collect numerical data that could be statistically analysed to test the predefined hypotheses (H1-H9). This approach was selected for its ability to objectively measure relationships between variables and generalize findings from the sample to the broader population of logistics professionals in Oman.

3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

A cross-sectional survey design was implemented. The study targeted logistics professionals working within the Sultanate of Oman. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants who had direct experience with LMD operations. The survey was distributed electronically and, where appropriate, in person, resulting in a final sample of 319 respondents. The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarised in Table 1 below.

3.2 Research Instrument

The data collection instrument was a structured self-administered questionnaire. It consisted of three main sections:

Section A: Collected demographic and professional information, including gender, age group, education level, usage of online services, delivery options, and general satisfaction with LMD services. The demographic profile of the 319 respondents is summarized in Table 1.

Section B: Comprised closed-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale to measure all constructs in the research model: Sustainable Transport (ST), Recyclable Packaging (RP), Route Optimization (RO), Delivery Efficiency (DE), Delivery Reliability (DR), Delivery Quality (DQ), Information Quality (IQ), Timeliness (T), Technological Innovation (TI), and Delivery Performance (DP). All measurement scales were adapted from established literature to ensure content validity.

Section C: Contained optional open-ended questions for additional comments.

3.3 Data Analysis Plan

The quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software, specifically IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29). The analysis followed a two-step procedure:

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of the respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	201	63.0
Female	118	37.0
Total	**319**	**100%**
Age Group		
Less than 20	27	8.5
21- 30	67	21.0
31-40	127	39.8
41-50	81	25.4
Above 51	17	5.3
Total	**319**	**100.0%**
Education Level		
Junior high school and below	4	1.3
High school	24	7.5
Undergraduate	43	13.5
Masters	127	39.8
PhD	121	37.9
Total	**319**	**100.0%**
Online Services		
Yes	249	78.1
No	70	21.9
Total	**319**	**100.0%**
Delivery Option		
Yes	251	78.7
No	68	21.3
Total	**319**	**100.0%**
LMD Services		
1	21	6.6
2	41	12.9
3	97	30.4
4	104	32.6
5	56	17.6
Total	**319**	**100.0%**
With Delivery		
1	11	3.4
2	20	6.3
3	106	33.2
4	97	30.4
5	85	26.6
Total	**319**	**100.0%**
Overall Satisfaction		
1	11	3.4
2	16	5.0
3	99	31.0
4	114	35.7
5	79	24.8
Total	**319**	**100.0%**

A. Descriptive Statistics and Data Screening:

Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated for all demographic variables and study constructs. The data was screened for missing values, outliers, and checked for assumptions of normality.

B. Inferential Analysis:

Measurement Model Assessment: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using the AMOS plugin to validate the factor structure, reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs.

Hypothesis Testing: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used via the AMOS plugin to test the hypothesized relationships (H1-H9) between the independent variables and the dependent variable (Delivery Performance). Alternatively, if SEM was not the final method, multiple regression analysis was performed using SPSS to test the hypotheses and determine the predictive power of the independent variables on Delivery Performance.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of logistics has undergone significant evolution from its military origins to becoming a vital commercial function (Belcher et al., 2020). Among its various components, LMD is recognized as the most expensive and customer-facing stage of the delivery process (Wanganoo et al., 2020). The growth of urban areas, along with increased reliance on e-commerce (Nogueira et al., 2021), has compounded challenges such as traffic congestion, environmental impact (Zhao et al., 2020), and rising operational costs (Arslan et al., 2019). Recent literature highlights three strategic pillars that can improve DP: sustainable transportation, recyclable packaging, and route optimization (Olsson et al., 2023). Sustainable transportation reduces carbon emissions and fuel costs by introducing electric vehicles, walking couriers, and drones (Osakwe et al., 2022). Recyclable packaging contributes to environmental preservation by minimizing landfill waste, while also potentially cutting costs in the long term (Wanganoo et al., 2020). Route optimization uses real-time data and algorithms to select the most efficient delivery paths, reducing delays and resource wastage (De Oliveira et al., 2021).

Service quality in LMD is another focal point of the literature (Arslan et al., 2019). Factors such as delivery efficiency, reliability, quality, information transparency (Saidi et al., 2020), and timeliness directly influence DP (Strauss et al., 2021) and customer satisfaction (Olsson et al., 2023). Moreover, technological innovation acts as a moderator that strengthens the relationship between these factors (Nogueira et al., 2021) and overall

performance (Vieira et al., 2020). Innovations like real-time tracking, automated dispatch systems, and AI-based forecasting have transformed how delivery services are managed and perceived (Li et al., 2021).

In Oman, the logistics landscape is rapidly evolving. However, several barriers persist, including limited infrastructure, insufficient adoption of green technologies, and regulatory challenges. The government's effort through the establishment of the Asyad Group and investments in ports, roads, and airports indicate strong institutional support. Nevertheless, a gap remains in research (Oliveira et al., 2021) focused specifically on the Omani context, particularly regarding LMD sustainability and innovation. This study fills that gap by proposing a model where DP is both the outcome and a mediating factor for sustainable and technological inputs (Strauss et al., 2021).

This table summarises the key hypotheses of the study, illustrating the direct relationships between various inputs both service based and sustainability driven and their projected influence on DP. The framework provides a clear blueprint for empirical validation and practical intervention.

4.1 Sustainable logistics

Khan et al. (2020) Discussed the importance of sustainability and how that has a positive impact on the environment and how logistic operations play a major role in that. Logistics activity is determined by a strategic business approach (Solomasov, 2019). Even in the case of a potential increase in costs, the primary objectives remain better performance and higher customer satisfaction (Kálmán & Tóth, 2021). LMD is the last stage in a supply chain (Suguna et al., 2021) and focuses on the delivery of products in the shortest time possible (Sorkun et al., 2020) with maximum profit and customer satisfaction (Lai et al., 2022). With the advent of e-commerce, the number of LMD deliveries has increased (Li et al., 2020). This increases the number of trips the vehicle makes to deliver the goods to the customers and increases the CO2 emissions, which impacts the environment negatively (Awwad et al., 2019).

4.2 Competitive Supply Chain

The supply chain has rapid growth globally (Wang & Wang, 2022) as it has some characteristics that are linked to each other (Castillo et al., 2022). It has the following main characteristics: procurement (Naunthong, 2021), warehousing (Ranathunga et al., 2021), logistics (Ranieri et al., 2018), First Mile Delivery (FMD) (Bruzzone et al., 2021), and Last Mile Delivery (LMD) (Boysen et al., 2021). Each one of them is divided into different categories and has different approaches and methods for working out.

Innovations raise the competition among the suppliers globally (Paula et al., 2020), which leads to more innovations (Sharma & Al-Muharrami, 2018) and attempts to satisfy the customers (Barsha & Tasneem, 2019) either from a quality, price (Tan et al., 2020), or delivery perspective (Ozbaygin & Savelsbergh, 2019). In other words, there is no chance for a monopoly market with innovations.

4.3. Last-Mile Delivery

Early research and studies have shown the strong relationship between LMD service quality and sustainable solutions. Deng et al. (2021) used several measures to prove this relationship. Delivery performance can be at its best (Correia et al., 2021), (Le & Ukkusuri, 2019). Through service quality for LMD and sustainable solutions. Sustainable solutions will have a long-term impact (Deng et al., 2021). Through participative innovation, collaborative and supportive relationships between innovators and businesspeople, LMD service quality produces better performing service (Zhang et al., 2021). Furthermore, Hryhoruk et al. (2021) noted that improved performance and achievement of innovation results from LMD service quality more than any other current LMD service (Zhang et al., 2021). Similarly, Binali & Esin

Table 2: Key Hypotheses Linking Variables to Delivery Performance.

Code	Description	Path
H1	Implementing Sustainable Transport (ST) in LMD will improve DP	ST to DP
H2	Implementing Recyclable Packages (RP) for LMD will improve DP	RP to DP
H3	Route optimization (RO) is crucial for LMD to improve DP	RO to DP
H4	Delivery Efficiency (DE) has a positive and significant effect on DP	DE to DP
H5	Delivery Reliability (DR) has a positive and significant effect on DP	DR to DP
H6	Delivery Quality (DQ) has a positive and significant effect on DP	DQ to DP
H7	Information Quality (IQ) has a positive and significant effect on DP	IQ to DP
H8	Timeliness (T) has a positive and significant effect on DP	T to DP
H9	Technological Innovation (TI) has a positive and significant effect on DP	TI to DP

***Source**:* Authors, 2025

(2022) reported that a moderate as well as a positive relationship existed between the LMD service quality of Sustainable Solutions and Delivery Performance as well as the impact of human health in urban cities (Zhang et al., 2021); (Milewski & Milewska, 2021). Vienažindienė et al. (2021) showed the positive side of LMD service and sustainability. Velazquez & Chankov (2019) have argued that returning the materials impacts the delivery service, customer satisfaction, and sustainability negatively. As well, the researcher noticed the direct correlation between transportation and sustainability (Khan et al., 2019).

4.4. Confirmatory factor analysis CFA

The Confirmatory factor analysis CFA including sustainable transportation, recyclable packages, route optimization, clustering algorithm, technological innovations, delivery cost and order accuracy was conducted given that the measurement scales for the variables were obtained from previously validated studies and a few updates were made where necessary. Conducting a CFA offers a structured approach to validate the hypothesized factor structure derived from theory or previous research (Watkins, 2021). CFA tests a pre-specified model by assessing how well the observed variables align with the proposed factor structure (Collier, 2020). By specifying the relationships between observed variables and latent factors a priori, CFA enables researchers to evaluate the fit of the model to the data, providing empirical evidence for the validity of the theoretical framework. Thus, the researcher proceeded with conducting the CFA to confirm the construct validity of measurement instruments and enhance the rigour of the study's findings (Watkins, 2021). The analysis yielded good model fits as presented below:

The results of the 6-factor CFA model comprising the following independent variables (delivery efficiency, delivery reliability, delivery quality, information quality, timeline quality and customer satisfaction) were assessed simultaneously to learn their model fit. During the analysis, the following items were dropped (Timeline quality item 1 and Customer satisfaction item 5) due to poor factor loading below 0.70 (Collier, 2020; Hair et al., 2008) which contributed to the poor model fit. The final model fit as shown in the CFA model above yielded a good model fit as presented in Table:2

4.5. Impact sustainable solutions on supply chain operation

Sustainable solutions have the potential to significantly impact supply chain operations toward achieving net zero emissions by 2050 in Oman. There have been several studies examining the impact of sustainable solutions on supply chain operations in the region.

Alshamsi et al. (2018) analysed the potential impact of using renewable energy sources in supply chain operations in the UAE. The study found that the use of renewable energy sources could reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve supply chain efficiency in the country. Khan and Emtairah (2019) examined the potential impact of principles of the circular economy on supply chain operations in the GCC countries, and Oman.

Table 3: Model Fit Results

Measure	Estimate	Threshold	Interpretation
CMIN	572.26	--	--
DF	260.00	--	--
CMIN/DF	2.201	Between 1 and 3	Excellent
CFI	0.934	>0.95	Acceptable
TLI	0.928	>0.95	Acceptable
SRMR	0.046	<0.08	Excellent
RMSEA	0.074	<0.06	Acceptable

***Source*:** *Authors, 2025*

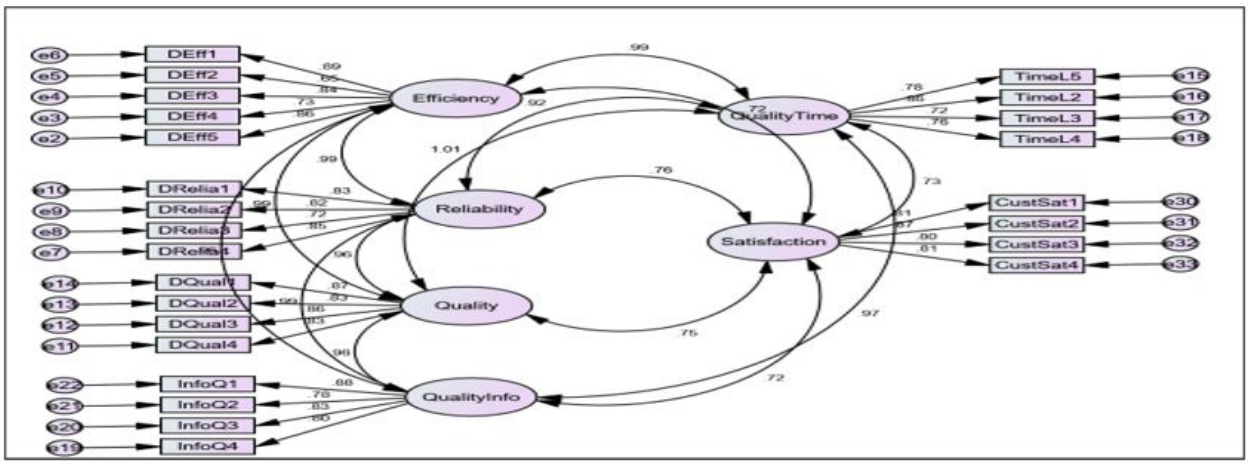


Figure 1: The 6 Factor CFA Model

Table 4: Hypotheses Tested

Direct Relationships			Estimates	Errors	95% Confidence Intervals		Hypotheses
					Lower Limit	Upper Limit	Interpretations
Clustering Algorithm	→	Delivery Cost	0.40***	0.32	0.26	0.53	**H9a:** Supported
Clustering Algorithm	→	Order Accuracy	0.45***	0.32	0.32	0.57	**H9b:** Supported
Clustering Algorithm	→	Satisfaction	0.51***	0.30	0.37	0.65	**H9c:** Supported
Tech Innovations	→	Delivery Cost	0.36***	0.42	0.25	0.51	**H10a:** Supported
Tech Innovations	→	Order Accuracy	0.38***	0.41	0.25	0.57	**H10b:** Supported
Tech Innovations	→	Satisfaction	0.32***	0.33	0.20	0.46	**H10c:** Supported

***Source*:** Authors, 2025

The study found that implementing principles of the circular economy, such as product redesign and closed-loop supply chains, could contribute to reducing waste and emissions and improving supply chain resilience in the region.

5. DISCUSSION

The last mile delivery (LMD) landscape in Oman faces multiple challenges, from infrastructure gaps to sustainability demands. This research emphasizes that delivery performance (DP), as a central indicator of logistics success, can be significantly improved through the adoption of sustainable practices and innovative technologies. Elements such as recyclable packaging, electric vehicles, drone deliveries, and route optimization are not merely futuristic options but realistic tools that can redefine the logistics ecosystem in Oman.

The study shows that delivery efficiency, reliability, and quality, combined with timely and accurate information, have a strong and direct impact on DP. Furthermore, technology serves as a catalyst, enhancing the effectiveness of both operational and sustainable measures. Oman's strategic investment in logistics through its Vision 2040, alongside initiatives like the Asyad Group, positions the country well for adopting the recommendations put forth in this research.

Based on the hypothesis analysis, both the clustering algorithm and technological innovations demonstrated significant positive effects on delivery performance. The clustering algorithm significantly improved delivery cost, order accuracy, and customer satisfaction, thereby supporting Hypotheses 9a, 9b, and 9c. It achieved this by optimising routes and improving sorting precision. Similarly, technological innovations such as automation and AI also led to substantial enhancements in the same three areas, fully supporting Hypotheses 10a, 10b, and 10c by streamlining operations and boosting the customer experience. Ultimately, the findings confirm that leveraging these strategies is highly beneficial for optimising logistics and improving overall delivery service performance.

6. CONCLUSION

This research set out to identify how sustainable innovation can enhance logistics performance in Oman. The results confirm that Delivery Performance is significantly influenced by a combination of sustainable practices, specifically in transport, and core service quality attributes like efficiency and reliability. The study provides a validated, data-driven model that can guide logistics providers in Oman. It demonstrates that aligning operational strategies with the national objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040 is not just a policy imperative but a viable path to competitive advantage and improved customer satisfaction. The findings offer a clear blueprint for transforming Oman's LMD sector into a more efficient, reliable, and sustainable ecosystem.

6.1 Implications

This study makes several significant contributions to the theoretical body of knowledge. It provides one of the first empirically validated models linking sustainable practices and service quality dimensions directly to Delivery Performance within the unique context of Oman's logistics sector. By successfully testing a model with nine hypotheses, this research moves beyond conceptual discussions and offers quantitative evidence for these relationships. Moreover, the study addresses a critical gap identified by the reviewers by firmly situating the research within a positivist, quantitative paradigm, thereby providing a clear and methodologically sound framework for future studies in similar contexts.

The findings offer actionable insights for logistics managers in Oman. The confirmed positive effects of factors like Sustainable Transport, Delivery Efficiency, and Reliability provide a clear prioritisation list for strategic investment. Managers are advised to allocate resources towards transitioning to EV fleets and optimising

routing algorithms, as these actions directly enhance performance. Furthermore, the strong influence of core service quality dimensions underscores the non-negotiable need for operational excellence in reliability and timeliness. Companies can use the validated measurement scales from this study as a dashboard to regularly monitor and benchmark their performance against these critical success factors, enabling data-driven decision-making to improve customer satisfaction and competitive advantage.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research

The limitation concerns the research design. The use of a cross-sectional survey means that data were collected at a single point in time. While this allows for the examination of relationships between variables, it does not permit definitive conclusions about causality. For instance, we can assert that Sustainable Transport is associated with higher Delivery Performance, but we cannot conclusively prove that it causes it. Also, the study relied on a non-probability purposive sampling method focused on logistics professionals in Oman. Although the sample size of 319 is robust, the sampling technique and geographical focus may limit the generalisability of the findings to other countries or contexts with different logistical infrastructures and cultural norms.

Furthermore, the study primarily captured quantitative data through a structured questionnaire. This approach, while excellent for testing hypotheses, does not explore the underlying "why" behind the statistical relationships. The data explains what is happening but not the deeper reasons, motivations, or contextual challenges from the perspective of the logistics professionals.

Based on these limitations, several avenues for future research are recommended. First, longitudinal studies are needed to track changes over time and establish causal relationships between sustainable innovations and long-term delivery performance. Second, expanding the geographical scope to other GCC countries or emerging economies through comparative studies would enhance external validity and reveal the impact of different cultural, regulatory, and infrastructural contexts. Third, employing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys with in-depth qualitative interviews would provide rich, contextual data to explain the statistical findings, such as exploring the specific barriers to adopting green practices. Finally, future research should incorporate the consumer perspective to examine how customer perceptions of sustainability and service quality influence their loyalty and satisfaction, thereby creating a more holistic understanding of the last-mile delivery ecosystem.

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During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not employ any of the Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies for Language refinement, drafting background section and did not perform any Task of the technology.

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Exploring ChatGPT's Role in English Language Writing Anxiety and Achievement

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the effects of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence, in improving English language writing anxiety and writing achievement among Form 4 students in Malaysian public secondary schools. This correlational study recruited 345 respondents from 5 districts in Penang, Malaysia through random sampling method. The need to comprehend how AI technologies affect students' learning experiences and the growing incorporation of these technologies in education are the driving forces behind this research. Survey questionnaires were administered to gather information on students' writing anxiety and English writing achievement. Pearson's correlational study revealed that the use of ChatGPT has a positive significant influence on English language writing achievement and writing anxiety. Descriptive and inferential analysis were carried out to investigate the correlation between the variable. Multiple regression results confirmed that ChatGPT use significantly predicted higher writing achievement and lower writing anxiety. Pedagogical training should be provided for both teachers and students to maximise the effectiveness of ChatGPT integration.

Keywords: English language education, writing anxiety, writing achievement, artificial intelligence, ChatGPT, educational technology, digital scaffold, second language writing, AI-assisted learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing anxiety in English is defined as a condition of fear and worry connected with writing assignments and is common among language learners. Writing anxiety is also a well-documented problem among Malaysian public secondary school students that is a substantial impediment to gaining fluency and confidence in written communication (Nawaz, 2021; Bynum, 2025). Writing achievement in the English language constitutes the ability to communicate oneself effectively and persuasively in written form while complying with grammatical structures and stylistic conventions in the English Language (Washington, 2023). ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, is an artificial intelligence model that can generate human-like text responses depending on user Input (Javaid et al., 2023). Recent studies have emphasized ChatGPT's transformative influence on research and learning processes across disciplines, reflecting its growing impact on educational practices (Kanwal, 2023).

Despite extensive research on English language writing anxiety and achievement, there are still limited empirical evidence on how artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT can be used to mitigate English language writing related challenges in Malaysian schools. This study is based on **Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982)** and **Siemens' Connectivism Theory (2005)**, which together provide a dual lens for understanding how ChatGPT may influence students' writing anxiety. ChatGPT aligns with the principle that learning occurs through **participation in knowledge networks (Siemen, 2005),** where AI mediates access to language models, stylistic patterns, and real-time corrections.

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This study adopts a conceptual framework based on two major educational theories, which are the Connectivism learning theory by Siemens (2004) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by Vygotsky (1978). Connectivism emphasizes the importance of networks, connections, and collaborative learning in today's educational environments. Within this concept, learning is viewed as a process of network construction and knowledge acquisition that is aided by interactions with varied resources (Corbett & Spinello, 2020). Additionally, Vygotsky (1978) established the Zone of Proximal growth (ZPD), which highlights the role of social interaction and scaffolding in cognitive growth. The ZPD defines the gap between a learner's current level of competence and their potential for improvement, where advice from a knowledgeable person improves learning results.

Theories involved in this study highlights students' interaction with ChatGPT, an AI language model meant to provide writing assistance and feedback. This exchange exemplifies connectivism learning theory, in which learners use digital technologies to get knowledge, receive feedback, and improve their English essay writing. This engagement is surrounded by students' connectivist learning networks, which include a wide range of materials and technological platforms. These networks provide chances for information exchange, collaborative learning, and knowledge production, which aligns with the connectivist concept of learning as network development.

ChatGPT acts as a scaffold within the collaborative learning environment, providing focused feedback, modeling writing styles, and recommending improvements based on students' specific requirements (Su et al., 2023). ChatGPT helps students bridge the gap between their current writing talents and their potential for improvement by acting within their ZPD. The results of students' interactions with ChatGPT and participation in collaborative learning activities are reflected in their writing anxiety and achievement.

This research is guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between English writing achievement and writing anxiety among Form 4 students?
2. Does the use of ChatGPT significantly influence the relationship of English language writing achievement and writing anxiety among Form 4 students?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adheres to a quantitative research design. According to Creswall (1994), quantitative research seeks to explain phenomena by gathering numerical data and analysing them with mathematical tools, particularly statistics. The quantitative research methodology offered the essential data for this study, allowing us to comprehend and assess the influence of ChatGPT on English language writing anxiety and writing achievement, both self-reported by students in the survey administered. By applying a correlational research design, researchers can draw conclusions about the larger population under investigation by employing representative samples and statistical tools (Gravetter & Forzano, 2008). This research is aimed to be conducted with equal number of samples from 5 districts in Penang. Thus, form 4 students from Malaysian public secondary schools were chosen as samples. In this study, the simple random sampling method has been administered. Based on the selection criteria by Krejcie & Morgan (1970), 345 participants were identified out of the total sample for survey administration and data collection purposes.

Questionnaires that consist of 41 items are divided into 2 constructs, which are to test the efficiency of ChatGPT to improve English Language writing achievement and another construct to study English language writing anxiety faced by students. According to Salkind (2006), reliability test is a measure of consistency among the items that are present in an instrument of the study. The instrument adapted for this study consists of two scales namely ChatGPT to improve English language writing achievement and second language writing anxiety which was administered to 30 samples, (N=30) for pilot study. For each scale, the reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the items administered. However, items A3, A10 and A14 were removed to obtain a good level of reliability based on Cronbach's Alpha reliability test. Upon removal of 3 items, this scale now consists of 13 items (α=.81). The α-value is .81, hence it is $0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.9$. Based on Cronbach's Alpha, it is interpreted as having a good internal consistency.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A correlation test was performed to determine the significant correlation between the influences of ChatGPT to improve English language writing achievement (Sum A) and second language writing anxiety (Sum B) in the population.

According to Table 1, there is a significant correlation between the influences of ChatGPT to improve English language writing achievement (Sum A) and second language writing anxiety (Sum B) in the population, the Pearson correlation coefficient is $r(343) = .87$, $p < .01$. The significance value for the influences of ChatGPT to improve English language writing achievement (Sum A) and second language writing anxiety (Sum B) is <.001, p

TABLE 1: Correlation of Influences of ChatGPT to Improve English Language Writing Achievement and Writing Anxiety

Correlations			
		Sum A	Sum B
Sum A	Pearson Correlation	1	.871**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	345	345
Sum B	Pearson Correlation	.871**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	345	345

***Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)*

Source: Author, 2025

≤ .01. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. According to Pearson's Correlation Coefficient table, the size of correlation that ranges from .70 to .90 shows a high positive correlation.

Based on Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, the findings of this study reveal that there is a significant positive high correlation between English language writing achievement and second language writing anxiety. As English language writing achievement increases, the writing anxiety of Form 4 Malaysian public secondary school students decreases. English language writing achievement and writing anxiety can be interrelated because improvement in writing skills boosts students' confidence in writing as they may feel more competent in handling writing essays (Teimouri et al., 2019; Tian & Ng, 2024). This contributes significantly to students' English language writing achievement, so the fear of committing mistakes in writing decreases. Hence, there is lesser anxiety in writing English essays among students (Li, 2022).

a. Dependent Variable: Sum A

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted between ChatGPT to improve English language writing achievement (Sum A) and second language writing anxiety (Sum B). Table 2 that a significant regression equation was obtained, F (1,343) = 87.98, p < .01, with R2adj of .76. Thus, approximately 76% of the variance in ChatGPT to improve English language writing achievement (Sum A) can be explained by the linear combination of second language writing anxiety (Sum B). According to Table 2, respondents' second language writing anxiety (Sum B), b = 1.33. This indicates that the predicted value of English language writing achievement (Sum A) increases by 1.33 for one unit of second language writing anxiety (Sum B) ChatGPT. Thus, second language writing anxiety (Sum B) is a significant predictor of English language writing achievement (Sum A).

Connectivism theory by Siemens (2004) highlights the significance of social and technical networks in education. ChatGPT provides students with exposure to various genres and styles of writing and language usage. According to Affective Filter Hypothesis by Krashen (1982), emotional elements like anxiety affects language learning. Hence, students' affective filters can be lowered by ChatGPT's capacity to deliver prompt, nonjudgmental feedback. Therefore, students experience less anxiety are more at ease and inclined to participate in writing assignments. Thus, this ChatGPT assisted method of scaffolding allows students to advance through writing tasks which they find challenging.

Song & Song (2023), reported similar findings, which stated that ChatGPT has significantly enhanced students' English language writing achievement and fluency. There is some variance in responses about the use of ChatGPT for idea development, concept formation, and vocabulary enhancement. This suggests that while many students benefit from using ChatGPT in English language essay writing substantially, a few still struggle with the intricacies of English language accuracy.

In terms of structure and organization, respondents of the study find ChatGPT to be useful for brainstorming and organising ideas as it delivers relevant keywords in English essay writing. The high mean scores from the findings demonstrate widespread agreement on the influences of ChatGPT in assisting respondents in organising ideas in English essays. As a result, this contributes to improved writing performance among Form 4 students in Malaysian public secondary schools in Penang, Malaysia. This finding is corroborated by recent research, such as those by Alharbi (2023), that underlines the usefulness of AI tools in assisting students in properly organising their thoughts and writing structures in English essays. Nevertheless, responses among Form 4 students in Malaysian public secondary schools in Penang, Malaysia also suggest that texts generated by ChatGPT has to be

TABLE 2*:* Coefficient of ChatGPT to Improve English Language Writing Achievement

Co-efficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Co-efficient		Standardized Coefficient			99.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	6.506	7.680		.847	.404	-14.714	27.727
	Sum B	1.329	.142	.871	9.380	<.001	.937	1.720

Source: Author, 2025

rechecked to confirm its trustworthiness and accuracy. This is also consistent with the results of research conducted by Chen et al. (2023), which found that people were skeptical about AI-generated material. Similar concerns about users' confidence and adaptive behavior toward AI applications in professional and educational contexts have been reported by Robinson (2023).

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the incorporation of ChatGPT in teaching essay writing to secondary school students within secondary ESL curriculum in Malaysia creates an opportunity for policy implications. By utilising ChatGPT in teaching and learning, teachers would be able to offer more individualised and efficient guidance that will help students to write better and feel less anxious (Sidhu & Khor, 2024).

5. Recommendations

Since writing anxiety explained 76% of the variance in writing achievement, structured ChatGPT-based feedback systems could aid teachers in integrating ChatGPT in writing English essays in order to set clear objectives and provide assistance to students. This ensures that all students can effectively use these resources to improve their writing abilities.

The findings of this study were critical to the contribution of further understanding regarding the influences of ChatGPT on English language writing achievement and writing anxiety of Form 4 students in Malaysian public secondary schools in Penang, Malaysia. This study was conducted based on a quantitative approach only; hence, future research can be done in the form of longitudinal studies or experimental studies to investigate the long-term impact of AI tools on students' writing achievement and anxiety levels.

Furthermore, investigating the influences of ChatGPT at various competence levels, from beginner to advanced learners, will also benefit English language curriculum development in Malaysia. Assessing how these tools meet the varying needs and capacities of students at various stages of language competence might help guide targeted interventions and instructional tactics.

6. Limitations of the Study

The findings of this research can address the significance of implementing ChatGPT as an intervention tool to assess English language writing anxiety and writing achievement in ESL classrooms only to a certain extent. This is due to the nature of the study, where the research is only limited to a single locality in Penang, Malaysia. Hence, the limited number of samples will only represent part of the population of Form 4 students in local government schools in Malaysia. The data of this study cannot be generalised to represent a larger population in Malaysia. Furthermore, the study's focus on a specific age group and education setting may have missed significant differences in English language writing anxiety and writing achievement among students from various backgrounds or educational systems. Apart from that, self-report bias may also exist in this study. Consequently, caution should be exercised when extrapolating the study's results beyond the defined sample demographics and future research should attempt to include a more diverse participant pool to strengthen the study's external validity.

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The author declares that she has no competing interests.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not employ any of the Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies for Language refinement, drafting background section and did not perform any Task of the technology.

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Contesting Plagiarism and Historiographical Distortions: The Image of *Guru Tegh Bahadur*

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ABSTRACT

In 1975, the tercentenary of Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom ignited a significant academic debate and controversy. In 1975 a renowned historian published an article in a respected research journal, depicting the Ninth Guru as a collaborator in acts of plunder and extortion alongside a Muslim Sufi, Hafiz Adam Sarhandi. This portrayal elicited strong objections from Sikh organizations and prompted immediate responses from Sikh scholars in major academic publications. Two decades later, similar objections arose over NCERT textbooks that similarly depicted Guru Tegh Bahadur. Even Audrey Truschke's recent comments on the Ninth Guru as a rebel executed for armed opposition misreads the evidence and perpetuates these distortions.

This study traces the origins of such misrepresentations in key Persian chronicles from the Mughal to the Colonial times by examining the motives and methods of Persian historians writing under the patronage of the Mughals and the British Colonial Government of India. On examining the Persian sources, it has been revealed that the distortion of Guru Tegh Bahadur's mission and martyrdom can be traced back to Persian historians loyal to the Mughal court, plagiarism promoted by the British Colonial administration, and misinterpretation of Persian texts by their English translators/editors. To honor the Guru's 350th martyrdom anniversary scholars must rigorously reexamine Persian chronicles, disentangle interpolations by colonial translators, and contextualize the Mughal-Sikh relations within the politics of Mughal orthodoxy and the legitimate socio-religious concerns and dissent of the Sikh Gurus.

Keywords: Persian Historiography, Plagiarism, Guru Tegh Bahadur, Aurangzeb, Sujan Rai Bhandarii, Yahya Khan, Ghulam Hussain Khan, Raymond, John Briggs, *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin.*

1. INTRODUCTION

It looks legitimate to remind that in 1975, on the Tercentenary of the Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, a research paper became the flashpoint for a fierce scholarly debate across Punjab. A prominent historian published an article accusing the Ninth Guru of colluding with a Muslim Sufi called Hafiz Adam to carry out plunder and rapine (Singh, F. 1974, pp. 79-89). It met with immediate outrage, and leading Sikh scholars mobilized swift rejoinders in peer-reviewed journals (Singh, K. 1975, pp. 153-166). The intensity of this debate revealed how deeply rooted contestations over the Guru's image had become both within and beyond academic circles. Far from being a closed chapter, the controversy exposed the fragile interface between historical interpretation, religious identity, and regional pride. It underscored the urgent need for a methodical reassessment of the sources that shaped such insensitive claims.

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Two decades later, a parallel uproar emerged over NCERT's history textbooks, which reiterated discredited portrayals of Guru Tegh Bahadur as a mercenary rebel (Satish, 1982, p. 228). The Sikh community successfully petitioned for the removal of these offensive passages, yet the underlying historiographical problem persisted. The textbooks had drawn on the same Persian and Colonial compilations of dubious provenance that fueled the 1975 controversy. Although the revision eliminated overt insults, it failed to address the deeper issue: the uncritical reuse of narratives that equated voluntary offerings and religious gatherings with militant sedition (Satish, 2007, pp. 346-47). This pattern of repetition demonstrated how entrenched distortions could resurface in new institutional formats, shaping generations of students' perceptions of a genuine martyr in the cause of freedom of conscience, transcending religious boundaries the world over.

More recently, Audrey Truschke has reignited discussion by casting Guru Tegh Bahadur as a political insurgent executed for armed opposition to the Mughal state (Audrey, 2017, p. 47). While her scholarship sometimes brings uncommon insights into Aurangzeb's polity, it inadvertently perpetuates the earlier smears by relying on the same Persian-Mughal chronicles without sufficiently contextualizing their biases. Truschke's monograph situates the Guru's martyrdom squarely within the framework of imperial security, thereby reinforcing the idea that the Guru posed a direct military threat. It reinforces misconceptions that have circulated for centuries and underlines the pressing need for a comprehensive source critique rather than isolated corrections.

The present study undertakes this task by tracing the origin of distortions in three key strata of historical writing. First, it analyzes near-contemporary Persian court chronicles/ texts like *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, *Nuskha-i-Dilkusha*, *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri, Farukhsiyar Nama, Muntakhib-ul-Lubab, Ibratnama*, *Mirat-i-Waridat, Tazkirat-ul-Muluk*, etc., that offer terse and often hostile references to the Ninth Guru. Second, it examines the transformation and expansion of these accounts in Colonial compilations such as Ghulam Hussain Khan's *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* and its subsequent English translations by Raymond Hajee Mustafa and Lt. Col. John Briggs. Third, it briefly takes note of modern historiography and textbook narratives that continue to echo outdated tropes. By intertwining philological analysis, manuscript/text collation, and historiographical critique, this study recreates the pathways through which bias was encoded and transmitted.

The structure of the study reflects this tripartite approach. In Part I, the focus falls on the earliest Persian narratives, examining their provenance, courtly context, and narrative strategies of omission and denigration. Part II turns to the colonial era, exposing cases of plagiarism, mistranslation, and editorial intervention that amplified anti-Sikh biases. Part III assesses the survival of these themes in postcolonial academic and educational environments, identifying opportunities for corrective pedagogy. A concluding by illuminating the historical origins and transmission of contentious claims about Guru Tegh Bahadur, this study aims to recover a nuanced portrait of the Ninth Guru's religious and temporal leadership and moral courage. In doing so, it seeks to honour the 350th martyrdom anniversary with scholarly integrity, offering a model of source-centered inquiry that respects both Sikh traditions and the highest standards of historical criticism.

2. METHODOLOGY

Sources and Approach

This section outlines the philological and historiographical methodology applied in analyzing Persian manuscripts, colonial translations, and modern historiography.

The study adopts a philological and historiographical methodology designed to interrogate how the image of Guru Tegh Bahadur has been represented, misrepresented, and transmitted across Persian, colonial, and postcolonial narratives.

First, a **philological approach** is employed to analyze primary Persian manuscripts and chronicles, including *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh, Ahkam-i-Alamgiri, Muntakhib-ul-Lubab, Ibratnama, and Tazkirat-ul-Muluk*. Each text is examined in its original language to identify omissions, interpolations, terminological ambiguities, and rhetorical strategies that shaped the portrayal of the Ninth Guru. By collating variant manuscript readings, this approach helps disentangle authentic records from later accretions and biases.

Second, a **comparative historiographical method** is applied to assess how these Persian narratives were appropriated, plagiarized, and transformed in colonial-era compilations such as Ghulam Hussain Khan's *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* and its English translations by Raymond Hajee Mustafa and John Briggs. The study highlights how selective mistranslations and interpolations introduced or amplified hostile tropes, reframing the Guru as a rebel or freebooter in ways that aligned with colonial administrative agendas.

Third, the analysis extends to **modern and postcolonial historiography**, including NCERT textbooks and works by contemporary historians such as Audrey Truschke. These are critically assessed to show how

colonial distortions continue to resurface in present-day academic and curricular narratives.

Throughout, the methodology emphasizes **triangulation of sources**:

1. Persian chronicles under Mughal patronage,
2. Colonial translations and reinterpretations, and
3. Sikh vernacular sources, sacred writings, and collective memory.

This layered comparative analysis allows the study to map the genealogy of distortion and to recover a historically grounded portrait of Guru Tegh Bahadur as a spiritual leader and martyr of conscience, rather than a political insurgent.

3. FINDINGS / ANALYSIS

Persian Chronicles under Mughal Patronage:

Early Persian accounts of Guru Tegh Bahadur appeared soon after his martyrdom, influenced by court interests and censorship. Chroniclers in Aurangzeb's service navigated strict regulations that forbade direct criticism of imperial policy or unflattering depictions of the Mughal Emperor (Elliot, Vol. VII, 1969, pp. 182-83). Consequently, references to the Ninth Guru are casual, brief, and often sanitized, emphasizing his tenure of guruship and martyrdom without context. This pattern of reticence reflects a broader reluctance among the Mughal historians to document the incidents of socio-religious dissent in full. By presenting capital punishment to Guru Tegh Bahadur as a routine administrative act, these accounts tacitly endorse the Emperor's harsh treatment of public figures who enjoyed people's trust, in the narratives, setting the stage for centuries of distortion.

Sujan Rai Bhandari's *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* (1696) stands as the foundational near-contemporary account. A resident of Batala, Panjab, and a pargana-level court official, Sujan Rai Bhandari records that Guru Tegh Bahadur led the Sikhs for eleven years before being imprisoned in Shahjahanabad and courting martyrdom, by imperial order (Bhandari, 1918, pp. 69-70). Yet he omits any discussion of the motivations behind this drastic penalty, leaving readers without insight into the Guru's principled stand or the Mughal rationale. His minimalistic treatment suggests either fear of reprisal or strict adherence to the Imperial ban on sensitive detail, by confusing the date/year of the Guru's martyrdom (Bhandari, p. 70; Grewal and Irfan, 1999, pp. 90, 94). Sujan Rai Bhandari inadvertently created an information vacuum that later chroniclers would fill unquestioningly or with speculation and bias.

Inayatullah Khan Ismi's *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri* (1701–1707) extends the narrative to encompass the broader context of Aurangzeb's religious policy. Commissioned to compile the Emperor's decrees, Inayatullah reveals the demolition of the Sikh shrine at Buria. He mentions an inquiry ordered by Aurangzeb in response to local unrest, implicitly framing the Sikhs as a source of disorder (Ganda Singh, G. 1949, p. 73). Though his work offers rare factual details, names of officials, and the place of demolition, it also reproduces the language of Islamic orthodoxy that viewed non-Muslim faiths as threats to the Mughal rule. Such accounts fortify the impression that Sikh institutions were looked upon as inherently subversive.

Bhim Sen's *Nuskha-i-Dilkusha* (1709) presents a striking example of Mughal courtly apprehension regarding the Sikh Panth's ascendancy in various parts of the country. Written under the patronage of Rao Dalpat Singh Bundela, Bhim Sen observes that Guru Tegh Bahadur lived in the mountains near Sarhind, amassed substantial offerings, and began styling himself *Patshah*. He notes that the Emperor, alarmed by the Guru's rising prestige and grandeur, summoned him to the Imperial court and awarded him capital punishment (Bhim, MS # 23, folio 169). In Bhim Sen's portrayal, there is no trace of spiritual or doctrinal motive, only a subtext of imperial suspicion that the Ninth Guru's influence among the people equated to sedition. This perspective transforms voluntary donations and growing followership into threats to the Mughal State's sovereignty, illustrating how Mughal chroniclers recast religious devotion as political rebellion.

Muhammad Ahsan Ijad, the author of *Farukhsiyarnama* (1131 Hijri/ 1719AD), while writing on the Sikh uprising under the leadership of Banda Singh, refers to Guru Tegh Bahadur's arrest and martyrdom very briefly. For example, he reveals that "Alamgir had issued the Farman for [Guru] Tegh Bahadur's arrest, but the order was kept secret. He [Guru Tegh Bahadur] was made prisoner by Dilawar Khan, the Faujdar of Sarhind, when encamped near Ropar, intending to proceed to the Ganges to bathe. When brought to the court, he (Guru Tegh Bahadur) refused to embrace Islam and was executed (Irvine, 1922, p. 79). Ijad's remarks are very brief but are crucial regarding the martyrdom of the Ninth Guru. Besides commenting upon Aurangzeb's direct involvement in arresting the Ninth Guru, he is the only historian who reveals that Guru Tegh Bahadur was offered to embrace Islam to save himself from capital punishment. Like a true loyal Mughal court historian, Ijad, neither discloses the reason for the Ninth Guru's arrest nor the date and place of martyrdom, which was the tested approach of Persian historians to omit the incidents that caused aspersions on the fairness of Aurangzeb.

Khafi Khan's *Muntakhib-ul-Lubab* (1731) amplifies this hostility, deploying polemical rhetoric to look upon the Sikh religious places of worship with jealousy and

contempt. As a court historian, Khafi Khan portrays the network of Sikh *Dharamsalas* and the Sikh *Masands* (preachers) as a covert political apparatus. He reports imperial edicts ordering the expulsion of Sikh preachers and the razing of their religious meeting places, attributing these measures to the need to curb indulgence in *Kufar* (blasphemy), a shadowy rebellion against the Islamic orthodoxy propagated by the Mughal Emperor. Khafi Khan's narrative employs evocative metaphors, such as "blasphemous practices" spreading through villages to heighten alarm about the growth of the Sikh Panth (Khafi, 1874, p. 651). It reminds us of Emperor Jahangir, who looked upon the fast spread of the Sikh Panth under Guru Arjan with contempt, calling it *Dukan-i-Batil* (Shop of falsehood), deserving immediate closure, subsequently resulting in the martyrdom of the Fifth Guru in June 1606. Similarly, by casting voluntary gatherings and offerings in criminal terms, Khafi Khan cements a template that later writers would adopt uncritically.

Muhammad Qasim Lahori's *Ibratnama* (1723) deepens the politicized framing by commenting upon the imposition of Islamic orthodox practices by Aurangzeb, besides situating Guru Tegh Bahadur among renowned Sufi luminaries summoned for scrutiny at Aurangzeb's court. Lahori recounts how Muslim Sufis such as Shah Daula Gujrati, Shah Sadaruddin Kasuri, and Shah Hasan Dur, who enjoyed considerable influence, were summoned to the Imperial court to assess their loyalty as well as their spiritual legitimacy. He remarks that some of them were successful in receiving royal favor, and others of the ilk of Dervish Sarmad courted martyrdom (Lahori, MS # 1270, folio 15). Into this milieu, he places the Ninth Guru, suggesting that his mass following and temporal charisma were the real cause of Emperor Aurangzeb's wrath (Lahori, folio 15), who desired from him unqualified faithfulness to the Mughal throne besides abjuring temporal concerns. By equating Guru Tegh Bahadur's principled stance with that of dissenting mystics, Lahori indirectly portrays him as a religious contentious figure, subject to the same disciplinary logic that governed Sufis like Sarmad, deemed subversive.

Muhammad Shafi Warid's *Mirat-i-Waridat* (1734) continues the narrative trajectory by remarking on the inexplicable growth of the Sikh Panth under the successive Sikh Gurus. He marvels at the Guru Tegh Bahadur's wealth, grandeur, and honor, but then blames the Ninth Guru for coercing "the local population of nearby towns, often indulging in plunder, which led to his arrest and execution by Imperial authorities after a long search." (Warid, MS# 553, folio 15). Intriguingly, Warid offers no concrete incidents, no dates, no testimonies, yet his brief statement suffices to cast Guru Tegh Bahadur as a figure who exploited his followers, and his growing influence was a threat to the Mughal State. In doing so, Warid retrospectively justifies Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's action, implying that the Ninth Guru's martyrdom was not an act of conscience but a necessary check on the claim of spiritual and temporal leadership in the disguise of religious leadership.

An account of crucial consequences, which has remained unnoticed by modern historians, is found in Yahya Khan's *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk* (1736-37). In his attempt to trace the background of the Sikh uprising under the leadership of Banda Singh Bahadar, Yahya Khan also takes note of Guru Tegh Bahadur with a different kind of renewed vigour and approach. Interestingly, after reflecting on Guru Nanak and his teachings, he discusses Guru Tegh Bahadur, besides describing Guru Gobind Singh and Banda Singh Bahadur's armed conflict with the Mughals. Regarding Guru Tegh Bahadur, he makes startling revelations, which are very crucial for our study because these have been reproduced verbatim by Ghulam Hussain Khan, the author of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*. These are as under:

> The eighth successor of (Guru) Nanak, named (Guru) Tegh Bahadur, gathered a large number of his followers and became a man of influence. Several thousand people used to accompany him as he moved from place to place. His contemporary, Hafiz Adam, a Faqir belonging to the group of Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi's followers, had also come to have many murids and followers. Both persons (Guru Tegh Bahadur and Hafiz Adam) took to the practice of levying forcible exactions and moved about in the land of the Panjab. (Guru) Tegh Bahadur used to collect money from Hindus, and Hafiz Adam from Muslims. The royal Newswriters wrote to the Emperor Alamgir that two faqirs, one Hindu and the other Muslim, named so and so, had adopted such and such practice; it would not be uncommon that with the increase of their influence, they may go out of control. Having received this news, Alamgir wrote to the Hakim (Governor) of Lahore that both should be arrested. Hafiz Adam should be banished from the imperial territories towards lands inhabited by Afghans beyond Attock and Peshawar and should never be allowed to return. (Guru) Tegh Bahadur should be arrested and kept in confinement. Action was taken in accordance with the order. After some days, another order came regarding (Guru) Tegh Bahadur that he should be put to death and his body cut into pieces be hung on the various points of the city wall. What was ordered happened. However, the followers of [Guru] Tegh Bahadur used to move

about like faqirs, and it was not their habit to wear arms (Yahya, MS # 1287, folios 30-31).

Yahya Khan's above statement is highly fallacious and cannot be brushed aside. For example, instead of Delhi, he has taken the locale of the martyrdom of the Guru to Lahore. Furthermore, he introduced an anachronistic person, Hafiz Adam, whose antecedents and period are questionable (Anand, 1976, pp. 11-12), which does not lend credence to his account. The nexus between Guru Tegh Bahadur and Hafiz Adam looks improbable because the Sufi Silsila to which he belonged was quite antagonistic to the teachings of Sikhism.(Dhillon, 2022, pp. 88-89). The report of the Imperial News-Writers that the Ninth Guru was a potential danger is self-contradictory when Yahya Khan states that the followers of Guru Tegh Bahadur lived like *Fakirs*, and they were not in the habit of wearing arms. Above all, during those days, there is no evidence of armed confrontation between the Ninth Guru and the Mughal authorities. It seems that the obligatory offerings that Guru Tegh Bahadur received in the form of *Daswandh* from his Sikhs have been misconstrued by Yahya Khan as forcible exactions.

What was the motive of Yahya Khan in depicting such an image of the Ninth Guru? Yahya Khan had served as *Mir-Munshi* (Chief-Secretary) to Emperor Farukhsiyar when the Sikh uprising under Banda Singh Bahadar was a major Mughal crisis. Being a loyal Mughal courtier, Yahya Khan was jealous and antagonistic towards the Sikhs for ousting the Mughals from Panjab. Consequently, besides tarnishing the personality of Guru Tegh Bahadur, he went on spreading canards about the last days of Guru Gobind Singh, obviously to discredit the Sikhs and their Gurus. He was in search of an excuse and thus indulged in a concoction to find a post-facto justification for the capital punishment of the Guru by Aurangzeb. Accusing Guru Tegh Bahadar as an unlawful character, coupled with weaving the tale of Hafiz Adam, an unknown and non-existent person, was a strategy to throw future historians off the track, besides depicting that the Mughal Emperor was judicious and impartial in dispensing justice.

Rai Chaturman, in *Chahar Gulshan* (1759–60), surveys Indian history up to the Mughal period. In the section on religious sects, he briefly discusses the Sikh Gurus under "*Nanakpanthis*." After summarizing Guru Nanak's life, he mentions the later Sikh Gurus in passing. Regarding Guru Tegh Bahadur, Rai Chaturman reproduces the information gathered from Sujan Rai Bhandari's *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* that the Ninth Guru ascended the seat of Guruship during Aurangzeb's reign for eleven years, courted martyrdom in Shahjahanabad on the Emperor's orders, and that Guru Gobind Singh was his son (Rai, 2011, p. 286). Like Sujan Rai Bhandari, Rai Chaturman divulges no details on the circumstances and cause of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, besides repeating the mistake regarding the exact date and year of the Ninth Guru's martyrdom, obviously avoiding revealing the truth.

Colonial Compilations: Plagiarism and Perpetuation:

Murtaza Hussain Bilgrami, author of *Hadiqat-ul-Aqlim* (1780), written under British patronage, offers a brief and flawed account of the Sikh Gurus. He claims Guru Tegh Bahadur led the Sikhs for eleven years and was awarded capital punishment for causing unrest, omitting any specific date and place (Bilgrami MS# 537, folio 148). Following in the footsteps of his predecessor, namely Sujan Rai Bhandari, Muhammad Shafi Warid, Bilgrami misdates the martyrdom to the 17th year of Aurangzeb (1085 Hijri) instead of the 19th (1086 Hijri), seemingly to deflect blame from the Mughal Emperor and thus depriving future historians of knowing the truth.

Ghulam Hussain Khan's *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, written around 1782 under the auspices of the British Colonial Government of India, represents a watershed in the institutionalization of distortion. Drawing heavily on earlier Persian chronicles, especially Sujan Rai Bhandari's *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* and Yahya Khan's *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk,* Ghulam Hussain Khan incorporates wholesome text verbatim yet attributes it to his scholarship (compare text of Yahya, folios, 30-31; Ghulam, 1897, pp. 401-402, See also Appendix-1). This wholesale theft of history went unnoticed until Major Nassau W. Lees exposed his mass-scale indulgence in plagiarism (Lees, 1868, p. 423). Lees lamented that Khan had "transferred almost the whole of this work verbatim, without ever once mentioning the author's name." Despite Lee's scathing critique, Colonial authorities went on to produce and print an English version of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* as an authoritative source, lending an officially approved treatise on the history of India, including the anti-Sikh biases.

Academia knows well that the British colonial government of India assigned Raymond Hajee Mustafa the job to render the English translation of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* for the benefit of European Orientalists engaged in studying the history and culture of India. It was completed in 1787 and published in 1789 from Calcutta under the title of *A History of Mahomedan Power in India.* Unfortunately, it further amplified *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*'s distortions by editorial interventions, inserting details that were absent in the original Persian text. Raymond elaborated the narrative of Guru Tegh Bahadur's alleged alliance with anachronistic Hafiz Adam (Anand, 1976, pp. 11-12), dressing the account in lurid language of a freebooter, indulging in plunder, rapine, and labelling him the potential future armed rebel (Raymond, 1789, pp.

90-91). These inventions, such as the Guru's imprisonment at Gwalior and forcible exactions on the people, have no basis in any near-contemporary manuscript or historical account. Nevertheless, Raymond's version laid the foundation for Colonial editors to transform the Mughal hostile propaganda into a universal indictment.

Later, Lt. Col. John Briggs's 1832, London edition of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, which was based on Raymond's version, facilitated the text's reach in British academic circles. Although Briggs refined the English prose and standardized orthography, he made no effort to correct historical inaccuracies or critique Ghulam Hussain Khan's source of information. As a result, fallacious narrative of sedition and rebellion found their way into the British pioneering surveys of the Sikh and Indian history by Eminent historians such as James Mill, and others (Mill, 1858, pp. 302-303; Malcolm, 1812, pp. 28-29; Cunningham, 1849, pp. 57-58; Trump, 1877, p. LXXXVIII), citing Briggs's edition uncritically, replicating its falsehoods in officially approved works. The colonial apparatus thus perpetuated a self-reinforcing cycle, an imperial power sponsoring distorted history to justify itself, and that very history lending credence to further political control.

The anonymously authored *Haqiqat-i-Bina-wa-Uruz-i-Firka-i-Sikhan* (1783) indicates that, besides disliking the popularity of Sikhism among the people, including the Zimindars of Panjab, Emperor Aurangzeb abhorred the Sikh Gurus taking a keen interest in the secular affairs of the people. He desired Guru Tegh Bahadur to renounce the doctrine and style of *Miri-Piri* and restrict himself purely to passive spiritualism (*Haqiqat*, MS # 1286, folio 4). It clearly reveals the Mughal Emperor's anxiety regarding the growing socio-religious influence of Guru Tegh Bahadur, whose appeal of message resonated among the people across the social spectrum, including Zimindars. The anonymous author of *Haqiqat* subtly exposes Aurangzeb's desire to suppress the popularity of Sikhism by luring Guru Tegh Bahadur to accept the Imperial patronage in the form of a revenue-free land grant to live in a corner without taking interest in secular affairs.

Budh Singh Arora, the author of *Risala Dar Ahwal Nanak Shah Darvesh* (1783), which he wrote on the recommendation of James Brown, a British Resident based in the Mughal-Darbar in Delhi, has also commented upon Guru Tegh Bahadur. As a resident of Punjab, he was supposed to gather accurate information about the Sikhs and their religion. However, on examining the *Risala* of Budh Singh, one feels disappointed that he did not reflect the simplest kind of information about the Sikh Gurus. For example, he states that Guru Tegh Bahadur was the son of Guru Harkishan; Emperor Aurangzeb was in the Deccan, where he summoned the Ninth Guru to appear in the Imperial court, and the Ninth Guru courted martyrdom in the Deccan, where a magnificent Sikh religious shrine has come up (Arora, MS# 433, folios 2-3). We can say that Budh Singh Arora intentionally tried his best to mess up, confuse, and distort the cause and context of the martyrdom of the Ninth Guru under the Colonial design that needs probing.

Muhammad Ali Khan Ansari, the author of *Tarikh-i-Muzaffari* (1800), reflects a complete dependency on Ghulam Hussain Khan's flawed version in *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, offering no corrections or critical engagement with earlier mistakes. Most notably, he repeats the entire account of Ghulam Hussain Khan regarding the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur (Ansari, MS # 269, folios 86-87), which had become a defining moment in the collective Sikh memory by this time. Ansari's silence not only reflects a broader historiographical trend of indulgence in plagiarism, besides downplays the Mughal culpability in religious persecution and discrimination against the non-Muslims.

Ahmad Behbahani, the author of *Mir'at-ul-Ahwal-e-Jahannuma* (1810), represents the final phase of Persian historiography on Guru Tegh Bahadur in the pre-modern era. His narrative, however, is steeped in historical errors. He repeats Budh Singh Arora's mistakes by claiming that Guru Tegh Bahadur was the son of Guru Har Krishan. Furthermore, he asserts that Guru Tegh Bahadur was murdered by a Hindu rather than courting martyrdom under imperial orders (Ahmed, 1992, p. 281). This revisionist framing deliberately shifts responsibility away from Aurangzeb, sanitizing the Mughal Emperor's involvement in what Sikh sources uniformly consider a legitimate martyrdom for freedom of conscience.

The foregoing discussion confirms that the Persian historiography of Guru Tegh Bahadur from the late seventeenth century to the colonial period depicts a consistent attempt to prove that the Ninth Guru's socio-religious mission was a political rebellion. These accounts were motivated by the authors' sympathetic attitude towards their co-religionist Mughal Emperor, coupled with the intent to legitimize the atrocious treatment as a judicious and legitimate one, deserving of a rebel. The enduring legacy of these Colonial compilations can be seen in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century history books, gazetteers, and travelogues that continue to echo *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*'s pejorative portrayal of the Sikhs, besides the persona of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh. By cloaking a Colonial agenda in the guise of scholarly history, Ghulam Hussain Khan, Raymond, and Briggs entrenched an anti-Sikh narrative at the heart of Anglophone historiography. Resultantly,

as mentioned earlier the writings of modern historians, including European scholars (Malcolm, 1812, pp. 28-29; Cunningham, 1849, pp. 57-58; Mill, 1858, pp. 302-303; Trump, 1877, p. LXXXVIII), are full of misconceptions about Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Sikh religion. The colonial embrace of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* marginalized the contemporary Sikh perspectives (*Bachittar*, 2000, Chap. 5.13-16; Sainapati, 1980, pp. 65, 68; Bhangu, 2004, pp. 24-28, 419). It suppressed the alternative narrative that was rooted in the sacred writings and *Hukamnamas* of the Ninth Guru, besides the collective Sikh memory enshrined in the Sikh sources.

Postcolonial Texts and Curriculum:

Though William Irvine had expressed his reservations on the credibility of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* (Irvine, 1922, p. 79), however, modern India's leading historians, especially J. N. Sarkar, took no initiative to correct the unwarranted observations (Sarkar, 1928, pp. 312-13). The amazing fact is that no British Colonial historian and modern indigenous historian took pains to verify the sources of Ghulam Hussain Khan from which he had acquired information but went on to accept the narrative presented by him as the proverbial truth (Faruki, 1972, pp. 253-554; Satish, 2007, pp. 346-47, Muzaffar, 1986, p. 327). Though in the case of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Prof. Ganda Singh and Teja Singh did their best to remove the mist of a fallacious account of Ghulam Hussain Khan (Ganda Singh, 1950, p. 56; 1976, pp 191-267), however, the gullible modern historians do not take cognizance of it. We can state that the root cause of it is the *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* and its English translation, on which our modern-day historians still rely for writing the history of India.

There is no denying the fact that Persian historiographical works display commitment and faithfulness to the Mughals, besides harboring communal bias against the non-Muslim subjects. Secondly, though Persian sources are indispensable for doing the history of India, at the same time, regional/vernacular sources are equally crucial while exploring the history of the Sikh Gurus. Another critical factor that has been ignored or has gone unnoticed so far is the indulgence in rampant plagiarism, distortions, repetitions, omissions, ignoring evidence detrimental to the persona of the Emperor, and communal prejudice by the Persian historians. Only by unraveling these layers of misinterpretations/ misconceptions, the present-day scholars disentangle fact from fiction and restore the Ninth Guru's true legacy.

Despite clear reservations by William Irvine regarding the credibility of the sources information of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, besides the absence of a near-contemporary perspective on Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom, twentieth-century textbooks and popular histories continued to perpetuate the Colonial distortions. Prestigious Indian educational bodies such as NCERT and the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) incorporated uncritical summaries of *Siyar-ul-Mutakhirin* into their curricula. Textbooks routinely presented the Ninth Guru as a militant rebel "levying contributions" and "forcible exactions," echoing Raymond and Briggs' erroneous translation. This version suppressed the authentic Sikh perspective, shaping the perception of future generations of students and researchers. The persistence of these stereotype narratives underscores not only editorial negligence but also institutional reluctance to revisit entrenched narratives once they gain official sanction. It is a pity that even the prominent historians (Grewal and Irfan, 1999), who did well to produce an admirable tome, *Sikh History from Persian Sources*, were found shy to discuss plagiarism and distortions by Ghulam Hussain Khan, thus missed the opportunity to resolve the issue once far all.

We have observed that the English translation of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* by Raymond, and later by Briggs, played a crucial role in depicting Guru Tegh Bahadur as an extortionist, freebooter, and a rebellious militant. It not only misrepresents the Guru's martyrdom but also reflects broader Colonial motives to suppress the moral and spiritual authority of the Sikh tradition. The Persian historiography of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, notably when mediated through Colonial translators, repeatedly framed the Ninth Guru's temporal and religious concerns as seditious. This narrative strategy sought to legitimize his capital punishment by portraying him not as a martyr of conscience but as a political insurgent. Modern scholarship must now critically reassess these inherited accounts. Only through rigorous source analysis and contextual re-evaluation can the historical integrity of Guru Tegh Bahadur's life and legacy be reclaimed from centuries of ideological distortion.

Evidently, the origin of the distorted image of Guru Tegh Bahadur is rooted in Yahya Khan's *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk*, from which Ghulam Hussain Khan has copied without any impunity. Although the *Tazkira* survives only in a couple of manuscripts, its defamatory portrayal of the Sikh Gurus found wider publicity/acceptance through Ghulam Hussain Khan's work. The endorsement and translation of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* by the British Colonial Government of India, like Raymond and Briggs, ensured the mass circulation of these distortions/fabrications. We have noted with concern that while Persian chroniclers belonging to the Mughal Imperial court and their later derivatives are marred by plagiarism, repetitions,

omissions, distortions, and communal prejudice, they still sometimes unwittingly certify the persona of Guru Tegh Bahadur's influence and the challenge he posed to the Mughal despotism and hegemony.

It is noteworthy that despite strenuous attempts by the Persian historians to erase or diminish the cause and legitimacy of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Sikh tradition preserved the truth. It transformed it into a central pillar of the collective memory of the Panth. It holds that the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb himself was responsible for the injustice done to Guru Tegh Bahadur, a fact which was deeply etched on the hearts of the ordinary Sikhs. There was a deep anger in their hearts. It come into the open as reported by the court historian Saqi Mustaid Khan in his *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* (1710), that when "On Friday, October 27, 1676 /29th Ramzan, while the Emperor was returning from the Jam'a Masjid, had alighted from the boat in order to mount the moveable chair, (*Takhat-i-Rawan*), an ill-fated disciple of Guru Tegh Singh threw two bricks, one of which reached the chair" (Saqi, 1947, p. 94). Surely, it was an expression of public anger and the failure of imperial propaganda to erase the martyrdom from the canvas of history. However, Tegh Bahadur's legacy transcended the Mughal courtly narratives to inspire the Sikh Panth to stand up in the cause of justice and righteousness without any fear. It reflects how Guru Tegh Bahadur's legacy of moral courage of fear not, frighten not, and resistance to suppress the freedom of conscience, came out into the open amid historiographical silence on the part of Persian chroniclers. His martyrdom was not merely a religious event; it was a defining moment of legitimate dissent/ resistance and moral-spiritual courage, whose impact reverberated well beyond his time.

No doubt, reclaiming the authentic account of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur is a challenging task; however, with proper methodology, it is still achievable in the present times. To address centuries of layered distortions, a rigorous philological methodology must be established. First, researchers should compile a master catalog of all extant Persian, Punjabi, and English texts, including the manuscripts that reference Guru Tegh Bahadur, ranging from *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* to colonial translations of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*. Each item must be identified by its various manuscript sigla, provenance, and dates of composition. Researchers then collate variant readings, noting omissions, interpolations, plagiarism, and marginal glosses that suggest editorial intervention. This process will illuminate how narrative threads, such as the alleged alliance with Hafiz Adam or claims of forcible exactions, were introduced, modified, or excised over time. By mapping the textual genealogy of each distortion, scholars can restore the original contours of the Ninth Guru's image as it emerged in the contemporary Sikh sources, rather than later colonial retellings. Contemporary scholarship must recognize these challenges and biases to present a more balanced and historically grounded portrayal of Guru Tegh Bahadur's life and martyrdom.

4. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the broader implications of historiographical distortions and the need for critical re-examination of Persian and colonial sources.

The findings of this study underscore the broader implications of historiographical distortions in shaping collective memory, identity, and interfaith understanding. The persistence of misrepresentations across Persian, colonial, and postcolonial sources reveals not only the biases of their authors but also the long-lasting institutional mechanisms—imperial patronage, colonial translation projects, and modern educational curricula—that allowed such distortions to become entrenched. These narratives, once canonized, influenced generations of students, scholars, and policymakers, thereby shaping the public image of Guru Tegh Bahadur far beyond his historical context.

A critical re-examination of Persian chronicles and their colonial appropriations is therefore essential. By exposing plagiarism, mistranslations, and rhetorical strategies of vilification, scholars can dismantle the inherited prejudices that continue to permeate modern historiography. More importantly, this discussion points toward the responsibility of contemporary scholarship to not only critique past distortions but also to reintegrate neglected Sikh sources, including *Hukamnamas*, vernacular chronicles, and oral traditions, into mainstream academic discourse. In doing so, historiography can move closer to reflecting a balanced account that honors the integrity of Sikh tradition while adhering to rigorous historical methods.

5. CONCLUSION

The study reaffirms that the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur was not an act of sedition or political insurgency, but rather a profound testimony of moral courage and freedom of conscience. Centuries of distortion—rooted in Mughal court narratives, reinforced by colonial plagiarism, and perpetuated in modern academic and curricular texts—have obscured this reality. By systematically tracing the genealogy of these misrepresentations, the paper demonstrates how historical narratives can be shaped and reshaped by power, ideology, and institutional agendas.

The conclusion calls for sustained source-critical scholarship that is attentive to philology, context, and cross-comparison. Only through such rigorous

engagement can the historical truth be disentangled from centuries of fabrication. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for scholars and educators to integrate Sikh perspectives alongside Persian and colonial accounts, thereby creating a more inclusive and accurate historiography. In doing so, the legacy of Guru Tegh Bahadur—as a spiritual leader, martyr, and defender of religious freedom—can be reclaimed and reaffirmed with scholarly integrity.

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Appendix

In order to trace the trail of plagiarism, distortion, omission of crucial evidence, and fabrication of narratives to legitimize the suppression of dissent against the Mughal state's policies, it is essential to examine the works of five key Persian chroniclers. These chroniclers played a pivotal role in shaping the official discourse, often aligning their accounts with the ideological and political interests of the Mughal Imperial court. Furthermore, this study also sheds light on how British colonial translators and editors, during the 18th and 19th centuries, not only misinterpreted these Persian texts but also selectively promoted and disseminated these skewed interpretations on a broader scale, thereby reinforcing colonial narratives that served their own administrative and ideological agendas.

Firstly, we take up the Persian text of *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* by Sujan Rai Bhandari. While listing the names and tenures of the successive Sikh Gurus, he misleads readers by erroneously dating the Ninth Guru's martyrdom to 1081 Hijri, corresponding to the 17th regnal year of Aurangzeb Alamgir, instead of the 19th regnal year, which accords with 11 November 1675 and is well attested in Sikh tradition. We notice that several later Persian historians repeated Bhandari's error. For readers' convenience, we provide images (No. 1 and No.2) of from *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* (1696) and *Siyar-ul Mutakherin* (1783), respectively establishing the source of Ghulam Hussain Khan:

Secondly, many historians are unaware that Yahya Khan's *Tazkirat-ul-Muluk* contains a reference to Guru Tegh Bahadur and his alleged collaborator, Hafiz Adam Sarhindi, a passage that Ghulam Husain Khan reproduced verbatim in *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*. Our Punjabi rendering and critical appraisal of it appear in *Sikh Itihas di Farsi Itihaskari* (Dhillon, 2022, p. 273). Yahya Khan's account is markedly polemical as it diminishes Guru Nanak's spiritual authority and the originality of his sacred compositions, treating them as if they were merely a Punjabi version of Sufi poetry; it also portrays the Sikh gathering around Guru Tegh Bahadur in a way that makes accusations of extortion seem plausible, even associating the Guru to a contemporary Sufi as though both together extracted money from the public. His vocabulary is frequently ambiguous, adding to the confusion. Because this testimony is crucial to demonstrating Ghulam Husain Khan's plagiarism, we have already provided its English rendering in this study along with a critique of its evidentiary value. To drive home our argument, we are appending here an image (No. 3) of *Tazkirat-ul Muluk.*

Thirdly, we draw attention to the Persian text of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*. Before discussing Guru Tegh Bahadur, Ghulam Husain Khan lists the successive Sikh Gurus and states that Guru Tegh Bahadur succeeded Guru Harkrishan and held the Guruship for eleven years. He further claims that, in the 17th year of Aurangzeb's reign, the Guru was imprisoned and executed by imperial order. Evidently, it is borrowed from Sujan Rai Bhandari and repeats his error of dating the martyrdom to the 17th regnal year of Alamgir. It constitutes a clear instance of plagiarism that went largely unnoticed or was ignored by British colonial historians. Notably, Raymond and Briggs omit this passage from their translations. For reference, we reproduce an image (N. 5) of the relevant Persian passage of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*.

Both translators omit the crucial reference (Raymond, 1789, pp. 89-90; Briggs, 1832, pp. 110-112) to the year of the Guru's martyrdom as recorded in *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, thereby concealing the error and deflecting attention from Ghulam Husain Khan's failure to identify the correct year. Additionally, their versions introduce distortions and fabrications absent from the original Persian text. We reproduce Raymond's passage with original spellings, marking questionable contents in italics:

> Nanec-Shah had not for his immediate successor, either the one or the other of his children, but only a servant of his, called Angad, who sat on

the patriarch's carpet with full authority. The ninth in succession from this Angad was one Tygh-bahadyr, who was of such an extraordinary character as drew multitudes after him, ***all of which as well as their leader, went always armed***. This man finding himself at the head of so many thousands of people, ***became aspiring***; ***and he united his concerns with one Hafyz-aadem***, a Mussulman Fakir, and one of those that styled themselves of Shekh-ahmed-serhindi's fraternity. ***These two men no sooner saw themselves followed by multitudes, implicitly addicted to their chief's will, than forsaking every honest calling, they fell a subsisting by plunder and rapine, laying waste the whole province of Pendjab;*** for whilst Tygh-bahadyr was levying contributions upon the Hindoos, Hafyz-aadem was doing the same upon the Mussulmen. Such excesses having soon ***attracted the notice of the crown-officers***, gazetteers, and intelligencers, they wrote to the emperor Aorengzib, ***that these two men made it a practice to live by plunder and sack.*** In answer to such an advice, the emperor commanded the Viceroy of Pendjab, residing at Lahor***,*** to seize these two miscreants, and to send the Mussulman to the country of Afghans, quite up to the last limits of Hindostan, beyond the Atec, with defense to him to cross it again under pain of death. ***Tygh-Bahadur, the other freebooter, he was to send a prisoner to the castle of Gwaliar***. The Governor executed his orders punctually. Some days after there came an order to the Governor of Gwaliar, to put Tygh-bahadur to death, to cut his body into four quarters***, and to hang them at the four gates of the fortress***, a sentence which was literally executed. But this execution was followed by mournful consequences (Raymond, Calcutta, 1789, pp. 90-91).

According to the above, after his arrest, the Ninth Guru was confined in the fort of Gwalior; his martyrdom is likewise said to have occurred there, a claim that directly contradicts Sikh tradition. Nothing in the original text justifies the assertions that Guru Tegh Bahadur "united his concerns with one Hafiz Adam," "subsisted himself and his disciples by plunder," "laid waste the whole province of Punjab," or that he was "a freebooter," apart from the underlying historical errors. Ironically, Briggs did not correct Raymond in the revised 1832 edition. In retrospect, Raymond and Briggs' depiction of Guru Tegh Bahadur as an extortionist and potential rebel not only misrepresents the Guru's life and martyrdom but also reflects the broader colonial design to undermine the moral and spiritual authority of the Sikh tradition. It looks legitimate to remind that contemporary French orientalist, namely A.L.H. Polier, who was a contemporary of Ghulam Hussain Khan and affiliated with the British colonial authorities, was in the forefront to denigrate the Sikhs who were on the threshold of establishing sovereign Sikh rule in Punjab. For example, he says that the Sikhs, "are the terror and plague of this part of India, a nation and power well calculated for doing mischief and encouraging rebellion in the zemindars or cultivators." He went on to denigrate the Sikh Commonwealth of Sikh Misals that it is a "many-headed snake" (Singh, G. 1962, pp. 64-65). This hostility illuminates the British Colonial Government of India's assessment of the Sikh tradition and its deep design in promoting *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*.

Lastly, we would like to draw attention to an extract of *Farukhsiyar Nama* (1717) by Muhammad Ahsan Ijad, who was a near-contemporary Mughal courtier. We have accessed and examined it very recently. Besides confirming William Irvin's observations, our reading provides a few more details about it. While explaining the origin of the Sikh uprising under Banda Singh Bahadur,

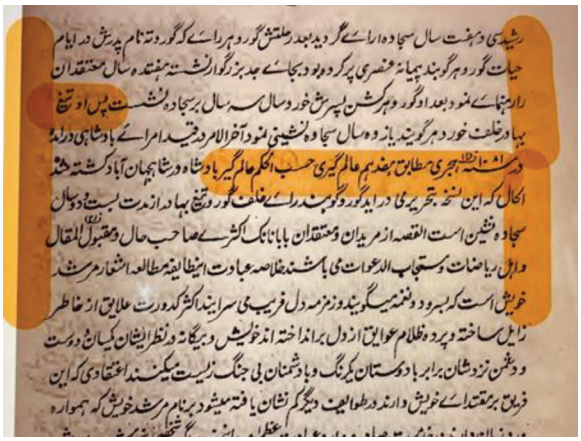


Image 1. Sujan Rai Bhandari, p.70, wherein he records the date of Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom wrongly taking place in 17th year of Alamgiri.

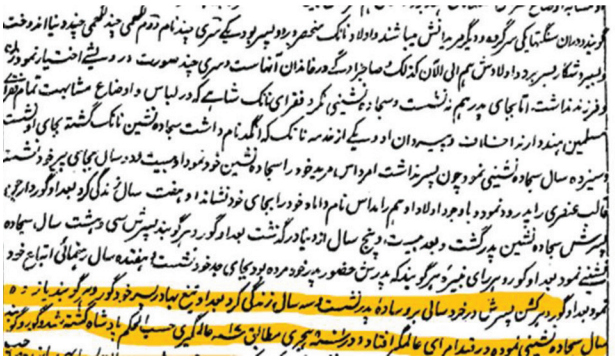


Image 2. Ghulam Hussain Khan's account of Guru Tegh Bahadur in *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* wherein he reproduces Sujan Rai Bhandari's error in dating the Martyrdom.

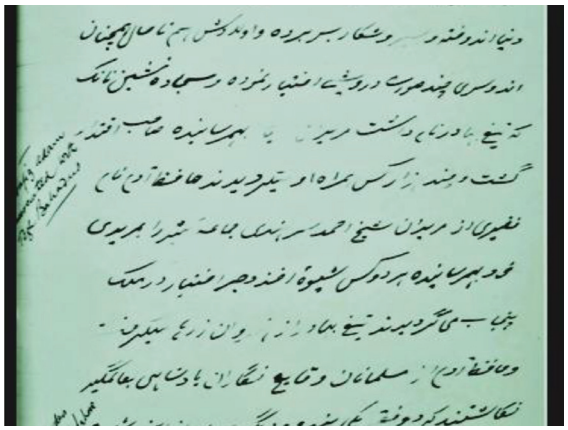


Image 3. Folio 30 of *Tazkirat ul Muluk* by Yahya khan wherein he introduces the tale of Hafiz Adam Khan an alleged collaborator of the Ninth Guru.

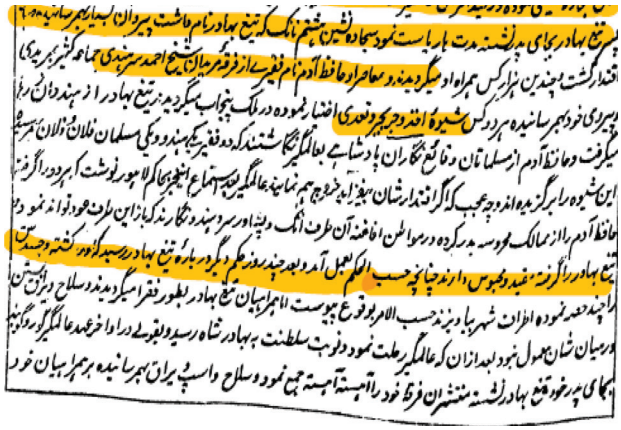


Image 4. *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* p. 401, wherein Yahiya Khan's above episode of Hafiz Adam appears in the same words.

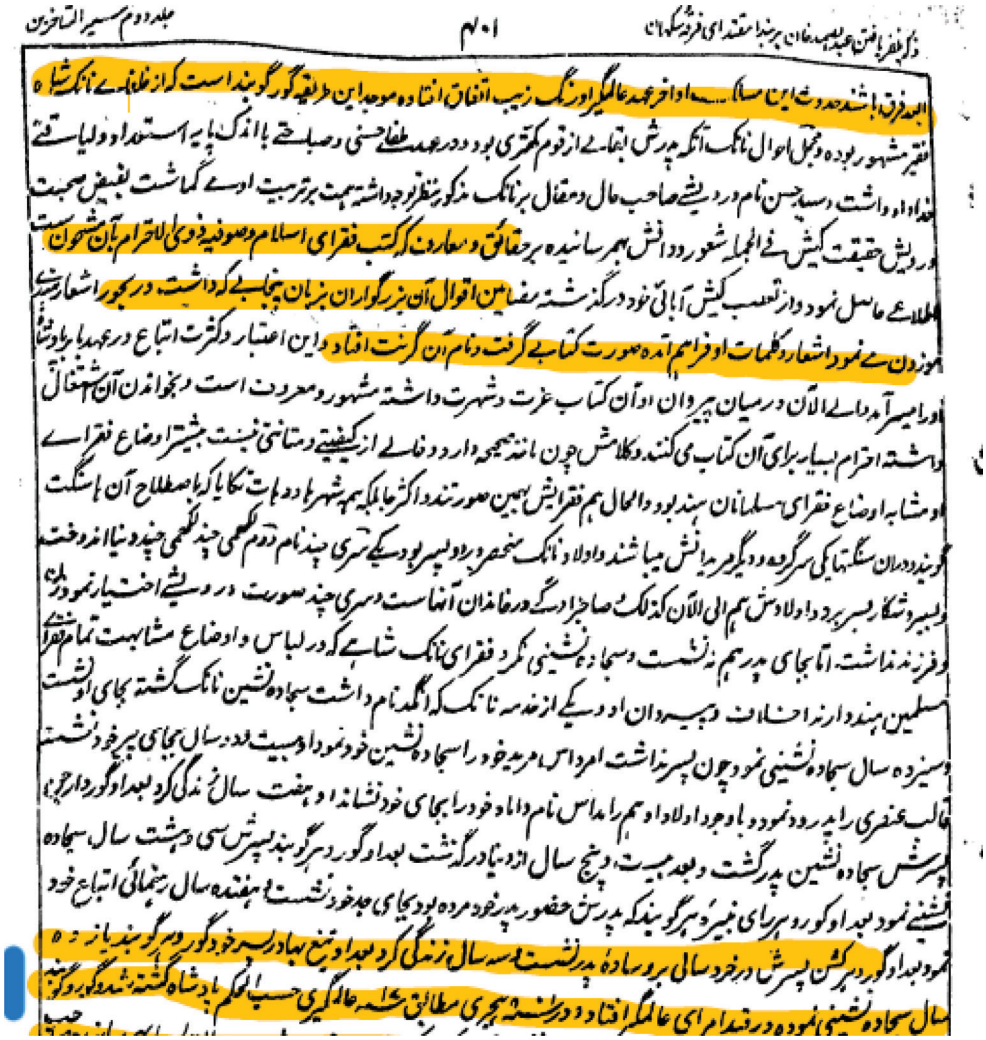


Image 5. Para of *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* on p. 401, which has been omitted by Raymond and Briggs in their translations.

Muhammad Ahsan Ijad tries to locate the Sikh dissent and discusses its origin. While commenting upon the Sikh Gurus, he discusses Guru Nanak, Guru Arjun, and Guru Hargobind, and then moves on to Guru Tegh Bahadur:

In the early years of *Hazrat Khulad-i-Makan* [Emperor Aurangzeb], a person named [Guru] Tegh Bahadur resumed the work of [Gurushipp]. He was [rugged] and rigid because the religious behaviour

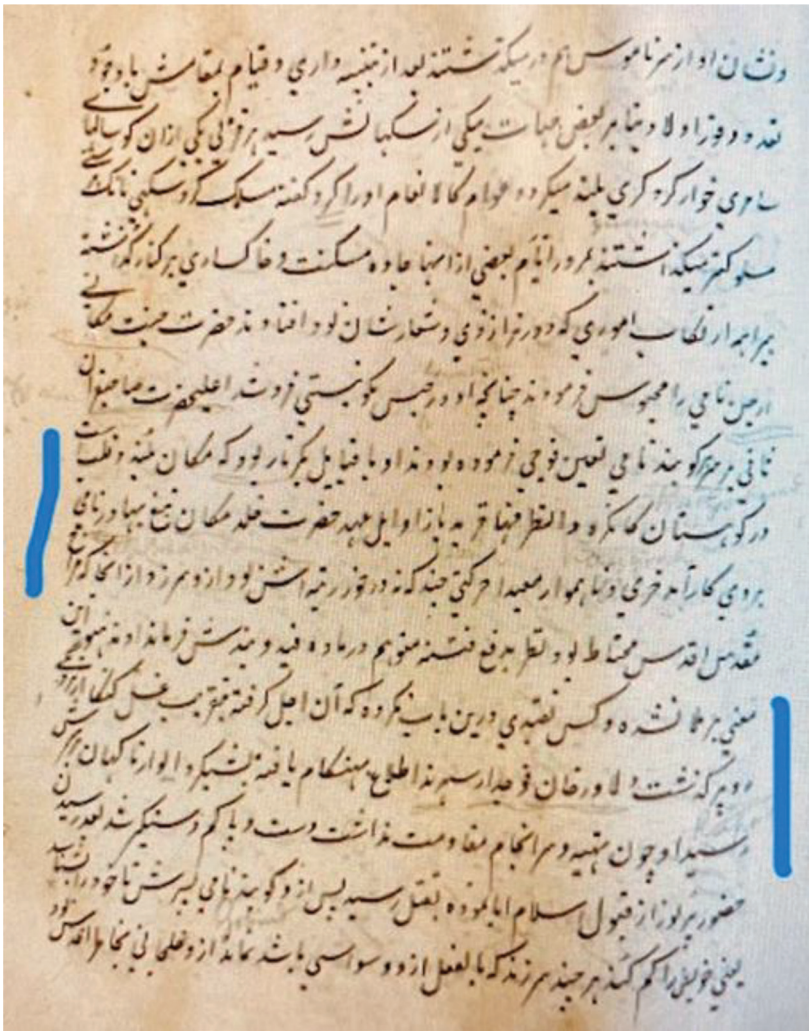


Image 6. Folio 13a of *Farukhsiyarnmama-Fragment* which bears testimony to Aurangzeb's order that was kept secret to arrest Guru Tegh Bahadur, and his denial to embrace Islam

> and practices adopted by him were illegitimate because of his status. Aurangzeb was strict about this type of crime, and therefore, he issued a *Farman* for [Guru] Tegh Bahadur's arrest to punish him for his conduct. However, no one, including any Hindus, knew about this order. When the time of death arrived, the Guru was proceeding to the Ganges, intending to take a bath, and had just passed Ropar. This news reached Dilawar Khan, the Faujdar of Sarhind, who immediately arrived there; [Guru] Tegh Bahadur was neither prepared nor inclined to fight. He was taken into custody, handcuffed, fettered, and put into prison. Later, when he was presented in the court, he refused to accept Islam and was executed. (Ijad, MS # 3958, folio 13a).

Although this account does not reveal the location of Guru Tegh Bahadur's confinement, nor the exact date and place of his execution, it remains a crucial piece of historical evidence. It discloses that Aurangzeb's order to arrest the Guru was not known to anyone but was kept a close secret. It also identifies Dilawar Khan, the Faujdar of Sarhind, as the official responsible for the Guru's arrest, and locates the event near Ropar. Kesar Singh Chhibber corroborates this in his *Bansavalinama Dasan Patshahian Ka* (1769), that Mughal soldiers from the Ropar police post apprehended the Guru near a village and later handed him over to the Faujdar of Sarhind (Padam, 1997, p. 116). Ijad indicates that Aurangzeb exerted pressure on the Ninth Guru to renounce the Sikh doctrine of *Miri-Piri,* which, in the eyes of the emperor, was illegitimate and politically subversive. Ijad also inadvertently reveals Aurangzeb's intention to convert the Guru to Islam forcibly. Significantly, the Sikh tradition is very consistent in its claim that Guru Tegh Bahadur was physically tortured, compelling him to embrace Islam, but he remained firm on his Dharma. It testifies that Guru Tegh Bahadur was asked to embrace Islam, and on denying it, he was put to the sword. Interestingly, Ijad's statement syncs well with the Sikh tradition. Ironically, the later Persian chroniclers, in order to exonerate the Mughal Emperor, continued to paint the Guru in the image of

an armed insurgent, conveniently ignoring the fact of religious persecution responsible for the martyrdom of the Ninth Guru. Though William Irvin has referred to it in a footnote, we feel pleasure in sharing the image (No. 6) of Muhammad Ahsan Ijad's testimony for wider appreciation at the hands of scholars.

Before concluding this write-up, it is important to reflect on the biases and limitations of the Persian chroniclers, whose fortunes were closely tied to the safety and stability of the Mughal Empire. As a result, their narratives must be interpreted with great caution and a critical eye, reading between the lines to uncover deeper historical truths.

A survey of Persian chroniclers reveals that these writings, originating between the late 17th and late 18th centuries, have commented on the life and martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur casually. These historians came from diverse socio-religious and geographical backgrounds. A few of them served as *munshis* or accountants in the Mughal administration. We find that Inayatullah Khan Ismi, Saqi Mustaid Khan, Muhammad Ahsan Ijad, Yahya Khan, Khafi Khan, and Muhammad Qasim Lahori belonged to the administrative-historiographical class attached to the Mughal court. However, being away from Punjab, most relied on reports from *Waqia-Nigars* and News-Writers, often leading to inaccuracies in their accounts of Sikh history and doctrine.

The motives of Persian historians were closely tied to their socio-political positioning. Many sought Imperial patronage, using their literary skills to gain favor at the Mughal court. Historians like Inayatullah Khan, Saqi Mustaid Khan, and Khafi Khan aligned their narratives with the Mughal State's orthodox Islamic ideology, legitimising tyranny and glorifying rulers like Aurangzeb. For Munshi-turned historians, instead of historical integrity and objectivity, writing was often a strategic path to professional and social advancement. As Mughal rule declined, several Persianate historians, such as Ghulam Hussain Khan, Syed Ghulam Ali Khan, Murtaza Hussain Bilgrami, and Muhammad Ali Khan Ansari, turned to the British East India Company for patronage. Their works, shaped by service to the British colonial administrators, influenced early British understandings of the Sikh tradition.

Evidence at hand suggests that, though some Mughal historians had access to official reports from *Waqia-Nigars* and News-Writers, and consulted texts like *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, none appeared to use the *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, despite its relatively balanced treatment of Sikh beliefs. Most Persian chroniclers, because of their loyalty to the Mughal crown, reinforced Mughal legitimacy, rarely questioning policies of religious intolerance and persecution, acknowledging the suffering of non-Muslims. Dissent was routinely portrayed as heretical or anti-Islamic, while Mughal violence was minimized or justified. Vilification of gathering of people around religious persons like Guru Tegh Bahadur by the Imperial News-writers in terms of perceived threats to Imperial authority was a common element.

Mention of Sikh Gurus by the Mughal Persian chroniclers was not a theological exploration but was framed within the context of Mughal Imperial concerns, particularly the Sikh doctrine of Miri-Piri, that social concerns are an inseparable part of Sikh spirituality, but it was understood as subversive, a challenge to Mughal sovereignty. This limited engagement led to mistrust, subsequently putting Guru Tegh Bahadur in confinement, preventing him from preaching his mission freely. While Guru Nanak's spiritual appeal was acknowledged, Persian historians, constrained by Islamic doctrine, especially the belief that the Prophet Muhammad is the seal of Prophethood, portrayed the Guru as a Sufistic figure like a Murshid, Pir, or Shah to fit within Islamic categories.

Imperial figures like Jahangir and Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi viewed the spread of Sikhism as a religious and political threat to both Islam and Mughal rule in India. Their calls for its suppression influenced subsequent Persian historians, who either ignored or rationalized the persecution of Guru Arjan, Guru Tegh Bahadur, and Guru Gobind Singh's sons. These narratives, couched in religious orthodoxy, mobilized Muslim sentiment against the Sikhs.

In sum, Persian historiography on Sikh history was shaped by proximity to Mughal despotism, theological limitations, and political motives. While informative as historical documents, these accounts must be critically examined for communal prejudice, plagiarism, omissions, and misrepresentations.

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Religion, Society and Civilization: Case of Hinduism

THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Several ancient religions are in practice today, in different parts of the world. Religions mirrored the values of the society very closely. In the present day's context of inter-faith and multicultural society in the borderless global village, various religions survive to coexist, despite sporadic incidences of conflict and intolerance. Amidst growing support for broader social fabric and peaceful coexistence, there is still strong communal feelings, guided by deep-rooted faith and belief of respective religion. While most of the modern youth give priority to economic empowerment and comfortable life in a forward looking modern society, religion based festivals and holy-congregations continue to attract millions of faithful devotees. In this context, the present paper starts with throwing light on the relevance of religions and then studies the evolution of different religions. This paper has a special focus on Hinduism, believed to be the oldest religion on this earth, going into the details of its evolution, struggle for survival and the modern day reforms.

Keywords: Religion, Hinduism, Kumbha-mela, Mahakumbh, Spirituality, Inter-faith

1. INTRODUCTION

Religion has always been more than a private system of belief: it is a living cultural force that shapes societies, moral orders, and enduring civilizational patterns. Across human history, religious traditions have been both agents and mirrors of cultural continuity and transformation. In this light, Hinduism stands out as one of the world's oldest surviving religious-civilizational traditions, offering a rich case for examining how a religious system interacts with social structures, historical upheavals, and modern globalization.

This paper seeks to explore the question: **how has Hinduism sustained its influence and adapted to changing social, political, and intercultural contexts across millennia?** In pursuing this aim, the paper does not engage in primary empirical research, but rather undertakes a **conceptual-historical analysis**: synthesizing historical sources, theological texts, and secondary scholarship to trace patterns of resilience, reform, and adaptation in Hinduism.

The significance of this endeavour is threefold. First, understanding Hinduism's civilizational durability helps clarify how religious systems can interplay with society over long time spans. Second, by examining instances of internal reform, external challenges, and cultural assimilation, we may draw lessons for religious traditions

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encountering modern pluralism and globalization. Third, this analysis contributes to comparative religious and civilizational scholarship, offering a South Asia–rooted perspective on religion and societal change.

In the following sections, we situate this study within relevant literature, explain the methodological approach, present thematic findings, and conclude with reflections on future directions and implications for interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue.

2. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE CONTEXT

Religion and civilization have been inseparable across history. Every major civilization has evolved with a religious foundation that provided moral codes, ritual practices, and social cohesion. Scholarly literature underscores that ancient religions were not only expressions of spiritual belief but also mechanisms of cultural regulation and survival (Johnston, 2004; Samuel, 2008). In contemporary scholarship, religion is increasingly examined as a cultural system that adapts under the pressures of modernization and globalization (Adamo & Al-Ansari, 2020; Dung & Kanwal, 2024).

Hinduism, often regarded as the world's oldest living religion, offers a particularly rich case. Its origins are frequently traced to proto-religious practices of the **Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3300–1900 BCE)**, where archaeological evidence reveals ritual objects, proto-deities, and water-bathing sites that resonate with later Hindu customs. The migration of Indo-Aryan groups into the north-western Indian subcontinent (c. 2000–1500 BCE) further contributed to the composition of the **Vedas** and the emergence of what is now called the **Vedic era of Hinduism** (Singh, 2021; Koul, 2024).

As comparative studies show, Hinduism coexisted and interacted with other ancient traditions, many of which later declined or transformed. The table below provides a concise overview of major world religions and their approximate origins:

Table 1: Pre-historic religions in the world

Religion	Start age/ year	Origin
Hinduism	2300-1500 BCE	South Asia, Indus Valley
Zoroastrianism	1500 BCE	Persia
Judaism	2000-1500 BCE	Southern Levant
Jainism	6th Century BCE	India
Buddhism	600-400 BCE	India
Confucianism	551-479 BCE	China
Taoism	500 BCE	China
Shintoism	400-300 BCE	Japan

Source: Authors, 2025

(Compilation from https://www.worldhistory.org/religion and other sources)

The resilience of Hinduism, in contrast to the extinction or transformation of many early religions, can be attributed to its **pluralist structure** and capacity for **internal reform**. Reform movements such as the **Bhakti tradition**, the **Brahmo Samaj**, and the **Arya Samaj** highlight how Hinduism repeatedly adapted to new social, political, and colonial contexts (Banahatti, 1995; Heehs, 2008).

In comparative civilizational research, Hinduism has been analyzed as both a deeply historical tradition and a flexible religious system capable of absorbing cultural influences without losing its philosophical core (Dung & Kanwal, 2024). Such studies help situate Hinduism not as an isolated phenomenon but as a participant in the broader dialogue of world civilizations.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **conceptual-historical approach**, emphasizing the synthesis of secondary literature and historical evidence to examine the resilience of Hinduism across time. The methodological orientation is not empirical but analytical, aiming to integrate theological, sociological, and historical perspectives into a coherent framework for understanding Hinduism as both a religion and a civilizational force.

3.1 Source Selection

The paper relies primarily on **secondary sources**, including:

- Historical and archaeological studies on early civilizations and religions (Adamo & Al-Ansari, 2020; Johnston, 2004).
- Classical Hindu scriptures and philosophical texts (e.g., Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita).
- Scholarly works on reform movements and modern Hindu thinkers (Banahatti, 1995; Heehs, 2008).
- Contemporary analyses of Hinduism's interaction with globalization and interfaith dynamics (Dung & Kanwal, 2024; Dodson, 2021).

To maintain academic rigor, the study incorporates **peer-reviewed journal articles, authoritative books, and verified open-access references**. Where appropriate, grey literature (reports and public domain materials) is used to illustrate contemporary practices such as the **Kumbh Mela**.

3.2 Analytical Lens

The analytical lens is threefold:

1. **Historical-Civilizational** – tracing Hinduism's continuity from proto-religious practices of the Indus Valley to its present form.

2. **Theological-Philosophical** – examining core scriptures, reformist movements, and evolving interpretations of dharma, spirituality, and social order.
3. **Sociological-Comparative** – situating Hinduism alongside other world religions in terms of survival, reform, and global diffusion.

3.3 Scope and Limitations

The study is **not empirical** in the sense of field surveys or ethnographic research. Instead, it is **synthetic and comparative**, drawing from diverse historical and scholarly sources. The scope is necessarily broad, covering more than five millennia of religious and cultural development. This breadth enhances civilizational understanding but limits the possibility of deep micro-historical analysis.

3.4 **Relevance to Scholarship**

By positioning Hinduism as a case of religious resilience, this methodology contributes to the broader discourse on religion and society in the **Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (JHSSR)**. Similar conceptual analyses in JHSSR have highlighted religion's role in shaping cross-cultural understanding (Dung & Kanwal, 2024), supporting the relevance of this study within the journal's focus.

4. **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The resilience of Hinduism over more than five millennia can be analyzed through six interrelated themes: evolution and early spread, challenges and invasions, reform and revival, pilgrimage and religious congregation, globalization and diaspora, and issues of tolerance.

4.1 Evolution and Early Spread

The earliest evidence of Hinduism can be traced to proto-religious practices of the **Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3300–1900 BCE)**. Excavations suggest rituals of fire, water purification, and proto-deities that resonate with later Vedic practices (Singh, 2021). The **Indo-Aryan migrations (c. 2000–1500 BCE)** introduced the Vedic hymns, recorded in the *Rigveda*, which formed the philosophical and ritual foundation of Hinduism.

The **Upanishads** (800–300 BCE) expanded this foundation, emphasizing metaphysics, spiritual inquiry, and the pursuit of moksha (liberation). This early period, often called the **Vedic era**, established a pluralist religious system that accommodated multiple deities, philosophical schools, and ritual forms (Koul, 2024).

4.2 Challenges and Invasions

Hinduism endured a series of profound challenges, including political upheavals, foreign invasions, and internal social tensions.

- The incursion of **Alexander's armies (4th century BCE)** and later Islamic conquests (8th–16th centuries CE) resulted in the destruction of temples, forced conversions, and cultural suppression (Dodson, 2021).
- The **caste system** created internal divisions, which sometimes weakened collective identity.
- During the **British colonial period (1757–1947)**, the rise of English education and Western rationalism challenged traditional beliefs.



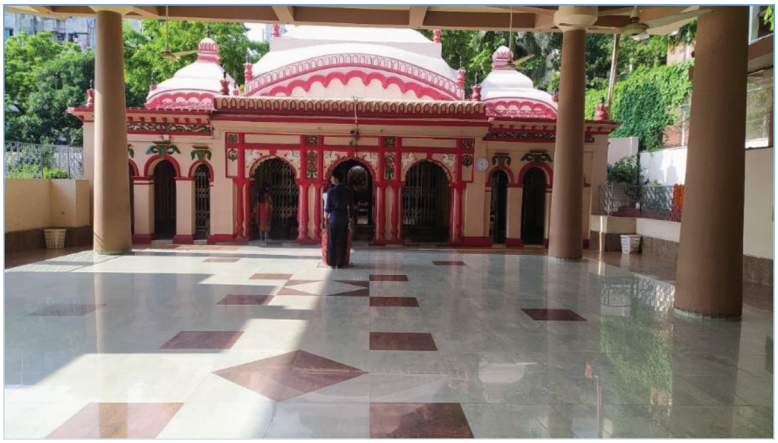
Picture 1. Worshipping Sun as God, Konark temple, Odisha, India

Illustrates continuity of solar worship from Vedic times to later Hindu traditions



Picture 2. Ancient Pashupatinath temple, Kathmandu, Nepal

Highlights proto-animal symbolism in Hindu ritual continuity.



Picture 3. Old Hindu temple at Dhaka, Bangladesh

Symbolizes resilience of Hindu temples despite centuries of external pressures.

Despite these challenges, Hinduism persisted by localizing practices, sustaining oral traditions, and maintaining strong family and community rituals. This resilience reflects what Subudhi (2025) calls Hinduism's "civilizational adaptability."

4.3 Reform and Revival

The **19th and early 20th centuries** witnessed vigorous reform movements that revitalized Hinduism in response to colonial critique and modernization:

Raja Rammohan Roy founded the *Brahmo Samaj* (1828), emphasizing rational religion and monotheism.

Dayanand Saraswati launched the *Arya Samaj* (1875), advocating Vedic education and social reform (Garg, 1984).

The Bhakti Movement in South India democratized spirituality through vernacular devotional songs (Samuel, 2008).

Swami Vivekananda internationalized Hindu thought, presenting it as a universal philosophy of tolerance (Banahatti, 1995).

Sri Aurobindo emphasized integral yoga as a synthesis of spiritual and modern life (Heehs, 2008).

These reformers demonstrate Hinduism's **capacity for renewal**, ensuring its survival in an age of colonial domination and rising nationalism.

4.4 Pilgrimage and Religious Congregation

Pilgrimage has been central to Hindu identity, reinforcing collective spirituality and social solidarity. Ancient cities like **Varanasi (Kashi)** and **Prayagraj** continue to serve as sacred centers for cremation rituals and holy bathing in the Ganges (Dodson, 2021).

The **Maha Kumbh Mela**, held every twelve years, represents the largest religious gathering in the world. The **Mahakumbh-2025 at Prayagraj** attracted over **660 million pilgrims**, with massive infrastructural arrangements, making it the most significant religious congregation in recorded history (Kulkarni & Nath, 2025). Such events reaffirm Hinduism's vitality in the modern world.

4.5 Hinduism in a Globalized World

Global migration, diaspora communities, and digital technologies have expanded Hinduism beyond its South Asian heartlands.



Picture 4. Ashi Ghat, Varanasi (ancient Kashi), in UP, India

Illustrates how methodological focus links textual sources with enduring ritual practices (holy bathing, cremation, pilgrimage).

- Hindu communities thrive across North America, Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia.
- **Virtual worship platforms** and **online discourse** make religious rituals accessible across borders.
- Practices like **Yoga** and festivals like **Diwali** have transcended religious boundaries, becoming global cultural assets (Dung & Kanwal, 2024).
- Institutions such as **ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness)** spread devotional traditions in a modern, globalized framework.

Hinduism's adaptability in the "borderless global village" demonstrates its continuing relevance as both a cultural identity and a universal spiritual system.

4.6 Issues of Tolerance and Intolerance

Despite the global spread, Hinduism—like all major religions—faces contemporary challenges of **fundamentalism, politicization, and intolerance**. While large-scale wars of religion are absent today, religious nationalism, interfaith tensions, and socio-political manipulation of faith continue to test Hinduism's pluralist ethos.

Scholars argue that genuine interfaith dialogue and education in the **"true spirit of religion"** are vital for sustaining peace in multicultural societies (Dung & Kanwal, 2024). Hinduism's emphasis on **pluralism, respect for nature, and spiritual harmony** remains a valuable resource for such engagement.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study has traced the **evolution, resilience, and adaptability of Hinduism** across millennia, demonstrating how it has survived foreign invasions, colonial domination, internal tensions, and modern global transformations. The evidence suggests that Hinduism's durability lies in three interrelated qualities:

1. **Pluralism and Philosophical Depth** – Hinduism accommodates diverse schools of thought, deities, and practices, allowing it to absorb new influences without losing its spiritual core.
2. **Capacity for Reform** – From the Bhakti tradition to the Brahmo Samaj, reform movements have repeatedly reinterpreted Hindu philosophy in ways relevant to their historical moment.
3. **Integration of Ritual and Community** – Pilgrimages, festivals, and family-based rituals reinforce communal bonds, ensuring continuity of practice across generations.

Future Directions

In light of these findings, several future directions can be outlined:

- **Interfaith Engagement**: Hinduism's pluralist ethos can provide a framework for peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies. Constructive dialogue across religions will be critical for reducing tensions and fostering global harmony (Dung & Kanwal, 2024).
- **Education and Awareness**: Greater emphasis is needed on disseminating the *true spirit* of Hindu philosophy—its focus on compassion, respect for nature, and spiritual balance—while combating superstition and fundamentalism.



Picture 5. Isha's Adiyogi bust of Lord Shiva, the tallest bust-structure in the world, Coimbatore, India Symbolizing modern institutionalization of Hindu philosophy.



Picture 6-a. Mahakumbha, the biggest ever religious congregation Visually documents the scale of contemporary pilgrimage gatherings.



Picture 6-b. Mahakumbh 2025



Picture 6-c. Mahakumbh 2025

NOTE: Photo Credit: *Rabi Narayan Subudhi*, 2025

- **Global Relevance**: As Hindu practices such as Yoga, Ayurveda, and Diwali festivals gain worldwide recognition, there is an opportunity to articulate Hinduism not just as a cultural heritage but also as a **global resource for sustainable living, ecological awareness, and spiritual wellbeing**.
- **Scholarly Inquiry**: Future academic work should deepen the analysis of Hinduism's interaction with modern issues such as gender equality, environmental ethics, and technological change. Empirical case studies of diaspora communities may also enrich comparative religion research.

Closing Reflection

The trajectory of Hinduism illustrates that **civilizational resilience is not rooted in rigidity but in adaptability**. Just as Hinduism has risen from periods of suppression to renewal, it offers lessons for global humanity: that spiritual traditions endure when they embrace diversity, reform, and coexistence. In this sense, Hinduism remains both an ancient tradition and a living resource for the challenges of the 21st century and beyond.

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AI with a Human Face: Reimagining Education for Gen Z and Gen ALPHA. *Living Dialogue between Disciplines, Voices, and Visions*

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ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary review explores how artificial intelligence (AI) can transform education for Generations Z and Alpha without eroding its human core. Drawing on historical, philosophical, and policy perspectives, the article frames AI as both *mirror* and *lamp*: it mirrors existing pedagogical shortcomings while illuminating new possibilities for dialogic, relational learning.

Part I examines teacher-learner interaction through the lens of humanistic and bilingual pedagogy (CLIL+IA, *Intelligenza Artificiale* in Italian). It argues that meaningful education depends on presence, empathy, and shared agency. Revisiting Enlightenment and modern pedagogical traditions, from Locke and Wollstonecraft to Dewey, it highlights the enduring importance of conversation and reciprocity in the learning process.

Part II extends this analysis to the systemic, policy, and technological dimensions of human-centred AI in education. Through a critical synthesis of global frameworks from UNESCO, OECD, and the World Economic Forum, as well as a case study of Italy's Multiversity S.p.A., it explores tensions between corporate automation and the ethical goals of humanistic learning. The findings suggest that AI's educational value lies not in efficiency or replication, but in its capacity to revive democratic dialogue, intercultural understanding, and creative thinking.

The article concludes that human-centred AI must rest on ethical governance, equitable access, and pedagogical courage. These principles can help teachers and learners rediscover what it means to learn and teach humanly in an algorithmic age.

Keywords: AI in Education; Dialogic Pedagogy; Digital Humanism; Educational Policy; Gen Alpha; Gen Z; Human-Centred Learning; Postcolonial Critique of AI; Systemic Innovation.

1. INTRODUCTION

"The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence."

- Rabindranath Tagore

"We need to learn to dialogue again - not to debate, not to convince, but to listen."

- Ilenia Valleriani

The dawn of the AI era has redefined not only how we access information but also how we understand

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learning itself. Across educational systems, generative technologies (tools capable of producing text, images, sound, and simulation) are provoking profound questions about the essence of teaching, the nature of cognition, and the boundaries between human and machine. Yet, beyond the fascination with technological novelty lies an older philosophical concern: how do we remain human while learning alongside machines?

At the core of this question is a paradox that has persisted throughout educational history. The more we automate processes of knowledge delivery, the more we rediscover the irreplaceable value of human presence and dialogue. Education has always been a negotiation between transmission and transformation, between information and imagination. As *Tagore's* vision suggests, genuine education extends beyond information transfer: through education, we nurture harmony, awaken resonance, and inspire moral growth, deepening our understanding and connection with reality. The rise of artificial intelligence does not negate this vision; it challenges us to revisit and reanimate it under radically new conditions.

This article, *AI with a Human Face: Reimagining Education for Gen Z and Gen Alpha*, is conceived as a dialogue between two complementary perspectives. Part I, *Teacher-Learner Interactions in the Age of GenAI*, adopts a **humanistic and pedagogical lens**, exploring the dialogic, bilingual, and intercultural dimensions of teaching in the age of generative intelligence. It traces continuities between Enlightenment pedagogies and contemporary CLIL+IA classrooms, arguing that authentic learning still depends on presence, reciprocity, and co-creation of meaning.

Part II, *Systemic, Policy, and Technological Dimensions of Human-Centred AI in Education*, extends the inquiry to the **structural and systemic level**. It situates the humanistic insights of Part I within the frameworks of international educational policy, technology ethics, and institutional design. By engaging recent developments in UNESCO's *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* (2021), OECD's *Education 2030* initiative, and the World Economic Forum's analyses of digital transformation, this section examines how human-centred AI can be institutionalised rather than idealised.

Together, these two parts articulate a single proposition: that AI, when guided by ethical imagination, can serve as both *mirror* and *lamp*: a mirror reflecting the limits of mechanistic instruction, and a lamp illuminating the possibilities of renewed dialogue, creativity, and collective intelligence.

This study therefore moves deliberately between **micro and macro levels** of analysis. It begins with the classroom encounter (the teacher, the learner, and the invisible, algorithmic 'interlocutor') and expands outward to include educational systems, governance frameworks, and the political economy of digital knowledge. This movement between voices and scales embodies what this article calls a *living dialogue between disciplines, voices, and visions*.

The argument proceeds from the conviction that technological advancement, by itself, does not guarantee progress in education. What determines the quality of learning in the age of AI is not the sophistication of machines, but the ethical and dialogic orientation of those who design, teach, and learn with them. As such, the integration of AI into education represents not merely a technical transition but a civilisational one, an opportunity to reaffirm the human face of learning.

2. HISTORICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN-CENTRED EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF AI

The impulse to teach dialogically, to educate through conversation rather than through command, has marked the evolution of pedagogy for over three centuries. From Enlightenment thinkers to 20th-century reformers, the aspiration to place the learner at the centre of the educational process has consistently resurfaced whenever societies confronted technological or ideological transformations. Artificial intelligence, far from breaking with this history, now extends and tests its boundaries.

The Enlightenment's call for rational inquiry and self-formation was rooted in a humanistic belief that education should cultivate judgment rather than obedience. *John Locke's Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) envisioned learning as the shaping of reason through dialogue and reflection. *Mary Wollstonecraft* and *Maria Edgeworth* challenged patriarchal models of instruction by foregrounding empathy, experience, and the social context of learning. In Italy, *Giacomo Leopardi's* pedagogical writings already perceived a crisis of meaning in rote instruction, urging teachers to awaken imagination rather than transmit doctrine.

Across these traditions runs a common insight: learning is a moral and relational act. This conviction would later re-emerge in *John Dewey's* progressive pedagogy, which defined education as "a process of living and not a preparation for future living." Dewey's insistence that knowledge arises from participation and experience resonates powerfully in today's discussions of *AI-supported learning environments*.

2.1 From Transmissive to Dialogic Models

Modern schooling, especially throughout the industrial 19th and early 20th centuries, institutionalised

transmissive learning. The teacher became the central authority, while learners were passive recipients of fixed curricula. Yet even amid industrial modernity, reformers like Dewey, *Lev Vygotsky*, and *Paulo Freire* sought to re-establish the primacy of dialogue. Freire's concept of "problem-posing education" anticipated the very challenges of algorithmic learning: systems that risk reducing learners to data points rather than participants in meaning-making.

The 20th century thus witnessed an ongoing oscillation between *progressive ideals* and *traditional persistence*. Progressive education aspired to active, student-centred engagement, while many institutions retained exam-oriented, lecture-driven practices. In the 21st century, this paradox persists. Digital technologies promised autonomy and participation, yet in many contexts they have reproduced transmissive logic through screens rather than chalkboards.

As shown in **Figure 1**, the historical pendulum between transmissive and dialogic paradigms has swung repeatedly from the Enlightenment to the age of AI.

The timeline illustrates how technological innovation has historically coincided with pedagogical reaction: industrial modernity favoured transmissive order; the digital revolution revived collaborative ideals. In the AI era, this cyclical tension intensifies, revealing that progress in learning depends less on tools than on the moral imagination guiding their use.

2.2 Language, Dialogue, and the CLIL+IA Paradigm

In contemporary classrooms, the interplay between *language, cognition, and culture* continues to define how learning occurs. The *Content and Language Integrated Learning plus Artificial Intelligence* (CLIL+IA) model exemplifies this shift. It combines bilingual instruction with AI-enabled tools for interaction, assessment, and creative expression. In such environments, teachers act not just as content deliverers but also as educational designers who orchestrate multimodal, cross-linguistic dialogue.

CLIL+IA reinforces the dialogic dimension of education by recognising language as both *medium and message*: a living interface where human and machine intelligences meet. Rather than automating correction or translation, AI tools can serve as scaffolds for reflection, encouraging students to become co-authors of meaning. The pedagogy thus returns, paradoxically, to Socratic inquiry: learning through questions, uncertainty, and shared exploration. Table 1 below synthesises the multimodal, multilingual, and meaningful dimensions that define the CLIL+IA model at the heart of human-centred, AI-mediated pedagogy.

This framework highlights how CLIL+IA redefines the relationship between language, cognition, and technology. By linking multimodality to creativity, multilingualism to inclusion, and meaningfulness to ethics, the model situates AI within a dialogic ecology rather than a mechanistic process. It demonstrates that artificial intelligence, when used reflectively, can become a tool for *human amplification* - enriching the learner's capacity to perceive, articulate, and empathise across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

2.3 Ethics of Presence and Attention

The digital saturation of modern life has transformed attention into a scarce resource. OECD reports (2023) note declining literacy and concentration among young learners, especially in screen-dominant environments. For Generations Z and Alpha, raised amidst algorithmic feeds and rapid cognitive switching, education must reclaim

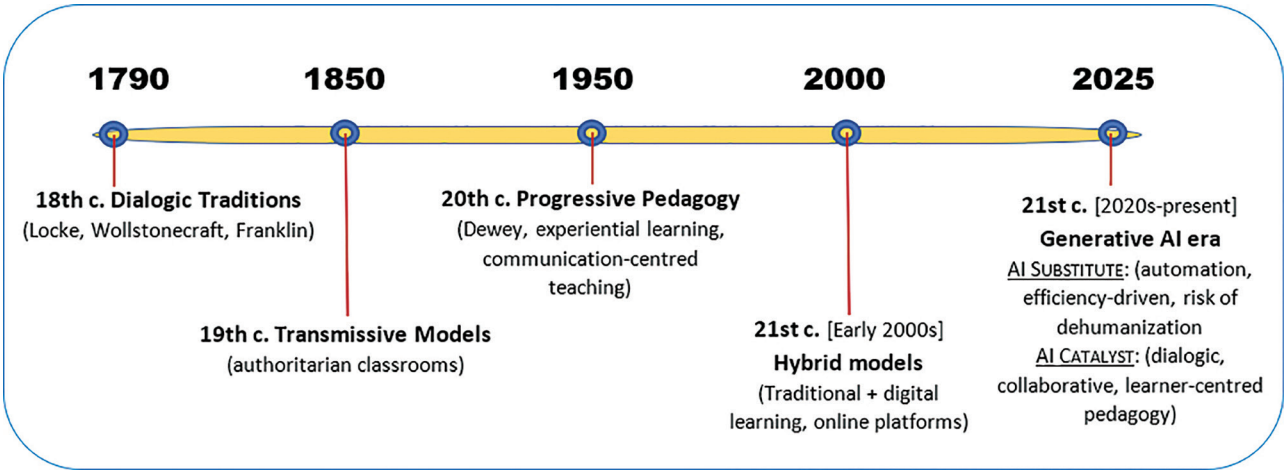


Figure 1: Timeline of Educational Paradigms (18th - 21st Centuries)

***Source**: Authors, 2025*

Note. *The figure traces the shift from 18th-century dialogic traditions (Locke, Wollstonecraft, Franklin) through 19th-century transmissive models and 20th-century progressive pedagogy to the current AI-mediated tension between automation and dialogue.*

Table 1: *CLIL+IA Framework: Integrating Multimodal, Multilingual, and Meaningful Dimensions of Learning*

Dimension	Description	Example of AI Mediation	Dialogic Outcome
Multimodal	Integrates text, image, and sound to construct meaning across sensory channels.	AI tools generate adaptive visuals, voice synthesis, and audio feedback to enhance comprehension.	Heightened sensory engagement and creative expression.
Multilingual	Encourages learners to navigate between languages, cultures, and registers.	AI-assisted translation, speech recognition, and semantic mapping tools foster cross-linguistic experimentation.	Greater intercultural awareness and linguistic confidence.
Meaningful	Grounds learning in authentic social, ethical, or ecological contexts.	Generative storytelling, simulation, and collaborative projects link knowledge to lived experience.	Co-authored meaning and ethical reflection.

Source: Authors (2025).

Note. *The table conceptualises the integration of AI into CLIL+IA pedagogy through three interdependent dimensions (multimodal, multilingual, and meaningful learning) each fostering dialogic engagement rather than automation.*

presence as an ethical act. Presence here does not oppose technology but redefines its use: technology becomes a medium for fostering *slow attention* and sustained dialogue.

In this sense, human-centred AI must preserve the emotional and cognitive ecology of learning. The teacher's empathy and the learner's curiosity remain the true engines of intelligence. Machines may process data, but only humans can generate meaning.

2.4 From Humanism to Digital Humanism

The concept of *digital humanism* offers a bridge between historical pedagogy and contemporary innovation. It insists that digital transformation should advance human values rather than replace them. The *Vienna Manifesto on Digital Humanism* (2021) called for technologies that strengthen democratic participation, cultural diversity, and intellectual autonomy. Applied to education, this ethos demands that AI systems respect pedagogical freedom and pluralism of knowledge.

Human-centred education, therefore, is not nostalgic; it is anticipatory. It prepares learners to engage critically with the world they inhabit, one increasingly mediated by algorithms and data economies. In this light, the history of education reads not as a succession of obsolete paradigms but as an unfinished conversation between generations of teachers, learners, and now, machines.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **qualitative and interpretive approach**, combining *comparative historical analysis* with *contemporary case observation* to trace the evolution of human-centred learning in the age of AI. The methodology reflects the dialogic structure of the paper itself: two voices, two perspectives, united by a shared inquiry into how technology reshapes human interaction in education.

3.1 Research Orientation

The research follows an **interdisciplinary humanistic inquiry** grounded in both philosophy and education studies. It draws from pedagogical theory (Dewey, Freire, Vygotsky), digital ethics (UNESCO, 2021; Crawford, 2024), and policy discourse (OECD, 2023; WEF, 2025) to situate current developments within a historical continuum. Rather than testing hypotheses, this study seeks to understand how the concept of *dialogue* (as both a cognitive and moral principle) survives and transforms in the context of machine-assisted learning.

3.2 Data and Source Selection

Primary materials include philosophical and pedagogical texts, recent policy frameworks, and selected institutional case studies such as Italy's **Multiversity S.p.A.**, which integrates AI into flexible online learning systems. Secondary sources consist of peer-reviewed articles, conference proceedings, and reports from UNESCO, OECD, and WEF, focusing on the ethics and governance of AI in education.

These materials were selected using three criteria:

1. **Relevance to human-centred learning** (focus on ethics, dialogue, or pedagogy).
2. **Recency and policy significance** (sources from 2020-2025 emphasised).
3. **Cultural representativeness**, reflecting both Global North and Global South perspectives.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis proceeds in three interpretive layers:

1. **Historical-pedagogical layer**, reconstructing the philosophical genealogy of dialogic education.
2. **Systemic-policy layer**, identifying international frameworks that shape AI's educational governance.
3. **Technological-ethical layer**, examining how generative AI affects cognitive, affective, and linguistic dimensions of learning.

This triadic lens reflects the *mirror-lamp duality* underpinning the paper: the reflective dimension (critique of automation) and the illuminative dimension (creative, ethical reimagining). Each part contributes to a composite understanding of *human-centred AI in education*.

3.4 Reflexive and Dialogic Method

Given the co-authored structure, the research also embodies a **method of living dialogue**, not only analysing interaction but enacting it. The integration of voices from different cultural and disciplinary contexts (humanities and policy) mirrors the very diversity the article advocates. Reflexivity was maintained throughout by continuously revisiting how AI tools were used in writing, analysis, and editing, ensuring awareness of the authors' own technological mediation.

In essence, this methodological stance positions AI not merely as an object of study but as a *participant*: a co-agent whose presence in research and writing compels renewed ethical and epistemological reflection.

4. TEACHER-LEARNER INTERACTION AND THE DIALOGIC CLASSROOM IN THE AGE OF AI

Teacher-learner interaction remains the crucible where technology either deepens or diminishes humanity in education. The question is not whether AI can assist teaching, but whether it can preserve the reciprocity that makes teaching human.

Dialogic pedagogy assumes that knowledge is co-constructed through communication. In AI-mediated classrooms, this principle becomes newly urgent: teachers must balance algorithmic guidance with interpretive flexibility, ensuring that feedback systems and predictive analytics do not silence curiosity or difference.

4.1 The Teacher as Mediator

In a world where information is abundant and instantly retrievable, the teacher's role shifts from being a gatekeeper of knowledge to a *curator of meaning*. Rather than competing with machine intelligence, teachers humanise it, embedding ethical reflection, empathy, and narrative understanding into the learning process.

AI tools, when employed thoughtfully, can extend this mediation. Conversational agents or generative tutors can simulate inquiry-based dialogue, but they cannot *embody presence*. The human teacher remains essential for transforming information into wisdom, a distinction critical to both Dewey's experiential education and today's debates on *machine pedagogy*.

4.2 The Learner as Co-Author

For Gen Z and Gen Alpha learners, education is increasingly multimodal and participatory. They engage with content through text, image, and simulation, often collaborating with generative systems. This co-authorship marks a shift from passive reception to *co-creation*, demanding new literacies: critical AI literacy, ethical reasoning, and metacognitive awareness.

As shown in **Figure 2**, the learner's position oscillates between *AI as substitute* (automation of routine learning) and *AI as catalyst* (enhancement of creativity and dialogue).

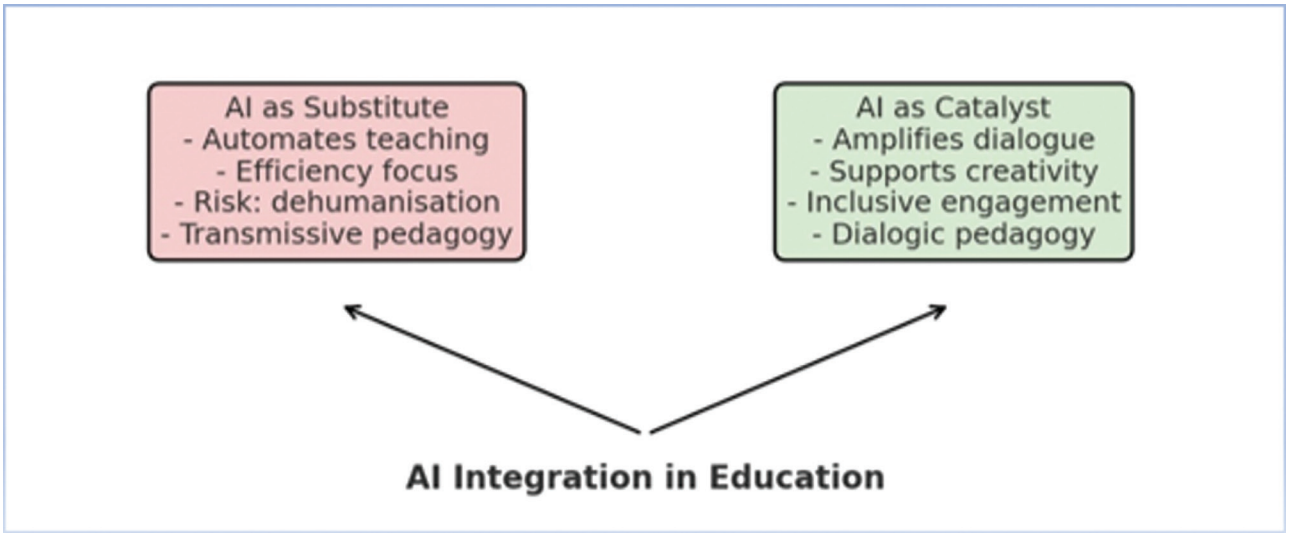


Figure 2 – AI as Substitute vs. AI as Catalyst for Dialogic Pedagogy (a conceptual contrast model).

***Source**: Authors, 2025*

Note. The diagram contrasts two pedagogical paradigms: AI as a *substitute* automating transmissive instruction, and AI as a *catalyst* amplifying collaboration, creativity, and dialogic learning. *Source: Authors (2025).*

Figure 2 visualises the critical tension in educational AI adoption: efficiency versus empathy. The sustainability of human-centred education depends on positioning AI as a pedagogical tool (almost partner in thought) rather than a replacement for human relation.

4.3 Cognitive Ecology and Emotional Presence

AI-mediated learning environments alter not just how knowledge is processed but how emotion and cognition interrelate. Neuroscientific studies suggest that emotional engagement remains decisive for memory and comprehension, areas where machines cannot replicate human affect. The educator's task is therefore to cultivate emotional intelligence alongside digital fluency.

Attention, empathy, and curiosity become the new "core literacies" of the AI era. As *OECD (2023)* notes, these capacities are vital for democratic citizenship and cannot be outsourced to algorithms. The dialogic classroom is thus both a technological and moral space: a laboratory of empathy, imagination, and responsibility.

5. SYSTEMIC, POLICY, AND TECHNOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN-CENTRED AI IN EDUCATION

The philosophical reflection developed in Part I finds its systemic counterpart in the structures, policies, and technologies that now govern education. Whereas the first part explored *how* learning happens within dialogic, bilingual, and ethical classrooms, the present section considers *where and under what conditions* such learning may occur.

Education in the AI era cannot be viewed in isolation from global governance frameworks, economic incentives, and institutional transformations. These macro-dimensions determine whether AI will reproduce hierarchies of access or advance the democratisation of knowledge.

5.1 International Policy and Ethical Frameworks

Global organisations have become increasingly vocal about the promises and risks of AI in education. The **UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence** (2021) established a landmark framework urging member states to prioritise transparency, inclusivity, and human-centred values in AI adoption. More recently, at the **2025 UNESCO Conference on the Ethics of AI in Education** (Bangkok), policymakers highlighted the urgent need to design *public or cooperative AI systems* to counterbalance the monopolistic tendencies of private corporations. These calls resonate with **Pasquinelli's (2023)** reminder that AI is not a neutral innovation but a socio-technical artefact rooted in labour, power, and extractive histories.

Parallel to UNESCO's efforts, the **OECD** has focused on systemic challenges such as declining literacy levels, digital divides, and widening inequities among learners.

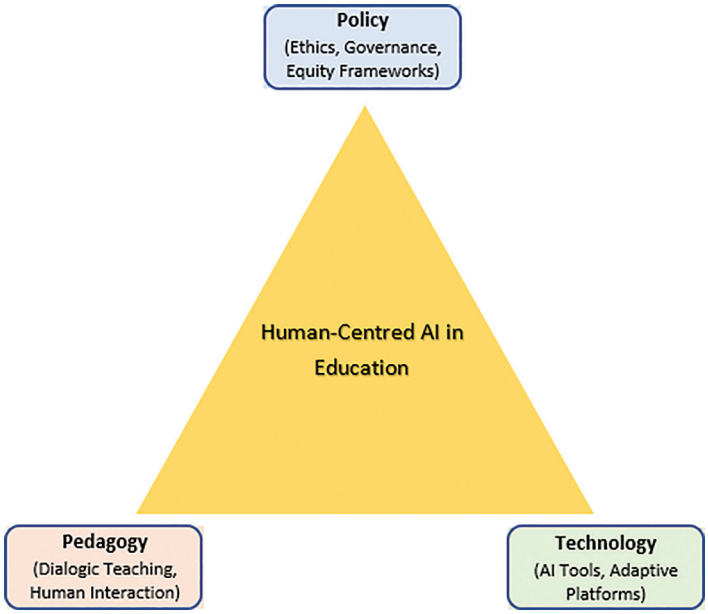


Figure 3 – Policy-Technology-Pedagogy Triangle

***Source**: Authors, 2025*

The Policy-Technology-Pedagogy triangle: A framework for balancing systemic governance, technological innovation, and human-centred pedagogy in AI" enabled education.

Note. *The triangle illustrates how ethical AI in education emerges at the intersection of policy governance, technological design, and pedagogical practice.*

The *OECD Education 2030 Framework* stresses that AI must be harnessed not only to improve efficiency but also to nurture critical thinking, creativity, and socio-emotional skills, competencies essential for Gen Z and Gen Alpha learners. This aligns with Part I's analysis, which identified literacy decline and the erosion of attention spans as barriers to meaningful learning in the digital age.

The **World Economic Forum (WEF)** further contributes by positioning AI within the broader shift toward the *Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Its reports (2022-2025) underscore AI's potential to expand access, automate routine tasks, and address teacher shortages, while also warning of risks related to workforce displacement, algorithmic bias, and over-reliance on automated systems. Collectively, these global institutions converge on the recognition that AI in education must balance innovation with safeguards that preserve equity and human dignity.

As shown in **Figure 3**, these intersecting frameworks form a triangulated structure of *policy*, *technology*, and *pedagogy* whose equilibrium determines the direction of AI's educational impact.

This model situates educational innovation within a balanced ecosystem: policies establish the ethical ground, technologies provide adaptive tools, and pedagogies ensure human connection. Any imbalance risks either technocratic automation or rhetorical idealism detached from practical governance.

5.2 Systemic Restructuring of Higher Education

Alongside these policy frameworks, systemic transformations in higher education are reshaping how AI is integrated into learning environments. Traditional "brick universities" increasingly compete with digital-first institutions such as **Italy's Multiversity S.p.A.**, which combines accredited online universities with coding academies and IT certification providers. These organisations present a flexible, on-demand model of education that leverages AI to automate administrative processes, deliver personalised pathways, and expand international reach.

While such models demonstrate the scalability and inclusivity potential of AI-driven systems, they also raise pressing questions: Will efficiency-driven "multiversities" marginalise dialogic forms of pedagogy? Can human interaction be preserved in an educational marketplace increasingly governed by corporate logics? These systemic tensions illustrate the dual potential of AI: to democratise education or to accelerate its commodification.

The implications are especially significant for regions seeking to widen access to tertiary education without eroding its civic mission. The challenge is not only technological but institutional: ensuring that AI supports academic integrity, intellectual autonomy, and ethical citizenship.

5.3 Technological Advances and Scholarly Debate

At the technological level, the integration of generative AI tools (ranging from adaptive platforms and virtual tutors to conversational agents) has begun to transform educational practice. Scholars such as **Gunkel (2012)** and **Crawford (2024)** caution that AI adoption is inseparable from ethical dilemmas, including surveillance, bias, and the colonialist extraction of data from the Global South. Conversely, education specialists highlight the transformative possibilities of AI when thoughtfully deployed: personalisation of learning (**Arora, 2021**), dialogic engagement through conversational AI, and multimodal bilingual learning in CLIL+IA contexts (**Cattoni, 2021**).

Recent contributions (**Benanti & Maffettone, 2024; Treré & Bonini, 2024**) stress that the educational future will depend on whether policymakers and institutions adopt AI as a *substitute for* or a *complement to* human interaction. The former risks entrenching transmissive models of education, while the latter opens the possibility of reanimating dialogic traditions.

5.4 Synthesis: Towards Human-Centred Systems

Taken together, these frameworks suggest that the future of AI in education hinges as much on **systemic and policy choices** as on technological innovation. UNESCO, OECD, and WEF converge on the principle of *human-centred learning*, yet the pathways to achieve it remain contested. Higher-education institutions are experimenting with radically different models (from corporate-led multiversities to grassroots cooperative platforms) each testing the balance between innovation and integrity.

The synthesis points to a crucial insight: technology is never neutral. It embodies power relations, cultural assumptions, and ethical orientations. The task ahead is not to resist AI but to humanise it, embedding its use within pedagogies that prioritise dialogue, empathy, and critical reflection. Only through such integrative thinking can education fulfil its dual mission: fostering individual flourishing and sustaining democratic societies.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of policy frameworks, institutional restructuring, and emerging technologies reveals that the adoption of artificial intelligence in education is not a purely technical transition but a cultural, ethical, and systemic transformation. Across the evidence reviewed, three interdependent domains (**systemic**, **policy**, and **technological**) shape how AI can either erode or enrich

human-centred learning. The findings demonstrate a complex interplay between global governance and local pedagogy, between algorithmic automation and dialogic imagination.

6.1 Systemic Findings: Institutional Evolution and Educational Ecology

At the systemic level, AI integration is transforming the architecture of higher education. The case of **Italy's Multiversity S.p.A.**, discussed earlier, provides a striking illustration of this new institutional ecology. By merging accredited online universities with coding academies and IT certification providers, Multiversity demonstrates how AI can streamline administration, personalise learning, and expand transnational access. Yet this efficiency carries a paradox: as digital-first universities gain market dominance, the risk of commodifying education increases.

The challenge lies in **sustaining dialogue and ethics in an automated environment**. While digital systems can reduce bureaucratic inefficiency, they may also dilute the intangible dimensions of learning: mentorship, intellectual risk-taking, and emotional resonance.

The findings suggest that sustainable institutional models must preserve the *human interface* even as they leverage algorithmic assistance. In this sense, the real question is not whether AI will replace the university, but whether universities can reimagine themselves as *dialogic ecosystems* that cultivate both technological literacy and ethical imagination.

This transformation echoes what **OECD (2023)** calls a shift toward *learning ecosystems*, where collaboration among educators, learners, and digital systems replaces rigid hierarchies. Human-centred AI thus becomes a form of *systemic ethics*: a mode of governance that aligns technological innovation with democratic participation and civic accountability.

6.2 Policy Findings: Ethical Governance and Global Convergence

At the policy level, a clear convergence emerges across international frameworks: **UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)**, **OECD's Education 2030**, and **WEF's Education 4.0** (2023) initiatives. All three stress the need to balance innovation with equity, and automation with autonomy.

UNESCO's ethical guidelines emphasise *human oversight, inclusivity, transparency, and accountability* as conditions for responsible AI governance. They further encourage states to promote *public-interest AI* as a counterweight to private monopolies. Similarly, the **OECD** framework foregrounds *well-being, creativity, and emotional intelligence* as the "new core competencies" essential for thriving in the digital century.

The **World Economic Forum (2025)** adds a complementary economic perspective, envisioning AI as a catalyst for upskilling and social mobility. However, it also warns that technological adoption without cultural adaptation risks amplifying inequalities. Together, these frameworks establish a **shared normative horizon**: the belief that technology should serve the development of the whole person, not merely the optimisation of performance.

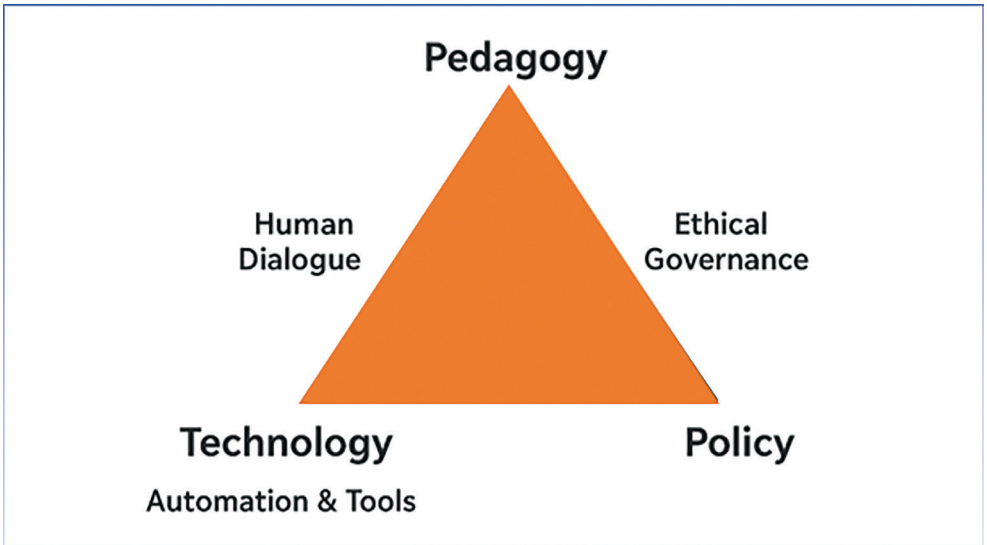


Figure 4 – Strategic Pathways for Human-Centred AI Integration in Education

***Source**: Authors, 2025*

Note. *The triangular model represents the interdependence of Pedagogy, Technology, and Policy in the sustainable integration of artificial intelligence within education systems. Each vertex symbolises a key domain — Pedagogy (human dialogue), Technology (automation and tools), and Policy (ethical governance) — which must remain in equilibrium to achieve truly human-centred AI implementation.*

From the perspective of this study, such convergence provides an unprecedented opportunity for cross-national collaboration in educational ethics. Yet it also reveals a persistent gap between policy discourse and institutional reality. Policies often proclaim *human-centred values*, but their implementation is constrained by market logic, underfunding, and digital asymmetries between the Global North and South.

To address this gap, the study identifies three actionable priorities:

Embedding ethical design in AI tools, ensuring transparency in data use and algorithmic decision-making.

Promoting open-access AI models that reduce dependency on corporate software and allow localised pedagogical adaptation.

Investing in teacher training and digital ethics education, recognising educators as key interpreters of AI rather than passive adopters.

Such initiatives would translate ethical principles into operational practice, anchoring the moral vision of Part I within the institutional realities of Part II.

The interdependence between these priorities is conceptualised in Figure 4, which situates pedagogy, technology, and policy as mutually reinforcing forces in the pursuit of human-centred AI.

As shown in Figure 4, effective AI integration in education depends on balancing the pedagogical, technological, and policy dimensions. If any one of these dominates — technological innovation without ethics, policy without pedagogy, or pedagogy without digital literacy — the system risks imbalance. The model underscores that *dialogue*, *governance*, and *digital design* must evolve together, ensuring that human agency remains at the heart of educational transformation.

6.3 Technological Findings: Generative AI and Cognitive Transformation

Technological innovation in generative AI has revolutionised not only the methods of teaching but also the ontology of learning itself. The findings show that **AI is transforming cognition from linear acquisition to networked co-creation**. Adaptive platforms, natural language interfaces, and multimodal tools allow learners to interact with knowledge as living dialogue rather than static content.

This transformation holds promise for **CLIL+IA** pedagogy, where AI facilitates multilingual comprehension and fosters intercultural empathy. Through intelligent feedback and contextual adaptation, students learn not

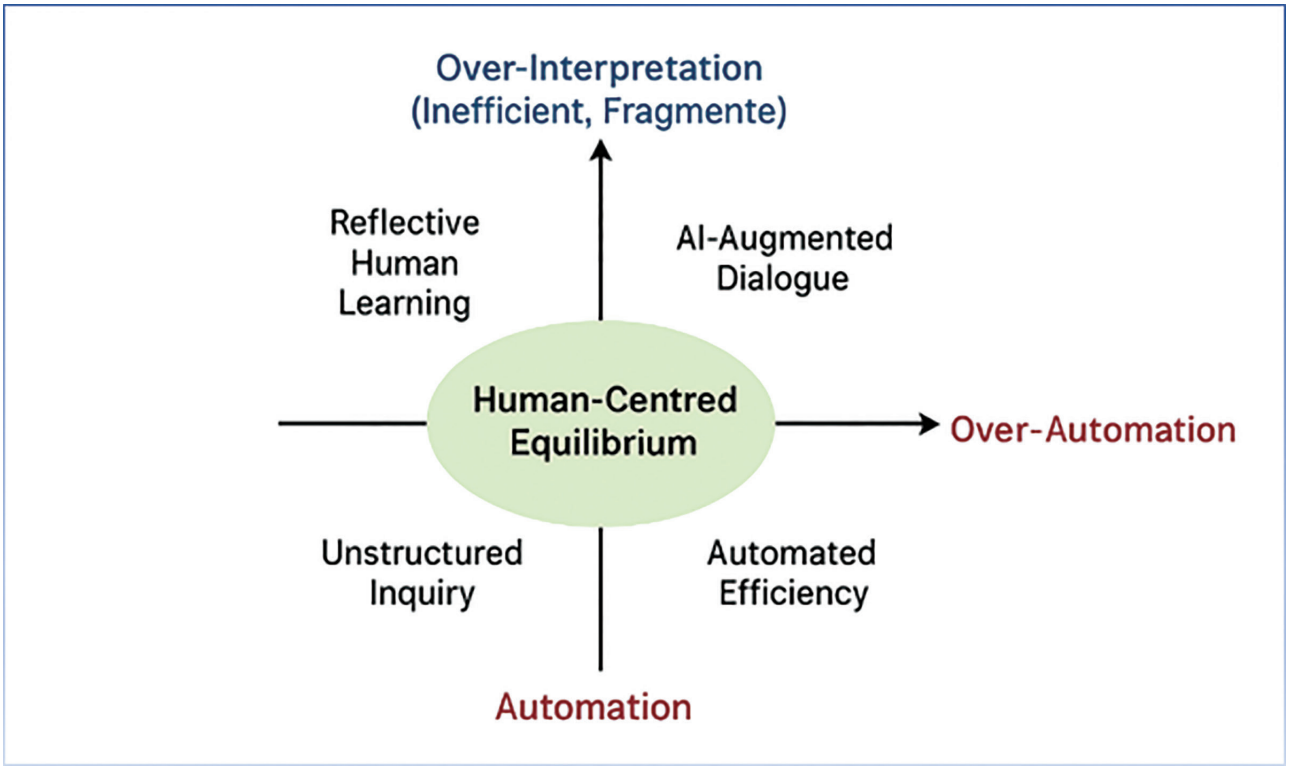


Figure 5: *Equilibrium Model of Automation and Interpretation in AI-Mediated Learning.*

***Source**: Authors (2025).*

Note. *This model visualises the dynamic balance between automation (data-driven efficiency, content generation) and interpretation (dialogic reflection, meaning-making). The central zone — Human-Centred Equilibrium — represents the optimal space where AI complements rather than replaces human cognition.*

only *through* language but *about* language, understanding how meaning evolves across cultures and media. The affordances of AI can thus extend Dewey's and Freire's dialogic principles into multimodal, cross-linguistic environments.

Yet this technological shift is not without risk. Scholars such as **Crawford (2024)** and **Gunkel (2012)** warn that algorithmic systems, if left unregulated, can replicate societal biases and reinforce epistemic inequality. In data-driven education, students' identities risk being reduced to quantifiable patterns, and their creativity channelled into predictive models.

The research findings suggest that meaningful innovation requires a **hybrid pedagogy**, one that blends algorithmic precision with human improvisation. When used dialogically, AI can function as a *cognitive tool-partner*, enabling learners to visualise complexity, simulate outcomes, and cultivate metacognition. However, this partnership demands critical literacy: learners must understand *how* AI operates to resist passive dependence on its outputs.

This balance between algorithmic precision and human interpretation is represented schematically in Figure 5.

As depicted in Figure 5, the transformative potential of AI in education depends on maintaining an equilibrium between automation and interpretation. Over-automation leads to mechanistic learning, while over-interpretation without digital augmentation risks fragmentation and inefficiency. The human-centred equilibrium, therefore, symbolises a pedagogical partnership between machine precision and human creativity, fostering reflective and adaptive learning environments.

6.4 Integrative Discussion: AI as Mirror, Lamp, and Bridge

The triadic findings underscore the paradox articulated throughout this study: **AI mirrors existing educational shortcomings (Albarras, 2024) and illuminates new creative possibilities. It also bridges the human-machine divide** through dialogue and ethical imagination.

At the systemic level, the *mirror* reflects institutional inertia and the commodification of learning. At the policy level, the *lamp* illuminates shared aspirations for fairness and transparency. At the technological level, the *bridge* connects cognition and creativity through hybrid interaction.

Taken together, these dimensions affirm the central thesis of this article: that the value of AI in education will ultimately be measured not by its computational sophistication, but by its contribution to the moral and relational renewal of learning.

The challenge before educators and policymakers is to sustain the *dialogic condition* (the human capacity to listen, question, and co-create meaning), in a world increasingly mediated by 'intelligent' machines. As AI becomes more capable of mimicking knowledge, education must become more capable of cultivating wisdom.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The reflections presented in this article affirm that the question of *artificial intelligence in education* cannot be separated from the question of *what it means to be human in an age of intelligent machines*. Across both parts of the study (the philosophical-pedagogical and the systemic-policy dimensions) the findings converge on a central proposition: **AI does not replace the human condition of learning; it redefines its parameters.**

The evidence drawn from historical, ethical, and institutional analyses underscores that every technological leap in education revives the same moral challenge first articulated by Enlightenment humanism: how to harmonise the advancement of knowledge with the cultivation of wisdom. In this sense, AI becomes not a rupture but a mirror: it reflects our enduring struggle to reconcile efficiency with empathy, information with imagination, and automation with interpretation.

Human-centred education, as revisited in this work, reaffirms that learning is a relational, ethical, and dialogic act. Machines can imitate understanding, but they cannot *care*, *listen*, or *wonder*. The irreplaceable human capacities for empathy, creativity, and moral judgment are what transform knowledge into wisdom. When AI is designed and implemented within pedagogies that foster these capacities, it serves not as a substitute but as a *catalyst* for deeper human development.

Concrete implementation of principles requires educators and policymakers to move from abstract ethics to concrete action. Two immediate priorities stand out: first, mandating professional development programs that train educators both in AI literacy and in digital ethics; second, establishing cross-sector "AI-in-Education Interdisciplinary Councils" at national and local levels that explicitly align technological innovation with pedagogical and social goals. These steps can ensure that human-centred values are not peripheral aspirations but structural imperatives guiding every phase of AI integration.

At the **systemic level**, this study demonstrates that the sustainability of AI in education depends on whether institutions and governments can embed *ethical governance* within their technological architectures. As UNESCO (2021), OECD (2023), and WEF (2025) consistently emphasise, policy must guide innovation rather than follow it. The creation of transparent,

inclusive, and equitable digital ecosystems is essential to ensure that access to AI-enhanced learning becomes a public good rather than a private commodity.

At the **pedagogical level**, the CLIL+IA framework developed in Part I offers a model for integrating language, culture, and cognition through AI mediation. It demonstrates that multimodal and multilingual learning environments can use technology to *expand* rather than *dilute* human dialogue. The convergence of bilingual pedagogy and digital interactivity creates conditions for intercultural empathy, which may become one of the most crucial literacies for Gen Z and Gen Alpha.

At the **technological level**, the equilibrium model proposed in Figure 5 encapsulates the future challenge: maintaining balance between automation and interpretation. Over-automation risks mechanising education and eroding critical agency; over-interpretation without technological support risks inefficiency and elitism. The middle ground — *human-centred equilibrium* — is the space of innovation, creativity, and ethics.

In envisioning the **future of human-centred AI**, several directions emerge. First, the development of *AI literacy curricula* should become a cornerstone of educational reform, enabling students to understand not only how to use AI but also how AI shapes cognition, communication, and society. Second, *teacher education* must evolve to include digital ethics, emotional intelligence, and algorithmic awareness, preparing educators as interpreters and curators of technological mediation. Third, *interdisciplinary research* should bridge computer science, cognitive psychology, and the humanities to ensure that AI systems are evaluated not solely on performance metrics but on their contribution to human flourishing.

The future of education will depend not on whether we adopt AI but on how we inhabit it: whether we use it as an extension of our ethical imagination or as a tool of intellectual outsourcing. The *mirror and lamp* metaphor that threads through this article captures this choice vividly: AI mirrors our educational systems, revealing both their brilliance and their blind spots, but it can also act as a lamp, illuminating paths toward renewed dialogue, inclusion, and moral creativity.

Ultimately, the enduring lesson is that **education endures as the most human of all technologies**. Its success in the AI age will be measured not by how efficiently knowledge is transmitted, but by how deeply understanding is shared. If guided by courage, empathy, and critical reflection, the partnership between human and artificial intelligence can rekindle the very essence of learning: the art of becoming more fully human.

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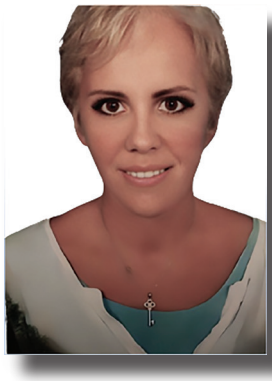
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The Psychology of Self-Deceit: Why We Lie to Ourselves

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ABSTRACT

Self-deceit is a psychological paradox in which individuals convince themselves of false beliefs despite contradictory evidence. While long debated, the mechanisms and purposes of self-deceit remain unsettled. Methods: This conceptual paper synthesizes experimental and theoretical literature, drawing on intentionalist and deflationary models, alongside empirical studies, to evaluate mechanisms and functions of self-deceit. Results: Findings suggest self-deceit operates as an unconscious process influenced by biases, emotions, and desires. A combined model better explains the paradox, supported by evidence from psychophysiological and cognitive load experiments. Three primary purposes are identified: enhancing deception toward others, preserving self-esteem, and serving as a defensive mechanism for self-preservation. Discussion: By merging intentionalist and deflationary perspectives, this analysis highlights the adaptive role of self-deceit in reducing cognitive load, maintaining psychological well-being, and facilitating social functioning. Conclusions: Self-deceit is best understood as a non-intentional psychological process in which conflicting beliefs are motivated by unconscious desires, simultaneously supporting self-validation, interpersonal deception, and ego protection. Understanding its mechanisms and purposes provides insights into human cognition, emotion, and behaviour.

Keywords: Cognitive Load, Defence Mechanisms, Intentionalist Approach, Self-Deceit, Self-Esteem, Unconscious Processes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Self-deceit occurs when an individual convinces themselves of a false belief despite evidence supporting the truth. An experiment by Gur and Sackeim (1979) attempted to uncover a more nuanced understanding of this concept. When asked to identify whether a recording was their own voice or that of a stranger, participants incorrectly stated that a recording was not their voice despite having a higher psychophysiological reaction that indicated recognition. These findings suggest that participants simultaneously held two contradictory beliefs: they unconsciously recognized their voice, yet claimed the opposite. This paradox has sparked a long-standing debate regarding self-deceit, and its purpose is continually being researched and understood (Chance & Norton, 2015). Consequently, studying self-deceit is crucial, as it may reveal how humans navigate internal conflicts and decisions. By examining its functions and processes, psychologists can better understand its connection to human emotions and behaviours. Numerous perspectives can be used to understand why we lie to ourselves and whether there is a benefit to this seemingly counterintuitive thinking (Warren, 2014).

This study aims to answer the question: What is self-deceit? Beyond that, it will provide a nuanced understanding of two topics: the intent and mechanisms behind self-deceit and the purpose of its existence. Both points aid in providing nuanced answers to this question. This essay describes why self-deceit is an unconscious process motivated by internal states and discusses the possible benefits of lying to oneself.

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2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD

This article adopts a conceptual synthesis approach rather than an empirical design. The objective is to critically examine the phenomenon of self-deceit by integrating insights from philosophy and psychology to clarify both its mechanisms and its purposes.

To achieve this, the analysis draws upon two primary theoretical traditions: the intentionalist framework, which emphasizes the paradox of consciously deceiving oneself, and the deflationary framework, which treats self-deceit as a motivated but non-intentional cognitive process. These perspectives were selected because they represent the dominant approaches to understanding self-deceit and frame the long-standing debate within both philosophical and psychological literature.

The sources reviewed include seminal philosophical arguments, peer-reviewed psychological studies, and empirical experiments that illuminate cognitive and affective mechanisms (e.g., memory disruption, psychophysiological measures, and cognitive load). Selection of materials was guided by their scholarly influence, citation within the field, and relevance to the questions of "how" and "why" self-deceit occurs.

The analytic strategy involved thematic categorization of the literature into two dimensions: (1) the mechanisms underlying self-deceit, and (2) the purposes it serves for individuals and social interactions. By comparing and contrasting intentionalist and deflationary perspectives with supporting psychological evidence, the article develops a synthesized model that highlights the adaptive and protective roles of self-deceit.

This methodological orientation allows for a nuanced conceptual contribution: rather than presenting new data, it refines theoretical understanding, clarifies debates, and points toward directions for future empirical research.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Findings on Mechanisms of Self-Deceit

Deceit generally involves one party that is aware of the truth and a second party that has been provided with false information (Makowski et al., 2024). In contrast, self-deceit implies that an individual is both the deceiver and the deceived, creating a paradox. The definition of self-deceit as a "false belief held simultaneously with a contrasting unconscious true belief" (Chance & Norton, 2015) is highly debated by psychologists and philosophers. However, this contradiction can be explained by defining self-deceit as a conflict between unconscious and conscious beliefs motivated by biases and emotional reasoning. Two significant psychological models must be considered to understand this contradiction: the intentionalist and deflationary(non-intentionalist) approaches (Chance & Norton, 2015). While both approaches attempt to address the paradox of conflicting perceptions, it is the combination of the two theories that defines self-deceit.

The intentionalist approach asserts that self-deceit is purposeful and acknowledges its paradoxical nature. In order to account for this contradiction, some theorists believe the mind is partitioned, meaning that two or more sections of the mind can hold two conflicting notions simultaneously (Mele, 2018). This explains how an individual can have opposing beliefs (Mele, 2018). This theory is further supported by a study which observed that self-deceit was more cognitively taxing, hypothesized to be a result of the state of conflict within one's mind when deceiving oneself (Li & Liu, 2024); however, this theory has been critiqued because it suggests that one section of the mind deceives another, while most minds are not fragmented (Mele, 2018). Alternatively, American philosopher Robert Audi (1982) claims that self-deceit is a state in which someone holds an opposing unconscious belief that is being deliberately ignored in favour of a false one. Psychologists Newman and Erber (2002) provide the example of a t Soldier who recognizes the immorality of his actions; to deceive himself into believing he is not as involved in these actions; he must hide the truth and evidence supporting unconsciously to maintain this misbelief. However, this model still leads to paradox; specifically, Mele (2018) notes that it does not address what he calls the dynamic paradox: If a person knows the truth, how can they intentionally deceive themselves into believing the opposite? With the example of the Nazi soldier, it seems implausible that he could intentionally deceive himself into believing he was not involved in the actions of Nazi Germany while simultaneously knowing the truth of his clear involvement in such activities. When an individual is aware of their deception, it becomes ineffective; therefore, it is irrational for one person to effectively convince themselves of a false notion if they are both the deceiver and the deceived (Winchell, 2015).

On the other end of this spectrum is the deflationary approach, which suggests that self-deceit is more similar to falsely or mistakenly believing something rather than holding two contradictory beliefs (Mele, 2001). By simplifying the nature of self-deceit, non-intentionalists avoid the paradox altogether. Instead, Mele (2001) argues that this inaccurate perception is neither intentional nor accidental but motivated by desire. Mele's definition is comparable to wishful thinking or motivated reasoning, as it lacks the conflict and tension that exists in the intentionalist viewpoint (Chance & Norton, 2015). However, philosophers such as Audi (1982) and Bermúdez (2000) critique Mele's perspective, arguing that a crucial

aspect of deception is the recognition of evidence that opposes their beliefs. For example, a person who denies that their partner is cheating despite evidence supporting the contrary often feels high stress and tension because of this conflicting evidence. Even when they maintain the belief that their partner remains loyal, suspicions may still manifest, even if subconsciously. Overall, while the deflationary approach accounts for the numerous paradoxes of self-deception, it lacks the tension characteristic of those experiencing self-deceit. These limitations suggest that a more comprehensive framework is needed to address these paradoxes.

Neither the intentionalist nor the deflationary approach alone is sufficient to explain the complexity of self-deceit. This concept is better understood as a combination of the two models. This definition of self-deceit involves contradictory beliefs; however, the process is not intentional but is driven by desires, emotions, and unconscious biases. By maintaining that a person can hold two opposing viewpoints, one conscious and one unconscious, this definition accounts for the conflict present in self-deceit and highlights that an individual is at least somewhat aware of evidence opposing their conscious beliefs. Moreover, empirical evidence further suggests that self-deceit arises unconsciously rather than through intent. Through an experiment comparing the cognitive loads of self-deceptive and non-deceptive behaviour, psychologists found that the cognitive load for the self-deceptive group was lower (Jian et al., 2019). Further experiments revealed that this reduction in cognitive load was connected to Involuntary Conscious Memory (ICM), which involves the recollection of "unintentional and spontaneous" (Jian et al., 2019, para. 6) memories or experiences. Essentially, ICM refers to the evocation of memories in the mind without conscious effort. Studies have highlighted that the ICM involuntarily disrupts the memories of participants (Jian et al., 2019). These findings highlight that self-deceit is not a result of intention but of memory disruption in the ICM to reduce cognitive load. Self-deceit is non-intentional, but rather one's desires and emotions act similarly in motivating the act of deception.

Because there is no intent to deceive, this definition effectively addresses the dynamic paradox. Ultimately, this definition of self-deceit most effectively explains the mechanisms underlying this concept.

3.2 Findings on Purposes of Self-Deceit

Deception is commonly observed in humans for social and relational purposes, such as avoiding conflict with others and increasing trust through false statements (Makowski et al., 2024). Additionally, it is crucial to understand the purpose of self-deceit to better understand the human mind. However, while numerous experiments study the process of self-deceit, the question of why it occurs remains unanswered. Although lying to others is seen as a daily occurrence that plays a crucial role in social settings (Li & Liu, 2024), lying to oneself may seem counterintuitive, as it creates false narratives that can harms individuals.

However, by examining multiple psychological perspectives, self-deceit can be defined in terms of three functions: deceiving others, self-validation, and serving as a protective mechanism.

A widespread explanation for self-deceit is that it helps deceive others more effectively (Chance & Norton, 2015). To ensure that one is not giving away verbal cues or nervous signals, a liar deceives themselves into believing the lie that they are telling (von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). Recent studies have emphasized the relationship between self-deceit and other-deceit. In an experiment, students were made to either lie to their teacher (who had a higher status than the participant) or lie to a fellow student (who had an equal status) (Jian et al., 2019). Self-deceit was observed more frequently in participants who lied to someone of higher status (Jian et al., 2019), which can be explained by the fact that lying to someone of high status often leads to more severe repercussions. The participants knew that if they were caught, they would be reprimanded, so by deceiving themselves, they could better deceive their teachers without being exposed. Alternate theories regarding self-deceit do not involve deceiving others but rather focus on how it validates oneself. Yang and colleagues (2024) describe self-deception as a response to a "comparative gap," finding it more common during upward social comparisons—such as when participants believed they performed worse in a game than others. These individuals also experienced stronger negative emotions and lower self-esteem, suggesting that self-deceit serves a self-preservative function (Yang et al., 2024).

A commonly proposed function of self-deceit is its role in preserving one's self-esteem. For example, participants who are provided with an answer sheet during tests may deceive themselves into believing that their performance on the test is a result of high intelligence, rather than recognizing the answer key as an advantage (Chance et al., 2011). By overestimating their own intelligence, self-deceit supports a person's positive view of themselves. Therefore, self-deceit validates an inflated sense of intelligence, even if it is only a short-term benefit (Chance et al., 2011). This experiment highlights the social and cognitive aspects of self-deceit and how deceiving oneself can benefit self-esteem. Additionally, self-deceit could benefit an individual's self-confidence in

public settings. Speaker anxiety has become a significant concern among researchers and professionals, which leads to a negative impact on the communication process (Bynum, 2025). To combat speaker anxiety, Bynum (2025) emphasizes prioritizing audience engagement over one's own internal negative thoughts. This effect could be described by self-deceit's role in the preservation of self-esteem: it allows speakers to better mask their anxiety and convince themselves of the audience's receptiveness to their words. In this sense, by maintaining one's self-esteem, self-deceit helps individuals speak more effectively and improves their self-assurance.

Finally, beyond inner validation, self-deceit can act as a defence mechanism in humans. Psychologist Goldeman (1985) examined a psychoanalytic perspective and how selectively ignoring certain facts and memories can act as a means of self-preservation. Sigmund Freud's ego defence mechanisms discuss the concept of denial, which is the refusal to believe that something is true (Warren, 2014). For example, people who claim to have a healthy lifestyle despite smoking regularly practice denial to feel less guilt about their habits. Another common mechanism is rationalization, which is used to justify one's thoughts and beliefs to maintain a positive view of oneself (Warren, 2014). These strategies are designed to protect the ego, the core rational sense of self (Warren, 2014). The function of self-deceit is like that of a defence mechanism. By keeping certain thoughts out of our conscious awareness, this process reduces stress and anxiety, protects self-esteem, and maintains social harmony (Goleman, 1985). While Freud emphasized defence mechanisms like denial and rationalization, today's individuals turn to digital escapism. Escapism, defined as the avoidance of the real world in favour of a virtual world, shields individuals from stressful and difficult moments in life, to the point that some "forget the physical world (Subudhi et al., 2020, p. 38)." The positive influence of self-deceit is short-term; these mechansims of defense can regulate an individual's mental health, subjective well-being, and interpersonal relationship (Liu et al., 2025). Overall, the psychoanalytic perspective highlights the short-term benefits of self-deceit in protecting one's sense of self.

Together, these explanations suggest that self-deceit is not an illogical flaw in human cognition but a form of adaptation, preservation, and protection. First, self-deceit evolved to more convincingly deceive others. The fact that self-deception is more likely when lying to those of a higher status emphasizes this s of self-deceit. Second, a more common purpose of self-deceit in our everyday lives is to preserve a positive view of oneself. The final explanation of the role of self-deceit answers why humans may repress certain memories or favour a belief over another; self-deceit is a protective mechanism that preserves the human ego. Therefore, self-deceit exists to benefit three purposes: lying to others, maintaining self-esteem, and protecting humans from difficult facts and memories.

4. DISCUSSION

This conceptual analysis demonstrates that self-deceit cannot be adequately explained by either intentionalist or deflationary accounts in isolation. Instead, the evidence supports a hybrid perspective, one that acknowledges unconscious bias, affective drivers, and selective memory as central to the phenomenon. Such a synthesis helps reconcile the paradox that individuals both recognize and deny contradictory evidence without the need for fully partitioned minds or wholly accidental misbeliefs.

From a broader psychological standpoint, the findings align with research on cognitive dissonance and motivated reasoning, which similarly illustrate how humans maintain coherence between beliefs and desires, even in the face of counter-evidence. Self-deceit can therefore be interpreted as one adaptive strategy within a larger repertoire of defensive cognitive processes, alongside rationalization and denial. Importantly, the reviewed evidence suggests that self-deceit reduces cognitive load, highlighting its potential role in conserving mental resources when individuals face threatening or disconfirming information.

The analysis also suggests that the purposes of self-deceit—to enhance deception of others, to validate the self, and to protect against psychological harm—reflect both social and intrapsychic functions. Socially, self-deceit increases the plausibility of lies by minimizing behavioural cues of insincerity. Intrapersonally, it preserves self-esteem and shields individuals from destabilizing realities, thereby promoting short-term resilience. However, these functions may come at a long-term cost if self-deceit prevents individuals from addressing maladaptive behaviours, interpersonal conflicts, or ethical lapses.

Conceptually, the integration of intentionalist and deflationary models provides a more complete explanation of self-deceit, but it also raises new questions. How can unconscious motivational processes be empirically distinguished from deliberate acts of denial? To what extent does self-deceit overlap with culturally shaped narratives of self-presentation or identity management? Future empirical studies might address these gaps by combining neurocognitive measures of memory suppression with behavioural paradigms of impression management, offering a more rigorous test of the boundaries of self-deceit.

Overall, this discussion situates self-deceit within the larger literature on human cognition and behaviour.

Rather than a paradoxical flaw in reasoning, self-deceit emerges as a flexible adaptation with both protective and deceptive functions. By reframing it in this way, the article underscores its relevance not only to philosophy and psychology but also to ethics, education, and clinical practice, where understanding the dynamics of self-deception may inform interventions that promote self-awareness and healthier decision-making.

4.1 Limitations and Future Directions

As a conceptual synthesis, this article does not present original empirical data. Its analysis is therefore limited to the scope of existing philosophical debates and psychological studies available in the literature. While this approach provides theoretical clarity, it cannot determine the prevalence, intensity, or variability of self-deceit across cultures, age groups, or social contexts. Another limitation is the reliance on classic psychological experiments which, though foundational, may not capture the full complexity of human cognition in contemporary settings. For example, while cognitive load studies observe that self-deceit reduces mental effort, these experiments are set in controlled environments that do not reflect natural experiences. Additionally, due to its theoretical nature, Freud's theory of defence mechanisms is limited in terms of its benefit to contemporary research.

Future research could address these gaps in several ways. First, **empirical studies** that integrate neurocognitive measures (e.g., brain imaging of memory suppression) with **behavioural paradigms** (e.g., impression management or lying tasks) would help distinguish unconscious motivational processes from deliberate acts of denial. Second, **cross-cultural investigations** could explore how cultural norms and moral frameworks shape the forms and functions of self-deceit. Finally, **applied studies** might examine the implications of self-deceit in domains such as education, mental health, and ethics, particularly in interventions designed to foster self-awareness, resilience, and healthier decision-making.

By acknowledging these limitations and outlining directions for future work, this article positions self-deceit not only as a philosophical puzzle but also as a rich avenue for interdisciplinary exploration in psychology, neuroscience, and the humanities.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this analysis sought to define self-deceit by addressing a paradox, presenting its mechanisms, and explaining the purpose of this concept. Self-deceit can be defined as simultaneously having an unconscious and conscious belief that is driven by an individual's affective drivers and internal biases; experimental evidence emphasizes the simultaneous occurrence of conscious and unconscious beliefs (Gur and Sackeim, 1979). While this process occurs unintentionally, factors like human emotion and desire often act in an intentional way, leading to the development of certain beliefs over others. These motivational forces also result in the selective ignorance of facts or memories.

Characterizing self-deceit as contradicting beliefs motivated by emotions and desire, this paper argues for a synthesis of the popular intentionalist and Deflationary approaches. This integrated perspective of both models offers a novel argument of self-deceit that advances beyond existing debates, addressing key conflicts and paradoxes in current literature. As a result, this definition sets the stage for a deeper examination of the purposes and implications of self-deceit.

This paper analyzed three different purposes of self-deceit to gain a full understanding of its existence in humans. The most common theory as to why self-deceit evolved in humans is that it aids in better deceiving others. Other instances of self-deception that do not involve deceiving others present the idea of maintaining a positive view of oneself by overlooking certain facts and memories. Through a psychodynamic lens, it can be seen as a defence mechanism, protecting an individual's mind by reducing their stress and anxiety, as self-deceit can repress harmful memories. Understanding self-deceit not only benefits psychologists but also has implications for daily behaviour and decision-making, providing insight into how humans navigate conflicting beliefs and respond to unwanted truths. To effectively understand the human mind, it is crucial to recognize how self-deception shapes human thoughts, beliefs, and choices.

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During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) did not employ any of the Generative AI and/or AI-Assisted technologies for Language refinement, drafting background section and did not perform any Task of the technology.

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Gendered Shadows: Media Representations of Masculinity, Trauma, and the Male Psyche behind Violence in Contemporary Television

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Violence that transcends gendered boundaries remains a persistent and complex global issue, often rooted in intersecting psychological, cultural, and historical dynamics. This study explores the relationship between mental health and violent behaviour, particularly focusing on how men's emotional and psychological vulnerabilities contribute to acts of violence against both women and other men. **Methods:** Using qualitative textual analysis of six select episodes, the study critically examines select male characters from three widely known television series: *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Alienist*, and *You*. These case studies were chosen for their portrayal of male protagonists with evident emotional difficulties and maladaptive behaviours as represented in the narrative. The analysis was guided by Social Learning Theory, Attachment Theory, and Gender Role Theory, which together frame how masculinity and violence are constructed and carried on through media. **Results:** The analysis reveals recurring patterns of emotional repression, unresolved trauma, and narrative depictions of psychological instability in male characters, which manifest as aggression, control, and violence. In particular, *How I Met Your Mother* uses sarcasm and comedy to conceal emotional repression, *The Alienist* places aggressiveness inside historical and scientific reasoning, and *You* depicts idealized violence and compulsive control. These behaviours are often normalized within the narrative frameworks, thereby reinforcing socio-cultural norms that legitimize violence irrespective of gendered victimhood. **Discussion:** The findings suggest that men's violent behaviour is frequently symptomatic of unaddressed mental health issues. The paper argues for a multidimensional approach in preventing violence beyond gender by fostering emotional intelligence, mental health awareness, and psychological literacy among men. **Conclusion:** Addressing violence that transcends gender requires more than punitive responses, it demands cultivating men's emotional competence, mental health literacy, and psychological resilience. These elements are essential for promoting healthier relationships and dismantling cultural norms that uphold gender-neutral violence.

Keywords: Masculinity, Violence, Mental health, Emotional instability, Emotional quotient.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gender–based violence, especially male–perpetrated violence, is extremely embedded in social, cultural, and psychological contexts. In this paper, the psychological, social, mental and emotional factors that contribute to male aggression are explored through the lens of media narratives, particularly those seen in popular television series *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Alienist* and *You*. The analysis of these shows questions the standard gender stereotypes and draws attention to the intricate relationships between acts of violence and aggressive behaviour, mental health, and masculinity.

This study explores how masculine characters' destructive actions are portrayed as being influenced by emotional vulnerabilities and trauma-related traits using conceptual frameworks including Attachment Theory, Gender Role Theory, and Social Learning Theory.

The study makes the case that unresolved trauma, toxic masculinity, and social pressures are the major contributors to the continuation of male aggression. In order to promote healthy relationships, reduce and prevent violence against women and men, it is important that these emotional and psychological problems be addressed and taken care of. This study explores the ways in which various media representations in *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Alienist* and *You* either support or contradict these societal constructs of masculinity, especially its association with violence.

The study emphasizes how emotional instability, trauma, and social norms that stigmatize vulnerability are the root causes of male aggression. The study examines the negative impacts of these pressures through psychological paradigms and enables cultural and psychological treatments to deal with the underlying causes of male aggression.

This study analyzes how these television shows depict male characters and their violent actions by combining ideas and aspects from Social Learning Theory, Gender Role Theory, Attachment Theory, and other psychological frameworks. It is evident that addressing social structures and mental health is essential to minimize violence and encourage more positive manifestations of masculinity.

Finally, the study argues that violence is a behaviour influenced by various psychological, social and cultural factors rather than an innate characteristic that is within oneself. It argues that in order to end the cycle of male violence, attention must be paid to men's mental health, and cultural standards around masculinity must be re–examined.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A lot of scholarly research has addressed and dealt with the connection between media, violence, and masculinity. This study of literature examines how popular media portrays male psychological issues that are influenced by cultural ideas of masculinity. The study analyzes how masculine conduct, mental health, and social pressures are interconnected, particularly in the television shows *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Alienist* and *You*, using theories such as Social Learning Theory, Gender Role Theory, and Attachment Theory.

2.1 Masculinity and Societal Expectations

The idea of "Hegemonic Masculinity", which stresses violence, emotional control, and dominance, is introduced in R. W. Connell's *Masculinities* (2005). Connell says that men are under social pressure to display power and authority while repressing their vulnerability (Connell, 2005, p. 45). This is further discussed in Michael Kimmel's book, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (2013), which highlights how men who feel cut off from certain social norms may become frustrated and resort to violence. According to Kimmel, many men are experiencing an identity crisis as a result of social and economic changes, which might cause them to feel frustrated, unhappy, angry and alienated, and act violently (Kimmel, 2013, p. 67).

Beyond Bombshells (2015), written by Jeffrey A. Brown, explores the ways in which popular culture either supports or contradicts the standard gender norms in the media. Despite his emphasis on female characters, Brown's observations shed light on how the male characters in *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Alienist* and *You*, either adhere to or defy gender expectations. According to Brown, gender role depictions in the media have a significant impact on how men and women behave (Brown, 2015, p. 112).

2.2 Media Narratives and the Glorification of Violence

The way that power relations and gender in media represent violence as a manifestation of masculinity is covered in Sarah Projansky's *Gender, Power, and Violence in Popular Culture* (2017). This is crucial when examining characters such as Joe Goldberg in *You* (Projansky, 2017, p. 83). By normalizing violence, these media narratives frequently perpetuate toxic masculinity and the notion that male aggressiveness is a normal reaction to social demands and societal expectations.

The issue of psychological instability, which is inherent in Joe Goldberg's character, is explored in contemporary media, including gothic ideas, in Catherine Spooner's work *Contemporary Gothic* (2006). In order to let the audience, relate to and even romanticize violent characters, Spooner talks about how contemporary gothic stories frequently combine romance and horror (Spooner,

2006, p. 142). Similarly, Diane Negra's *What a Girl Wants? Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (2009), examines how romanticized media frequently obscures the negative sides of male conduct, as shown in *You*. According to Negra, postfeminist media frequently hides the destructive nature of male behaviour under the disguise of romantic love (Negra, 2009, p. 97).

Expanding on previous studies examining how violence is portrayed and romanticized in popular media, the study also incorporates concepts from media and cultural studies, which highlight how meaning is created and disseminated through representation, performance, and audience participation, in addition to psychological and gender-based frameworks. Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representation emphasizes how media narratives actively create reality through language, framing, and genre conventions rather than just reflecting it. In the same way, Butler's (1990) concept of performativity illustrates how narrative frameworks consistently enact masculinity through constant behaviours. Further evidence that audiences actively negotiate and interpret meaning rather than passively consuming it comes from studies on audience response (Fiske, 2011; Morley, 1992). By placing literary depictions of male trauma and violence into the larger networks of media production and reception, these perspectives enhance the current research.

Recent empirical researches have demonstrated the impact of media narratives on audience perceptions regarding masculinity and violence. According to studies on media cultivation, continuous exposure to violent or hypermasculine depictions can influence audience perceptions of gender norms and acceptable conduct (Morgan et al., 2019; Tukachinsky et al., 2021). Studies on parasocial relationships also show that audiences frequently empathize with ethically ambiguous or violent male protagonists, promoting identification with aggressiveness disguised as passion or protection (Stever, 2017; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Also, reception evaluations of romanticized antiheroes in streaming media show that irony, nostalgia and aesthetic framing might reduce the perceived severity of violent acts (Molina-Guzmán, 2020; Click et al., 2018). These results place the study in the larger empirical conversation on how modern audiences internalize and interpret mediated violence.

The theories guiding this study, Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1982), and Gender Role Theory (Connell, 1995), together offer a multidimensional framework for understanding male violence. While Attachment Theory reveals how disrupted emotional bonds create vulnerability and repression, Social Learning Theory explains how these repressed emotions can manifest through learned aggression and modeled behaviour. Connell's framework situates these psychological processes within broader cultural systems that valorize control and discourage vulnerability. Integrated together, these theories illuminate how trauma, learned behaviour, and social norms collectively construct a cycle where emotional suppression becomes both a cause and a consequence of violence.

2.3 Trauma, Mental Health and Violence

Violence caused by men are also significantly influenced by unresolved trauma. *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), by Judith Herman highlights how trauma can lead to violent behaviour, as illustrated by Willem Van Bergen in *The Alienist*, whose violent tendencies originate from abuse during childhood (Herman, 1992, p. 103). Bessel Van Der Kolk's book *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014), gives more details on the physical and mental effects of trauma, strengthening the notion that untreated trauma influences behaviours that are aggressive. According to van der Kolk, trauma affects physical health in addition to emotional stability, making it challenging for people to manage their emotions in a healthy way (Van Der Kolk, 2014, p. 225). These psychological realizations are essential to understand and interpret the behaviour of the male characters in *The Alienist* and *You.*

2.4 Gender and Power Dynamics

Feminist perspectives criticize the societal constraints that define masculinity and cause men to suppress their feelings. Bell Hooks criticizes how patriarchal structures drive men to act aggressively by severing their emotional bonds in his book *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (2004). Hooks claims that cycles of violence and emotional alienation are exacerbated by society's expectation that men be domineering and emotionless (Hooks, 2004, p. 56). In *How I Met Your Mother*, Barney Stinson's obvious and readily apparent masculinity conceals his emotional vulnerabilities, reflecting this idea (Hooks, 2004, p. 59).

This specific passage highlights and draws attention to the intricate connection between violent conduct and social identities including gender, ethnicity, and class. These overlapping identities have an impact on how people perceive oppression and authority, which in turn leads to violence in *The Alienist*. People's experiences of violence and prejudice can be intensified or changed by the concept of intersectionality, which emphasizes that social elements like race and class are not experienced by themselves but rather in combination. For example, individuals from marginalized racial or ethnic groups may

have structural obstacles in gaining access to resources or social mobility, which might raise their risk of being victims or offenders of violence (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 14). Additionally, the interaction of race and class frequently results in various types of violence, with those from lower socio–economic backgrounds more at risk of criminal activity as well as financial difficulty. This can be especially true in impoverished and underprivileged situations, where feeling helpless, hopeless, despair and a lack of options can lead to violent behaviour (Hernandez, 2003, p. 54).

Another significant factor that shapes violent and aggressive conduct is gender. Male dominance, control, and aggressiveness are frequently encouraged by societal norms around masculinity, particularly when men feel that their identity or status is threatened. People may feel pressured to express their masculinity, which can intensify disagreement and result in aggressive and violent conduct (Connell, 2005, p. 89). The representation of masculine characters committing violence in *The Alienist* is a result of larger cultural standards that associate violence with power and control, in addition to reflect the individuals' own personal reasons.

2.5 Gaps in Existing Research

There is an enormous amount of study on violence and masculinity, but very few of it looks at how media portrays these concepts in connection to mental health. This research attempts to close this gap by examining the ways in which the male characters in *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Alienist* and *You* use their characters to examine the psychological underpinnings of violence and to challenge social standards. By exploring these instances from the media narratives, this study will explore how fictional depictions of masculinity simultaneously support and challenge the societal norms and structures that fuel male aggression.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

Despite significant research on masculinity, trauma, and violence, a few studies have looked at how popular television storylines incorporate psychological and societal aspects into character development and storytelling. There is a gap in our knowledge of how media narratives concurrently reflect and influence male emotional behaviour since existing research frequently isolates either psychological components or cultural representation. In order to bridge this gap, the current study uses an interpretive textual analysis based on gender and psychological theories to examine the intersections of violence, masculinity, and mental health in a few television shows.

As a result, the following research questions form the framework of this study:

1. How do *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Alienist*, and *You* represent psychological and emotional roots of male violence through their central male characters?
2. In what ways do these television narratives normalize, romanticize or critique toxic masculinity and emotional repression?
3. How do psychological theories such as Attachment Theory, Social Learning Theory and Gender Role Theory collectively explain the transformation of male vulnerability into violence in these narratives?

3.2 Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative textual analysis with thematic and narrative techniques, led by Social Learning Theory, Attachment Theory and Gender Role Theory. The analysis is interpretive and reflective with an emphasis on meaning-making rather than measurement. Three television shows: *How I Met Your Mother* (a sitcom), *The Alienist* (a historical crime drama), and *You* (a psychological thriller), were chosen using a purposive sampling technique because they all focus on male emotional repression, trauma and violence despite having different genres. The study uses genre as an interpretive component to explore how different narrative modes such as comedy, historical realism, and psychological suspense, mediate the portrayal of masculinity, emotional repression, and violence throughout various series. The unit of analysis include primary male character arcs and significant episodes that depict narrative portrayals of psychological instability and aggression: *You* (Season 1, Episode 3; Season 2, Episode 5), *The Alienist* (Season 1, Episode 1; Season 1, Episode 8), and *HIMYM* (Season 4, Episode 1; Season 6, Episode 14). In order to find patterns of emotional suppression, trauma-driven pathology, and the narrative normalizing of violence, data were analysed using iterative coding procedures i.e., open coding, axial coding, thematic development (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This interpretative approach enables a multifaceted knowledge and understanding of the construction and contestation of masculinity across various narrative frameworks.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, people adopt or take up habits by observing and imitating other individuals around them. When prominent individuals or the media resemble or mimic such actions, this process has the potential to continue violence.

Connell's Gender Role Theory looks at how women's and men's actions are influenced by cultural norms. Anger and domination are two negative behaviours that can be exacerbated by rigid gender standards, particularly those related to masculinity.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory, emphasizes the influence of early interactions on young people's emotional growth and conduct as adults. Healthy emotional relationships are fostered by secure attachments, however behavioural patterns might be adversely affected by interruptions.

The conceptual structure offered by these ideas helps us comprehend how early relationship experiences, mental health, and social conventions impact the actions of male characters.

4.1 Summary of the Series

1. How I Met Your Mother

This sitcom centers on Ted Mosby and his close friends Marshall, Lily, Robin, and Barney as they chase love. Barney's hyper-masculine conduct, which the series frames stemming from childhood neglect and abandonment/attachment-related issues, draws attention to toxic masculinity, while Ted's romantic idealism and fears reflect attachment difficulties and cultural pressures. The show examines friendship, love, and human development; Barney's final transition into a parent demonstrates emotional maturity. This transformation becomes evident when Barney holds his daughter Ellie for the first time and says, "You are the love of my life. Everything I have and everything I am is yours" (Bays & Thomas, 2005-2014, *HIMYM,* Season 9, Episode 24). This moment directly contrasts his earlier detachment, indicating genuine emotional progress.

2. The Alienist

The show centers on Sara Howard, journalist John Moore, and Dr. Kreizler as they look into cruel murders in 19th-century New York. Moore's empathy and Kreizler's therapeutic detachment are used to explore the psychological causes of violence. Violent conduct is influenced by trauma and social learning, as demonstrated by Willem Van Bergen, a character whose childhood abuse is presented as formative in his development. The series examines how trauma is narratively linked to violent behaviour while criticizing cultural suppression.

3. You

This psychological thriller centers on Joe Goldberg, whose portrayal includes an insecure attachment style and unresolved childhood trauma that the narrative links to his violent acts and obsessive love. His distorted view of love serves as justification for his stalking, manipulation, and murder, challenging popular narratives that romanticize dominance and obsession. The series examines the perils of untreated psychological instability and emotional suppression. For instance, Joe says, "I'm not the bad guy. I'm the guy who does what has to be done" (Gamble & Berlanti, 2018-2023, *You,* Season 1, Episode 3), moments before he kills Benji, portraying how he rationalizes violence as devotion.

4.2 Analysis of Media Narratives *How I Met Your Mother* and Emotional Neglect

In the series, *How I Met Your Mother (HIMYM)*, the life and relationships of five friends are looked at and examined. The male characters like Ted Mosby and Barney Stinson shed light on toxic masculinity and emotional neglect.

Ted Mosby: The Romantic Idealist

The expectations that society places on romantic success are reflected in Ted's never–ending search for "the one". Unhealthy relationships and self–doubt result from his recurrent romantic failures. Relationship sacrifices made by Ted reveal his insecurities.

"I'm not the guy who meets a girl, falls in love, and lives happily ever after. I'm the guy who screws it up" (Bays & Thomas, 2005-2014, *HIMYM*, Season 4, Episode 1).

Ted's reliance on outside approval can be explained using Attachment Theory, which contends that social expectations that associate successful relationships with masculinity are the root cause of his emotional instability.

Barney Stinson: The Mask of Hyper–Masculinity

Barney, with his extravagant lifestyle and "bro code" to cover up inner vulnerabilities, especially those stemming from childhood neglect. He is an iconic representation of toxic masculinity. His influence and manipulation over women, which is frequently depicted in a comical way, is a reflection of a culture which emphasizes power, dominance and emotional distance.

"Suit up!" (Bays & Thomas, 2005-2014, *HIMYM*, recurring), his catchphrase, represents his efforts to protect himself against vulnerability.

"A lie is just a great story that someone ruined with the truth" (Bays & Thomas, 2005-2014, *HIMYM*, Season 6, Episode 14).

Barney's actions fit in with the Gender Role Theory, which examines how objectification and emotional repression are rewarded by cultural standards. His subsequent development, particularly in his connection with his daughter, contradicts and defies these expectations and shows how emotional intelligence may end destructive patterns, practices and behaviours.

Critiquing Masculinity Norms

HIMYM reinforces stereotypes and frequently normalizes Barney's harmful actions through dark humour. Nevertheless, it also quietly challenges these standards by demonstrating Barney's ultimate self-discovery, suggesting the possibility of emotional development and transformation.

The Alienist and Trauma–Induced Violence

The Alienist, which is set in Gilded Age New York, explores the psychological causes of violence by showing masculine characters battling with social constraints and trauma.

Dr. Laszlo Kreizler: The Compassionate Observer

Kreizler encounters the most sinister facets of the human psyche in his role as an early Psychologist. He struggles with social expectations personally, which is reflected in his physical impairment and mental solitude.

"The mind is the most mysterious thing we possess" (Carr, 2018-2020, *The Alienist*, Season 1, Episode 3).

According to Attachment Theory, Kreizler's work highlights the long–term consequences of unresolved emotional wounds on both his patients' and his own conduct. His emotional detachment and difficulty in forming strong relationships are presented as possibly linked to early attachment disruptions, which the series situates as influencing his behaviour and contributed to his difficulty in managing personal connections. This detachment surfaces when Kreizler, emotionally isolated, says to Sara, "We are all marked by our wounds" (Carr, 2018-2020, *The Alienist,* Season 1, Episode 8*),* acknowledging trauma but showcases inability to form emotional intimacy.

John Moore: The Empathetic Investigator

While helping with the investigations, Moore, a journalist and close friend of Kreizler, struggles with his own ethical issues and moral dilemmas. He offers a sobering and a realistic viewpoint on the cruelty they come across. Moore's personality stands in strong contrast to Kreizler's clinical indifference. Even unintentionally, his responses to violence and empathy reflect the psychological effects that violence has on its victims.

"I have seen terrible things, but this, this is beyond anything I could have imagined." (Carr, 2018-2020, *The Alienist*, season 1, episode 1).

John's emotional reaction to the inquiries and investigation in *The Alienist* corresponds with the Attachment Theory, which holds that early attachments influence emotional coping. His increasing remorse, empathy, regret and sympathy for the victims are indicative of an anxious attachment style, showing how emotional ties might make it difficult for him to maintain his distance (Bowlby, 1982).

Willem Van Bergen: The Creation of a Predator

Abused as a youngster and social rejection are the root causes of Willem's aggressive inclinations. His acts serve as a reminder of the terrible consequences and his crimes demonstrate how terrible unresolved trauma can be.

"They made me this way" (Carr, 2018-2020, *The Alienist*, Season 1, Episode 8).

By using the Social Learning Theory, it becomes clear how Willem's aggressive actions were impacted by the exposure of negative attitudes and behaviours around him. His road towards violence was influenced by the trauma and abuse he endured, which probably caused him to observe and take on the negative actions exhibited by others.

Critiquing Societal Norms

The Alienist challenges social conventions by demonstrating how men's emotional and psychological problems are frequently suppressed with negative results. It also talks about how structural issues, such stigmatization in society and poor mental health care, promote violent cycles.

You and the Pathology of Obsession

In *You*, Joe Goldberg's character highlights the perils of compulsive violence by illustrating the relationship between psychiatric disorder and popular tales about love.

Joe Goldberg: The Charming Predator

The cause of Joe's compulsive actions is his concerned attachment style and childhood trauma. His perverted and flawed conception of love serves as a justification for his abuses, including stalking, manipulation, and murder.

"I'm not the bad guy. I'm the guy who does what has to be done for love" (Gamble & Berlanti, 2018-2023, *You*, Season 1, Episode 3).

The Attachment Theory, which connects emotional instability and possessiveness in adult relationships with early abandonment, is reflected in Joe's craving and desire for control and possessiveness.

Critiquing Romanticized Violence

You criticize the way culture romanticizes male dominance and compulsive love, raising concerns about the audience's involvement in justifying Joe's actions

as a sign of affection. This representation questions societal narratives that promote or legitimize masculine aggressiveness.

4.3 Comparison of the Series

Each series offers a different perspective on the male psyche and how it relates to violence.

- *How I Met Your Mother* uses humour and nuanced storylines to challenge toxic masculinity and emotional neglect.
- *The Alienist* explores how violent tendencies are influenced by untreated trauma and societal expectations.
- *You* demonstrate how societal narratives about control in relationships can be linked to the representations of psychological instability, within the narrative.

4.4 Shared Themes Across the Series

- **Emotional Suppression**: Men are discouraged by social standards and conventions from showing vulnerability, which leads to internal conflicts and external aggressiveness. Violence, whether emotional or psychological (for example, the characters Barney and Ted from *HIMYM*) or physical (for example, the serial murderer from *The Alienist* and character Joe from *You*), frequently manifests as a misguided way to cope with the feelings of inadequacy, rejection, or fear.
- **Trauma and Mental Health**: Destructive behaviours are often brought on by unresolved trauma, highlighting the significance of mental health care. Characters like Barney (*HIMYM*), the serial murderer (*The Alienist*), and Joe (*You*), show how early experiences greatly influence adult actions and promote violent and impulsive behaviour.
- **Cultural Norms and Masculinity**: The series challenge patriarchal cultural notions of masculinity that perpetuate violence and suffering by emphasizing power over affection**.** Through their domination, characters like Barney and Joe represent toxic masculinity, whereas the character John Moore serve as healthy example of masculine conduct.

4.5 Cultural Impact and Media Narratives

Each of these media tales emphasizes how male conduct is influenced by cultural expectations, whether they are connected to trauma, masculinity, or romantic success. *How I Met Your Mother* criticizes the social forces around emotional neglect and toxic masculinity, whereas *The Alienist* examines how untreated trauma may result in violence. The romanticization of compulsive love is explored in *You*, which also critiques how cultural narratives influence and even justify risky conduct. These series challenge the narratives that support harmful patterns in real life and offer an insightful commentary on the relationship between violence, societal expectations, and mental health.

4.6 Narrative Framing, Genre and Audience Positioning

The narrative and aesthetic frames of each series influence how audiences interpret male trauma and aggression. *HIMYM* downplays emotional repression by using sitcom sarcasm and comedy, portraying it as charming or humourous. *The Alienist,* contextualizes male dysfunction within historical and scientific discourse, employing the aesthetics of the crime genre to justify violence as a necessary part of development. *You,* on the other hand, uses first-person narration and thriller realism to get the audience into protagonist's head and foster empathy for his violent and possessive inclinations. These genre-based framing methods influence audience position and moral perception, exposing how masculinity is challenged and normalized in recognizable media forms (Hall, 1997; Butler, 1990; Mittell, 2015). The interplay of representation (Hall, 1997), performativity (Butler, 1990), and narrative form (Mittell, 2015) highlights the importance of production environment and audience engagement in creating meaning in media tales.

5. IMPLICATIONS AND SOLUTIONS

5.1 Promoting Mental Health Literacy

In order to break patterns of violence, men's mental health and emotional intelligence must be promoted. Men who receive thorough mental health education can understand and control their emotions better, leading to healthier and happier lifestyle choices. The media plays a crucial part in achieving this objective by promoting good masculinity models that prioritize empathy, emotional transparency and non-violence.

5.2 Interventions for Trauma

The core reasons of violent inclinations must be tackled by incorporating trauma–informed treatment into mental health services. The chance that people may acquire negative behavioural patterns in the future can be considerably decreased by early therapies that target childhood trauma. Emotional resilience and better coping strategies are guaranteed when unprocessed trauma is addressed with counselling, therapy and medical care.

5.3 Cultural Shifts

In order to reduce violence, it is important to change how the society views masculinity. This entails defying expectations and questioning social standards which attribute masculinity to control, dominate, and emotional repression. Men's expressive emotions, empathy, and vulnerability are encouraged since they improve interpersonal connections and promote a mutually respectful and understanding society.

5.4 Media Responsibility

Media producers bear a heavy burden of debunking gender stereotypes and offering complex representations of masculinity. The media has the power to shape cultural attributes and support a larger social movement for gender equality and mental health awareness by distorting and breaking harmful myths and negative stereotypes, and advancing varied and healthy depictions of male identity.

6. CONCLUSION

This study critically analyzes the complex interrelationships between violence, cultural expectations, and male mental health as depicted in *How I Met Your Mother, The Alienist* and *You.* The study emphasizes that male aggression is a learnt and acquired behaviour that is influenced by societal norms, emotional suppression, and unresolved psychological challenges and emotional issues rather than being a natural feature through the application of Social Learning Theory, Gender Role Theory, and Attachment Theory.

One theme that runs through all of the examined series is how cultural ideas of masculinity prevent men from expressing their emotions, which leads to internal conflicts that show out as aggressiveness and violence. *How I Met Your Mother* sheds focus on the subtle but widespread ways that broken relationships are caused by emotional neglect and cultural expectations of masculinity. Ted Mosby, for example, exhibits exaggerated idealism and insecurity that reveal a deeper emotional emptiness shaped by social dynamics and societal pressure. In the same way, Barney Stinson uses his exaggerated hyper-masculinity as a coping method for his unresolved childhood traumas and feelings of inferiority. These characters, which prioritize emotional distance and power above vulnerability, transparency and connection, serve to be the prime examples of how societal norms perpetuate negative marital dynamics.

The historical and psychological aspects of trauma, particularly in relation to war and societal expectations, become the main emphasis of *The Alienist*. The desire and the need to fit into rigidly masculine stereotypes and consequences arising from previous violence are issues that the male characters struggle with. Psychological instability and trauma may result in damaging and affecting one's actions and behaviour, as seen by Dr. Kreizler's complicated inner difficulties and John Moore's internal battle between personal morality and societal standards. This series emphasizes the cyclical nature of violence and the long–term effects of societal repression, as men frequently imitate the aggressive habits that have been engrained in them by historical and cultural factors.

On the other side, *You* provide a terrifying examination of how unresolved psychological and emotional instability may turn hostile. Joe Goldberg acts in this way because of an incomplete and incorrect understanding of relationships and love, which is further exacerbated by childhood trauma and dominant societal ideas. His negative actions, destructive behaviour and compulsive habits highlight the perils of unfulfilled psychological demands and emotional repression. The show offers a critique of societal myths that legitimate dominance and possessiveness as manifestations of masculinity by exploring Joe's mind.

The study concludes and highlights the importance and the need for social and cultural change. To address the underlying causes of violence, destructive standards that associate masculinity with control, domination, and emotional repression must be eliminated. Men's emotional transparency and vulnerability are not just a personal change, but also a social change that promotes better communities and relationships. This is the point at which media and education play a crucial role. By encouraging emotional literacy and presenting varied, positive representations of masculinity in the media, we can change societal perceptions and minimize the stigma associated with masculine emotional expression.

This study illustrates how media portrayals and cultural standards teach and reinforce violent and aggressive behaviours through the prism of Social Learning Theory. Furthermore, Gender Role Theory shows how inflexible societal norms around masculinity promote emotional suppression and harm interpersonal relationships. Finally, the relevance of early emotional experiences in forming adult behaviour is emphasized by Attachment Theory, which also emphasizes the necessity of early therapies to address psychological issues.

In conclusion, a diversified strategy is needed to reduce violence and achieve gender equality. Society may break violent patterns by treating mental health issues, fostering emotional intelligence, and changing cultural narratives about masculinity. These initiatives are crucial for promoting empathy, diversity, and more positive interpersonal relationships. In the end, changing

the definition of masculinity and emphasizing emotional health are the very essential first steps in creating a society that is more just and caring.

Based on these findings, the study suggests concrete methods for promoting better depictions of masculinity and violence in media. Integrating media literacy programs into schools and institutions could help young people understand how television normalizes the portrayal of aggression and emotional repression. Writers and producers could benefit from working collaboratively with mental health specialists and gender academics to create storylines that convey vulnerability without mocking or hypermasculine backlash. To responsibly contextualize psychological issues, streaming services may incorporate content cautions and reflective conversation guides. Finally, adding emotional literacy modules to the present media education programs may promote empathy-based participation, while assisting audiences in identifying, challenging and questioning the normalized violence. Together, these interventions turn criticism into constructive cultural practice.

6.1 Limitations of the Study

Despite certain limitations, this study offers a thorough examination of how male perpetrated violence is portrayed in media. Initially, the selection of *How I Met Your Mother, The Alienist,* and *You* focuses on Western culture, which could not accurately reflect culturally or globally varied conceptions of violence and masculinity. Secondly, the character–based approach excludes the production environment, audience reaction, and institutional beliefs that underlie these programs in favour of emphasizing narrative interpretation. While this study focuses on textual and thematic analysis, it does not go into detail on the formal cinematic elements, such as cinematography, audio, editing or the reception context that influences audience interpretation. Future study could combine these dimensions to create a more complete picture of how media form and audience placement reinforce or oppose masculinity and violence depictions. Since this is a qualitative research based on theoretical frameworks and conceptual structures, the interpretations are necessarily subjective and can change based on the viewers or readers.

The fact that there is no discussion on how violence functions across a wider gender range, including queer or non–binary identities, and that the focus is mostly on cisgender male characters is another drawback. Moreover, the study does not go into detail about how the intersections of race, class, and sexuality influence masculine representation. These dimensions have significant effects on how power, vulnerability, and violence are represented and received in media narratives (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, *How I Met Your Mother* and *You* present middle-class white masculinity as the cultural norm, whereas *The Alienist* depicts late nineteenth-century class hierarchy and racial tensions in New York. Future research could explore how non-Western media or queer masculinities address emotional suppression and violence differently within their sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, the analysis's relevance to behavioural investigations in the real world is limited since it does not experimentally quantify the influence of media on audience opinions. The study does not make a direct casual link between media exposure and violent behaviour; instead, it interprets how television narratives symbolically construct and normalize ideas of masculinity and aggression. And also, rather than using psychological and clinical research, the study primarily handles trauma and mental health as narrative elements. These restrictions point out the necessity of a more comprehensive, multidisciplinary framework in order to expand on the conclusions and findings made here.

6.2 Recommendations

Future studies should examine media narratives from other cultural and geographical origins, particularly from non–Western contexts, in order to expand on the findings of this study and offer a more comparative view of violence and masculinity. Studies on audience reception, conducted through surveys, interviews or focus groups, can provide factual information on how viewers absorb, understand or reject these depictions. Furthermore, future studies should use an intersectional perspective to look at how masculinity shapes violent behaviours and emotional suppression in relation to race, class, sexual orientation and disability. It might enhance the gendered understanding of violence to include depictions of female and non–binary offenders. Using mixed–method approaches, researchers may also combine quantitative data, such as frequency counts of violent actions or psychiatric symptoms or behavioural disorders in media text, with qualitative content analysis.

The last way to connect narrative theory with practical effects is through long–term research examining the behavioural and psychological effects of such media on audiences, particularly younger viewers. These suggestions will support the development of an interdisciplinary, more complex conversation around violence, media and gender.

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CASE STUDY
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Bridging Heritage and Tourism through Interdisciplinary Theories: A Case Study of Traditional Performing Arts in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Southern Vietnam's traditional performing arts, particularly Đờn ca tài tử and Cải lương, are deeply rooted in the region's cultural identity and represent valuable resources for enhancing tourism in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC)[1]. Despite their cultural richness, the integration of these art forms into the city's tourism strategies remains limited and insufficiently theorized within interdisciplinary frameworks. **Methods:** This study employs an in-depth qualitative research approach, combining document analysis, participant observation, and conducting 20 in-depth interviews. The analysis is guided by an interdisciplinary framework integrating stakeholder theory, cultural ecology theory, cultural economics theory, and sustainable tourism theory to examine how traditional performing arts can be effectively leveraged in tourism development while preserving their cultural integrity. **Results:** The findings indicate that sustainable tourism development involving traditional performing arts requires multi-stakeholder collaboration, including cultural practitioners, tourism authorities, policymakers, and local communities. The study identifies gaps in current policies, infrastructural limitations, and low public engagement. Furthermore, it highlights the ongoing tensions between cultural preservation and commercialization in the tourism sector. **Discussion and Conclusions:** The study underscores the critical role of interdisciplinary strategies and stakeholder engagement in balancing heritage conservation with tourism development. It concludes with policy recommendations and practical solutions for integrating Đờn ca tài tử and Cải lương into HCMC's urban tourism landscape. These proposals aim to foster a culturally rooted and resilient tourism model by enhancing the tourist experience through strategic stakeholder collaboration.

Keywords: Traditional art, Cultural tourism, Heritage culture, Urban tourism, Heritage preservation, Vietnam's intangible culture

1. INTRODUCTION

The integration of intangible cultural heritage into tourism development has become an important trend, aiming to create unique visitor experiences and contribute to heritage preservation. According to UNESCO (2015), living forms of heritage, such as performing arts,

[1]It should be noted that as of July 1, 2025, the administrative boundaries of Ho Chi Minh City and other provinces have been officially adjusted following national restructuring. This study uses data and context prior to this change.

can generate economic benefits and enhance community pride when properly managed. However, excessive commercialization may distort the inherent value of heritage. This raises the urgent need to develop tourism in a sustainable manner that is closely linked with heritage, especially for traditional art forms that are gradually losing their audience in modern society.

In Vietnam, *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* are two representative performing art forms of the Southern region. *Đờn ca tài tử* was recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013, while *Cải lương* was once a dominant form of popular theater throughout the twentieth century. Nevertheless, facing increasing competition from modern entertainment, both are now at risk of fading. This trend is strongly reflected in Vietnam's national policies. The foundation was laid by Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW (2014) of the Party Central Committee, which defined culture not only as a spiritual foundation but also as a driving force for sustainable development. This perspective was further concretized in the "Strategy for the Development of Vietnam's Cultural Industries to 2020, with a Vision to 2030" (Decision 1755/QĐ-TTg, 2016), which identified performing arts and cultural tourism as key sectors. More recently, the commitment to cultural development has been reinforced through Conclusion No. 156-KL/TW (2025) on continuing the implementation of Resolution 33, and the approval of the "National Target Program for Cultural Development for the 2025-2035 period" (Resolution 162/2024/QH15), demonstrating a consistent and long-term strategic vision from the state. This poses a dual challenge, requiring not only the preservation of these arts but also their renewal in order to remain relevant in contemporary life. As the country's major center of culture and tourism, HCMC has made efforts to integrate traditional arts into tourism activities. These include *Đờn ca tài tử* performances at the Ao Dai Museum and Binh Quoi Tourist Village, as well as *Cải lương* shows for tourists at Tran Huu Trang Theater. However, these efforts remain fragmented, lacking a comprehensive strategy and strong collaboration among stakeholders.

Despite these efforts and policy orientations, a clear research gap exists regarding a comprehensive, interdisciplinary analysis of the structural challenges and opportunities in this domain. Therefore, this study addresses the central research question: How can *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* be effectively integrated into tourism development in HCMC, while also ensuring the sustainable preservation of their cultural values? To address this, the paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach and applies four theoretical frameworks: (1) Stakeholder theory, (2) Cultural ecology theory, (3) Cultural economics theory, and (4) Sustainable tourism theory. These frameworks are used to analyze the current situation and propose feasible solutions for harmonizing tourism development with the preservation of traditional performing arts.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The selection of these four theories was deliberate, aiming to construct a multi-layered analytical framework capable of capturing the complexity of the research problem. Stakeholder theory provides the lens to identify the key actors and analyze their interactions, conflicts, and potential for collaboration. Cultural ecology theory allows for an examination of the "environment" in which the arts exist, including the social, spatial, and policy conditions that influence their adaptation and survival. Cultural economics theory offers critical tools to decode the value system, particularly the inherent tension between cultural integrity and commercial pressures. Finally, sustainable

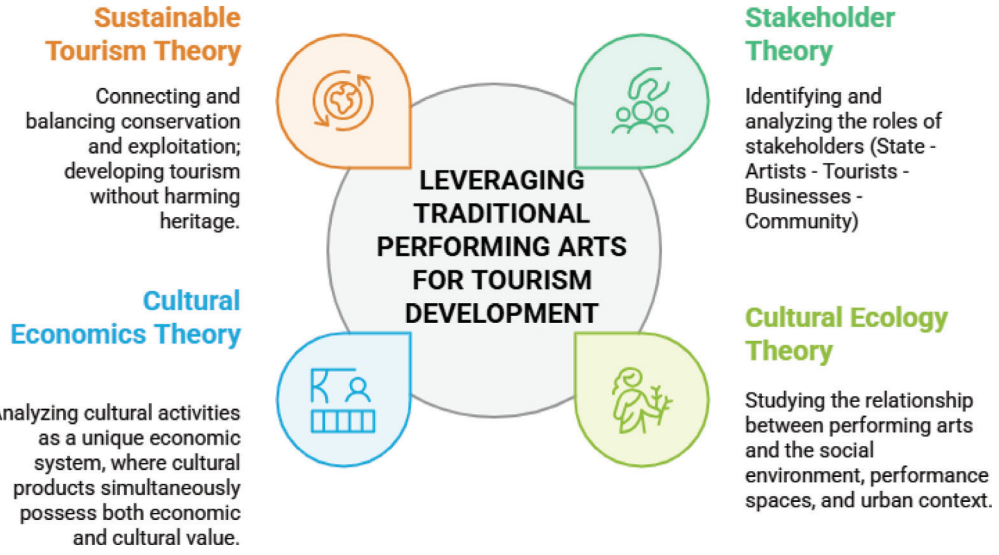


Figure 1. The integrated theoretical framework for the study

tourism theory serves as the normative framework, providing the guiding principles and ultimate goals for developing solutions that are balanced, ethical, and long-term.

2.1. Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory is one of the foundational frameworks in modern strategic management. It was first systematically conceptualized by R. Edward Freeman in his book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (1984). According to Freeman, businesses or organizations should not focus solely on the interests of shareholders, as in classical theories. Instead, they should broaden their perspective to consider other actors who affect or are affected by the organization's activities. These are referred to as stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders encompass a wide range of groups who are involved in or impacted by development processes. In the context of cultural tourism, they may include government agencies, local communities, artisans and artists, travel businesses, tourists, and international organizations. From this perspective, the preservation and promotion of traditional arts in connection with tourism requires the participation and collaboration of all stakeholders in order to achieve shared goals in a balanced and coordinated manner. Applying stakeholder theory to heritage tourism management helps clarify the roles and expectations of each group. It also supports the establishment of effective mechanisms for coordination, dialogue, and benefit-sharing. Previous research has shown that multi-stakeholder collaboration is key to reconciling the relationship between heritage conservation and sustainable tourism development.

2.2. Cultural Ecology Theory

Cultural ecology theory is an interdisciplinary approach rooted in the work of American cultural anthropologist Julian Steward, particularly in his influential book Theory of Culture Change (1955), which argued that cultural patterns are products of societal adaptation to specific environments. In other words, each cultural form can only survive when supported by a suitable cultural ecosystem, which includes spatial, community, economic, educational, and policy conditions. If this ecosystem is disrupted or degraded, cultural heritage may not be able to survive.

Applying this theory, the preservation of traditional performing arts must be closely associated with the maintenance of the socio-cultural environment in which these art forms are nurtured. This includes not only the protection of the natural environment, but also favorable economic and social conditions, educational systems, supportive policies, and a strong sense of community identity. Thus, the cultural ecology approach emphasizes the importance of creating an enabling environment where traditional arts can continue to "live" and adapt to new contexts, rather than being disconnected from their cultural origins.

2.3. Cultural Economics Theory

Cultural Economics Theory, a field that applies economic principles to the arts, is built upon foundational works such as David Throsby's (2001) Economics and Culture and Baumol and Bowen's (1966) seminal study, Performing Arts-The Economic Dilemma. This theory does not reduce culture to financial figures but instead seeks to explain the unique economic behaviors and structures that operate within this field, where products carry profound symbolic and aesthetic values alongside their exchange value. Its central thesis is the theory of "duality of value," pioneered by David Throsby (2001), which posits that all cultural goods simultaneously possess economic value (measurable in monetary terms) and cultural value (a non-material, multidimensional set of attributes including aesthetic, social, historical, and symbolic value). This parallel existence creates an internal conflict, as efforts to maximize economic value can risk diminishing cultural value, posing a core challenge for cultural management to regulate this complex relationship.

Another foundational contribution is the "cost disease" model by Baumol and Bowen (1966), which demonstrates that labor productivity in the performing arts grows much more slowly than in other industries. However, to retain artists, arts organizations must pay competitive wages that keep pace with the broader economy, creating a chronic "income-expenditure gap". This explains the inherent financial difficulties faced by traditional arts and the need for external support. From this, cultural economics provides a strong rationale for public policy intervention. Bruno Frey (2003) argues that the value of a cultural asset also extends to the wider community through "non-user values" (such as existence, option, and bequest values) that the free market cannot price, leading to a classic market failure. Therefore, state support is both necessary and economically justified to ensure that the total social value of culture is maintained and developed.

2.4. Sustainable Tourism Theory

Sustainable tourism theory emerged from the broader concept of sustainable development, famously defined in the Brundtland Report, titled *Our Common*

Future (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). When applied to cultural tourism, sustainable tourism refers to the development of tourism that balances three core objectives: economic effectiveness, environmental and resource protection, and the promotion of local cultural and social values. These aims ensure long-term benefits for both the community and tourists.

Sustainable tourism theory emphasizes the importance of responsible planning and management in tourism. It warns against short-term profit-driven approaches that may lead to irreversible negative impacts on the natural environment and local cultural identity (UNESCO, 2015). In the context of traditional performing arts, sustainable tourism requires that tourism activities be carefully designed and monitored. This ensures they provide resources to support heritage maintenance, such as funding, the training of younger generations, and raising public awareness, while avoiding excessive commercialization or distortion of the art's original character. Active participation of local communities in the development of cultural tourism products is also a fundamental principle. This involvement helps ensure that communities receive fair benefits and maintain ownership and control over their cultural heritage.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs an in-depth qualitative research approach to provide a multi-dimensional and contextual understanding of the research problem. This approach was chosen for its ability to explore the complex perspectives of key stakeholders and interpret the nuanced realities of cultural phenomena that quantitative data alone cannot capture. The specific methods included:

- **Document Analysis:** The study involved the systematic collection and analysis of policy documents, strategies, and plans from central government agencies and HCMC City authorities; summary reports from the Department of Culture and Sports, the Department of Tourism, and public arts units; and related scientific research and articles. This method helped establish the policy and institutional context, providing a framework for comparison with primary data from interviews and observations.
- **In-depth Interviews:** This was the primary method for gathering rich, firsthand data. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of key stakeholders. Specifically, the 20 interviewees included 4 state managers, 8 artists and artisans, 4 private entrepreneurs, and 4 researchers and experts. The interviews focused on clarifying operational models, identifying internal challenges, and capturing the perspectives of "insiders" that secondary data could not reveal. The selection criteria for these interviewees and the key themes explored are summarized in Table 1.
- **Participant Observation:** Leveraging the author's professional role as an MC for several traditional arts programs in the city, this method was used to record the authentic atmosphere of performances, the immediate reactions of tourists, organizational practices, and the interactions between artists and audiences. This provided candid, objective data on

Table 1. Profile of interviewees and key interview themes.

Stakeholder Group	Profile and Selection Criteria	Key Themes Explored
State Managers	Leadership from public arts units (theatres, cultural centres) and the Department of Culture and Sports, and the Department of Tourism. Selected for their policy-making and implementation roles.	▪ Policy and institutional challenges. ▪ Inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms (culture-tourism). ▪ Strategies for heritage preservation and promotion.
Artists & Artisans	People's Artists, Meritorious Artists, veteran and emerging performers of *Đờn ca tài tử and Cải lương* (both state-employed and independent). Selected for their deep artistic knowledge and first-hand performance experience.	▪ Economic challenges and artists' livelihoods. ▪ Conflict between artistic integrity and commercial pressures. ▪ The "lived experience" of performing for tourists. ▪ Issues of succession and training for the next generation
Private Entrepreneurs	Owners and senior management of tourism businesses that feature traditional arts (theatres, restaurants, cruise ships). Selected for their market-driven perspectives and understanding of tourist needs.	▪ Business models for cultural tourism products. ▪ Tourist preferences and market demand. ▪ Challenges in collaborating with artists and state agencies. ▪ Marketing and pricing strategies.
Researchers & Experts	Leading researchers and experts in cultural and tourism studies from reputable universities. Selected for their theoretical and analytical insights.	▪ Historical context and evolution of the art forms. ▪ Assessment and comparison of development models. ▪ Strategic recommendations and future trends.

Source: Authors, 2025.

the actual experience at the performance sites, complementing the data from interviews.

The data collected from these methods were thematically analyzed, cross-referenced, and interpreted through the lens of the study's four theoretical frameworks to ensure the credibility and depth of the findings.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Perspective from Stakeholder Theory

From the perspective of stakeholder theory, integrating *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* into tourism development in HCMC requires the collaboration of multiple actors. These include local government authorities, particularly the Department of Culture and Sports and the Department of Tourism, the community of artisans and artists, performing arts institutions (such as theaters and *Cải lương* troupes), tourism businesses (such as travel agencies, attractions, restaurants, and hotels), local residents, and tourists. Currently, there is a notable lack of an effective coordination mechanism among these parties. Although the HCMC People's Committee approved a project in 2018 to preserve and promote *Đờn ca tài tử*, which included an orientation toward tourism, the results after several years remain limited. According to Pham Thai Binh (HCMC Cultural Center), "in order to develop *Đờn ca tài tử*, we need an investor, a clear plan, and resource mobilization. But at the moment, everything remains a hope, and there are not many signs to be optimistic" (Trung Son, 2022). This reflects the insufficient role of the government in leading and uniting the relevant stakeholders.

In terms of artistic human resources, HCMC has a strong foundation. In an interview with the research team, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Hoai Phuong, Deputy Director of the HCMC Cultural Center, confirmed that the city is not lacking in practitioners. Statistics from her center in 2024 recorded 229 clubs and 84 groups of *Đờn ca tài tử* with 1,226 active members, a force she described as a "solid rear for the entire grassroots cultural system." This represents a core foundation, although most members are semi-professionals. The challenge is how to bring together those artisans and performers who are both capable and committed to participating in tourism programs over the long term. Many currently view *Đờn ca* as a refined pastime rather than a viable profession, as it provides little financial return. For instance, at the Ao Dai Museum, many performers must pursue other jobs for a living and can only perform in the evenings or during free time. This makes it difficult to sustain their engagement without adequate financial support. Therefore, encouraging greater participation from the artistic community requires appropriate incentives and fair benefit-sharing mechanisms. For example, cultural tourism programs should allocate a portion of their revenue to pay performers fairly or offer subsidies for *tài tử* clubs to maintain regular operations.

In the broader picture, tourism businesses and performance organizers are also key stakeholders. However, most tour operators are not currently interested in incorporating *Đờn ca tài tử* or *Cải lương* performances into their tours due to concerns about limited tourist interest. Some attractions that once hosted regular *tài tử* performances have discontinued them due to low audience turnout. The root cause lies in the lack of high-quality content and ineffective marketing, resulting in a mismatch between supply and demand. This creates a cycle: businesses hesitate to invest for fear of financial loss, while the public remains unaware, leading to poor attendance and failed models. To break this cycle, stakeholders must come together to design more attractive cultural tourism products and implement effective communication strategies to draw in visitors. The coordinating role of the local government is crucial. The city could act as a facilitator to connect travel companies with performing arts institutions, such as the Tran Huu Trang Theater, and provide initial financial support or incentive policies. Establishing a multi-stakeholder cooperation network would help distribute both risks and benefits. Tourism enterprises would bring in customers, performing arts institutions would ensure performance quality, local communities would offer cultural settings and complementary services such as cuisine and souvenirs, and government agencies would support infrastructure and promotional efforts. This public-private-community partnership model has been successfully implemented in heritage tourism destinations around the world. It presents a promising approach to developing unique tourism products while ensuring that all parties benefit and remain committed to heritage preservation.

However, in-depth interviews reveal a significant imbalance in this stakeholder ecosystem. While businesses and organizers hold economic power, the artists—the core stakeholders who embody the cultural capital—are often in a vulnerable position. As People's Artist Thanh Tuyet shared, the flexibility of the art form can be a double-edged sword: *"The best thing about Đờn ca tài tử is its flexibility... But precisely because of that flexibility, people treat us like a 'spice,' a 'side dish,' not the main course. We become 'background music' for a fancy dinner or a river cruise... the restaurant owner sells a meal for 500,000 VND, the cruise owner sells a tour ticket for a million, but we artists... receive a few hundred thousand*

in remuneration." This testimony highlights a critical issue of benefit-sharing that threatens the long-term sustainability of the artists' engagement.

4.2. Perspective from Cultural Ecology Theory

The cultural ecology approach allows for a deeper assessment of the environmental conditions necessary for the survival and development of *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* within the context of urban tourism. As Andrew P. Vayda has noted, cultural transformation should be understood as a continuous process of adaptation by social groups to new environmental conditions (Ngô Thị Phương Lan, 2016). First, in terms of cultural space, *Đờn ca tài tử* is traditionally a chamber music style closely associated with peaceful rural landscapes and riverine environments. When relocated to noisy urban tourism settings, this art form may feel out of place if the context is not carefully curated. In practice, some *Đờn ca tài tử* performances held on tourist boats or at floating markets have not succeeded, largely because of engine noise and the surrounding commotion that detracted from the audience's enjoyment. Therefore, it is essential to select appropriate performance spaces, ideally quiet and open areas that reflect the original cultural setting. In HCMC, suburban districts such as Cu Chi, Binh Chanh, and Can Gio could take advantage of their riverside and garden landscapes to host programs like "Đờn ca tài tử under the moonlight" or "Đờn ca tài tử by the water," integrated with rural tourism. At the same time, it is crucial to create a distinct urban identity for *Đờn ca tài tử* in Ho Chi Minh City, rather than merely replicating the rural aesthetic. As researcher Dr. Le Hong Phuoc emphasized in an interview: *"Đờn ca tài tử in Saigon must have an urban space... If you come to Saigon and also 'mimic' the Mekong Delta style, firstly it's not true to the historical reality of Saigon's Đờn ca tài tử, and secondly, tourists will find nothing new. We must show people how Đờn ca tài tử exists in an urban setting."* This perspective suggests that the potential lies not only in copying the garden model but in leveraging the historical presence of the art form within the city's own urban spaces, from the salons of intellectuals in the past to the modern-day clubs in cafes and cultural houses. These periodic "cultural spaces" would allow *Đờn ca tài tử* to become a natural part of urban life and help foster an appreciative local audience.

Social and community factors are also key components of the cultural ecosystem. *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* can only survive in the long term if they are respected by the community and inherited by younger generations. Currently, there is a real risk of generational disconnect. Many elder artisans are aging, while few young people are eager to carry on the tradition. Most *tài tử* activities now take place within informal hobby clubs and lack youth participation. To address this, traditional music should be integrated into school curricula and extracurricular programs, giving students early exposure to *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương*. HCMC has organized performances for students in recent years, but these efforts need to be maintained on a regular basis. In parallel, recognizing and honoring artisans with formal titles such as People's Artist or Meritorious Artist is an important way to acknowledge their contributions and encourage them to continue mentoring others. From an economic perspective, as previously mentioned, there is a need to build a cultural ecosystem in which artists can earn a sustainable livelihood. If traditional performers are unable to make a living, they will be forced to abandon their craft, and the heritage may be lost. This challenge requires, on one hand, stronger integration with tourism to create markets and revenue streams. On the other hand, initial state support is essential. For example, the city could subsidize performances in the early stages of building a tourism brand or commission high-quality shows for official events, thus creating more employment opportunities for artists. In fact, HCMC has organized several regular festivals, such as the "Golden Lotus" *Đờn ca tài tử* Festival and the Citywide *Cải lương* Festival. These events not only aim to discover new talent but also provide performance opportunities that help sustain traditional arts in contemporary life. This represents a cultural ecology approach that establishes a continuous cycle of training, performing, recognition, and community engagement, ensuring that traditional art forms remain "nurtured" within a favorable environment.

The challenges within the cultural ecosystem are particularly acute for public institutions. Mr. Phan Quoc Kiet, Director of the Tran Huu Trang Cai Luong Theater, candidly described the theater's struggle to adapt to the new economic environment: *"The harsh reality is that for many performances, we only sell a few dozen tickets, sometimes even fewer than 10. The audience for these shows are mostly relatives of the artists, theater staff, or invited guests."* This situation is a direct consequence of an operational model that, according to him, has a "DNA" built to fulfill state-assigned service quotas rather than to compete in the market. This reveals a systemic paradox where the very institutions tasked with preserving high art are the least equipped to make it economically viable in the modern tourism ecosystem.

4.3. Perspective from Cultural Economics Theory

From the lens of cultural economics, the challenges that *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* face in Ho Chi Minh City's tourism sector are not merely issues of public taste

or marketing, but are rooted in structural value conflicts and economic pressures. Applying this theory allows for a deeper diagnosis of these problems and helps in proposing more sustainable business models.

First, the process of integrating traditional arts into tourism products in the city has clearly exposed the conflict of "duality of value". *Đờn ca tài tử* performances on Saigon River cruises or in restaurants are prime examples. These models maximize *economic value* by creating a convenient product that is easily integrated into tour schedules and does not demand high concentration from tourists. However, they severely diminish *cultural value*: authenticity and the original performance context are compromised by noisy environments, while artistic value is diluted as classic repertoires are shortened to fit brief time slots. The management challenge here is not to prevent commercialization, but to design models capable of generating revenue without eroding the core "cultural capital" of the heritage.

Second, the "cost disease" model by Baumol and Bowen provides a sharp diagnostic tool for the chronic difficulties of the *Cải lương* stage in HCMC. The reality of troupes struggling to maintain operations and artists facing precarious livelihoods is not just due to "audiences turning away." It is also a consequence of an economic law: the productivity of a stage performance cannot increase (it still requires a similar cast, musicians, and duration as it did 50 years ago), while production costs (theater rental, artist salaries, set design) in an expensive metropolis like HCMC continuously escalate. This creates an "income-expenditure gap" that ticket prices can hardly cover, especially when competing with countless modern entertainment forms that have much lower marginal costs. This theory suggests that without specific funding mechanisms designed with an understanding of this "disease", efforts to "revitalize" the art form are unlikely to achieve sustainable success.

Based on this diagnosis, cultural economics also suggests feasible solutions and business models. One direction is the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, where the state can support fixed costs (providing venues in public theaters, subsidizing basic salaries for artists) to address the "cost disease," while tourism enterprises focus on their strengths in product development and marketing. Another model is to develop the experience economy; instead of just selling performance tickets, a series of products can be created, such as backstage tours, meet-and-greets with artists, or short workshops to learn a line of *vọng cổ* (a style of singing in *Cải lương*). This approach not only increases revenue but also deepens the cultural experience for tourists, generating economic value from ancillary activities while preserving the integrity of the main performance. Finally, the foundation for any sustainable business model is the effective enforcement of intellectual property rights, ensuring legitimate benefits for artists and creators, thereby encouraging long-term investment and innovation.

4.4 Perspectives from sustainable tourism theory

From the perspective of sustainable tourism, the exploitation of *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* must fulfill two parallel objectives. These are to generate momentum for tourism and local economic development, and to ensure that the cultural heritage and the communities who own it are not harmed. Lessons from several locations show that heritage can be easily damaged when development is driven by short-term profit. For example, after *Đờn ca tài tử* was inscribed by UNESCO, performances rapidly proliferated across many tourist destinations in the Mekong Delta. However, due to a lack of proper orientation, a distorted form of commercialization occurred. Performances advertised as *Đờn ca tài tử* catered to tourists' demands for pop music or contemporary tunes, undermining the refined aesthetic that defines the genre (Nham Hung, 2023). As a result, audiences quickly lost interest, venues shut down due to lack of visitors, and many artisans found themselves out of work. This is a clear case of an unsustainable approach.

Conversely, a sustainable approach requires long-term vision. Rather than staging hasty, low-quality performances to earn immediate profits, efforts should be made to invest in the development of truly high-quality cultural tourism products. These may not bring instant returns but can build credibility and long-term value. Above all, cultural identity and authenticity must be respected in tourism offerings. As UNESCO recommends, tourism activities must prioritize the interests and aspirations of the communities who hold the heritage. These communities should be empowered to decide how their culture is presented and shared (UNESCO, 2015). Therefore, when designing tourism programs related to *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương*, consultation with veteran artisans is crucial to ensure that core traditional values are preserved. For instance, musical compositions can be shortened for tourist consumption but should not be excessively altered in melody. Performances can be creatively staged but should not be transformed into vulgar comedy. The participation of local communities is also essential. People in the Southern region are the true custodians of this heritage, so they should receive fair benefits through employment or income generated from tourism. Their voices should also be included in the management process.

A community-based tourism model can be applied. For example, households in Can Gio or Nha Be can organize *Đờn ca tài tử* nights in their gardens or homestays. Tourists can experience local culture while hosts earn income and

have greater motivation to preserve traditions. This model requires training communities in tourism-related skills and partnering with travel companies to bring visitors to these experiences. Another important dimension of sustainable tourism is education and awareness-raising for tourists. Many international visitors and even local youth may not fully understand the value of *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương*, resulting in indifference or a view of these performances as mere entertainment services. Therefore, in addition to explanations provided during programs, promotional materials should emphasize the historical and artistic significance of these art forms to help tourists appreciate them more deeply. The tourism sector could also develop codes of conduct for attending traditional performances, guiding visitors to respect artists, avoid making noise, and behave appropriately during shows.

Lastly, economic efficiency must be thoughtfully balanced with heritage conservation. A cultural tourism program can only be sustainable if it generates enough income to support those who deliver it. Otherwise, they will lack the motivation to continue. This means that revenue strategies should not be overlooked. A sound financial model for *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* tourism products should include diverse sources of funding, such as ticket sales, corporate sponsorships, government subsidies, and conservation funds. Additional income can also come from merchandising, such as selling CDs, DVDs, or photo books of the performances, and from offering experiential workshops like introductory singing or instrument lessons.

It is crucial that a portion of the profits be reinvested into preservation efforts. These may include supporting the training of young talent, restoring traditional instruments and costumes, and organizing competitions to select and mentor the next generation. Only through such a cyclical model can tourism generate resources for heritage conservation, while conservation, in turn, enriches tourism offerings in a sustainable way. In summary, a sustainable tourism approach demands a careful balance between development and preservation. For *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương*, this means continuously improving tourism products to attract audiences, ensuring that the art form remains viable, while also preserving its cultural essence and resisting the pressures of commercialization. This is a complex challenge but also an essential path if the heritage is to remain alive within the community for generations to come.

4.5. Comparative Insights: Successful Models from Other Vietnamese Cities

To provide a practical context for potential solutions, it is valuable to examine successful models of integrating traditional arts into tourism from other Vietnamese cities.

Hoi An's Integrated Cultural Space Model: The ancient town of Hoi An has successfully transformed its heritage into a core tourism product. The Hoi An Traditional Art Performance House, located in the heart of the old town, offers multiple daily shows featuring folk songs, dances, and *Bài chòi* (a UNESCO-recognized art form). Crucially, the performance is included as an option in the mandatory entrance ticket to the old town, ensuring a steady stream of audience members. The theater itself is housed in a historic building, creating an authentic atmosphere, and often includes interactive elements like mask painting workshops. This model demonstrates a successful public-private partnership where cultural policy is directly linked to the tourism economy, creating a sustainable ecosystem where heritage is both preserved and monetized effectively.

Thang Long Water Puppet Theater's Professionalization Model: Located in Hanoi, the Thang Long Water Puppet Theater is a prime example of how a traditional art form can become a commercially successful, "must-see" attraction for international tourists. The theater operates 365 days a year with multiple shows per day, a testament to its high demand and professional management. Its success lies in creating a high-quality, accessible, and engaging product. The shows are visually captivating, overcoming language barriers, and are accompanied by a live traditional orchestra that enhances the experience. Having toured over 40 countries, the theater has built a strong international brand. This model highlights the importance of professionalization, consistent quality, and strategic marketing in turning a niche art form into a flagship cultural tourism product.

4.6. Evaluation of the Theoretical Framework

The selection of this theoretical framework is the result of a thorough comparison and analysis of both domestic and international approaches. It reflects an interdisciplinary, practical, and humanistic research orientation, which is well aligned with the characteristics of the cultural management field and the complexity of the research subject, namely traditional performing arts in the context of urban tourism.

The four theories complement one another in explaining the phenomenon: stakeholder theory identifies the mechanisms of interaction among key actors; cultural ecology theory explores the relationship between the art form and its social and spatial environment; cultural economics theory analyzes the value conflicts and inherent economic challenges; and sustainable tourism theory offers a development direction that balances exploitation with conservation. Their combination expands the analytical scope across structural, contextual, communicative, and policy dimensions.

In the context of HCMC, a dynamic and multilayered urban area, the framework proves highly appropriate. It allows for the examination of the relationships between government, communities, and businesses, the definition of culturally specific spaces, the reception behaviors of younger audiences, and the demands for long-term policy planning. No single theory is sufficient to fully address the complexity of this issue, but together, the four provide a comprehensive and effective approach.

In terms of applicability, the theoretical framework supports both the analysis of the current situation and the formulation of practical solutions. These theories have been widely applied in studies of development, culture, and tourism, and can be adapted into models, evaluation criteria, or operational tools, particularly in the design of cultural tourism programs, sustainability indicators, and participatory mechanisms for artist communities.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has clarified the potential and current state of exploiting *Đờn ca tài tử* and *Cải lương* in tourism development in HCMC. Based on an interdisciplinary framework and qualitative data from in-depth interviews, the study reveals that the core challenge is not a lack of audience interest, but rather a structural "experience gap": while tourists highly value the cultural essence of the performances, their overall satisfaction is diminished by inadequate physical environments and a lack of interactive opportunities. The findings affirm that integrating traditional arts into tourism is a vital opportunity for both economic development and cultural preservation. However, to be successful, a strategic shift is required from merely "selling performances" to "designing holistic cultural experiences."

Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the study proposes the following key recommendations:

- **Strengthen Inter-sectoral Coordination under a Unified Policy Framework:** This study recommends establishing a formal coordination mechanism under the direct leadership of the HCMC People's Committee. This framework should align the strategic efforts of key departments—specifically the Department of Culture and Sports, the Department of Tourism, and the Department of Finance—and formalize collaboration with the artist community and private enterprises to ensure economic efficiency and achieve shared goals in developing high-quality cultural tourism products. **Develop Tiered "Experience Packages":** Instead of one-size-fits-all performances, create tiered product packages. This could include standard performance tickets, premium packages with backstage tours and artist meet-and-greets, and exclusive workshops, catering to different tourist segments and willingness to pay.
- **Invest in Technology to Bridge the Experience Gap:** Mandate the use of multilingual subtitles (e.g., via LED screens or mobile apps) for all performances targeting tourists. Explore the use of QR codes to provide contextual information and augmented reality (AR) to enhance storytelling, thereby addressing the strong demand for technology-enhanced experiences.
- **Upgrade Key Performance Venues:** Prioritize investment in upgrading the infrastructure of key venues like the Tran Huu Trang Cai Luong Theater and establishing dedicated, high-quality cultural spaces for *Đờn ca tài tử*, ensuring excellent acoustics, seating, and professional environments.
- **Create Fair Benefit-Sharing Mechanisms:** Develop clear guidelines and model contracts to ensure that artists, as the holders of cultural capital, receive a fair share of the revenue generated from tourism activities, thereby ensuring their long-term commitment and motivation.

Limitations

While this study provides in-depth qualitative insights, several limitations should be acknowledged:

- **Limited Generalizability:** As a qualitative study focused on HCMC, the findings are context-specific and may not be directly generalizable to other regions with different socio-cultural or institutional conditions.
- **Subjectivity of Qualitative Data:** The findings are based on interviews with a purposive sample of 20 stakeholders. While providing depth, these perspectives may not capture the full spectrum of opinions, and the interpretations are inherently shaped by the researchers' analytical lens.
- **Dynamic Cultural Context:** The rapid evolution of digital media and entertainment preferences poses an ongoing challenge to the long-term applicability of the specific strategies proposed. Continuous market research is needed to adapt to changing tourist demands.

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

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Giang is a recipient of multiple national research accolades, including First Prize at the Euréka National Student Research Award. He has participated in various large-scale youth research programs and national academic conferences. His scholarly work reflects a strong commitment to cultural preservation and social impact, with a growing focus on the application of emerging technologies—such as AI and immersive media (VR/AR)—in heritage conservation and public engagement.

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Note

This issue of the JHSSR has been reviewed by experts in Education, Literature, Management, Psychology, Religion, Sociology, Social Studies, Technology, and Urban Studies.

These experts provided candid and critical comments, which helped our editorial team pinpoint the specific comments and improved the papers' quality. The JHSSR editorial board is very grateful for the invaluable contributions from all reviewers listed above *(sorted by alphabetical order by first name)*.

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The Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (JHSSR), eISSN 2682-9096 is a **peer-reviewed, international** journal that uses an **open access** model. It publishes original contributions in the field of humanities and social sciences. The journal serves as a place to share new thinking on analysis, theory, policy, and practice that relates to issues that influence innovative research and education. We believe that our journal can make a significant contribution to the advancement of the field and help address some of the pressing challenges facing society today.

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JHSSR aims to promote **interdisciplinary studies** in humanities and social science and become a recognised leading journal in the world. Our objective is to unite researchers undertaking comparative projects. The journal is concerned with showcasing new and diverse international and innovative research that uses rigorous methodology that focuses on theory, policy, practice, critical analysis, and development analysis of issues that influence humanities and social sciences education.

JHSSR has as its core principles: a) **innovative research**; b) **engagement with theory**; and c) **diverse voices in terms of authorship**.

Keywords / Scope of the Journal

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Our journal aims to provide a platform for researchers and technical experts to publish **original research, reviews, systematic literature reviews, theological analysis, opinion, conceptual framework, action research, case studies** and **book-reviews** on all aspects of humanities and the social sciences research. It also seeks to broaden the realm of interdisciplinary fields of humanities and social sciences by publishing essays that investigate topics, texts, and controversies that have not typically been included in the canon of these areas.

We strive to maintain a high standard of scientific objectivity, and we ensure that all submitted articles undergo a stringent yet relatively rapid double-blind peer-review process, which translates to benefits such as timeliness of publication, widespread dissemination, high visibility, and likelihood of high citations and broader impacts. JHSSR follows code of conduct stipulated by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). Alongside a mission-driven Editor-in-chief, the globally diverse Editorial Board works with prominent scientific community to create a fast moving and rigorous editorial review process by delivering robust decisions in the shortest possible time using double blind peer review.

We seek to present the cutting-edge innovations and/or latest insights and strive to maintain the highest standards of excellence for JHSSR.

The journal is published online with DOI: https://doi.org/10.37534/bp.jhssr.2025.v7.n2.id.0018c.p240

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Invitations for paper submissions: No Deadline for 2026-27.

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(Manuscript Preparation & Submission Guide)

Revised: Dec. 2025

Please read the guidelines below and follow the instructions carefully. **Manuscripts that do not adhere to the Journal's guidelines will not be put into the peer-review process until requirements are met.**

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A well-formatted manuscript follows all journal instruction. All elements of the manuscript are printed in English with 1-inch margins at top, bottom, and sides. Right margins are unjustified. Horizon journals accept manuscript submissions which uses any consistent text— Format-free Submission! This saves you time and ensures you can focus on your priority: the research.

However, citations/ references must be formatted by you as per APA format.

Submission Preparation Checklist

As part of the submission process, authors are required to check off their submission's compliance with all of the following items, and submissions may be returned to authors that do not adhere to these guidelines.

- ✓ The submission represents an original work that has not been published elsewhere nor submitted to another journal in any language for publication;
- ✓ The submission cites current theoretical and empirically-based literature, including relevant articles published in the Horizon Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research;
- ✓ The submission is written in language that is engaging, lively, and direct, using active voice whenever possible;
- ✓ The submission includes a maximum of four tables and figures uploaded as separate files, if applicable;
- ✓ The submission adheres to word count and APA 7 stylistic and bibliographic requirements; and
- ✓ The author/s must declare the use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Tools in Figures, Images, and Artwork.

Checklist for Manuscript Submission

- Cover letter
- Declaration form
- Referral form
- Manuscript structure

(Title, Author details and affiliation, Abstract, Keywords, etc. using the **IMRAD** style). See below explanation.

Manuscript Types

Horizon accepts submission of mainly **four** types of manuscripts for peer-review.

1. **Regular Article**
   Regular articles are full-length original empirical investigations, consisting of introduction, materials and methods, results and discussion, conclusions. Original work must provide references and an explanation on research findings that contain new and significant findings.

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2. **Review Article**
   These report critical evaluation of materials about current research that has already been published by organizing, integrating, and evaluating previously published materials. It summarizes the status of knowledge and outline future directions of research within the journal scope. Review articles should aim to provide systemic overviews, evaluations and interpretations of research in a given field. Re-analyses as meta-analysis and systemic reviews are encouraged. The manuscript title must start with "Review Article".

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They are timely, peer-reviewed and brief. These are suitable for the publication of significant technical advances and may be used to:

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Invited papers, Book reviews, Brief reports, Opinion, Case studies, Action research, Concept papers, Theological-Historiographical analysis, and Letters to the Editor may be considered subject to the discretion of the journal editors.

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- **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**: This section should answer the question you raised in the introduction.
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Manuscript Structure

Most scientific papers follow a standard format known as **IMRAD**, an acronym for **Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, And Discussion**. IMRAD can be viewed as a more structured form of the common **IBC** (Introduction–Body–Conclusion) framework used in academic writing. Importantly, IMRAD refers to an overall pattern or organizational logic rather than a complete set of section headings.

Beyond the core IMRAD components, a full research paper typically includes several additional sections: **Title, Authors, Keywords, Abstract, Results and Discussion** (either combined or separate), **Conclusions, Competing Interests Statement, Acknowledgements, Declaration on the Use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Tools in Figures, Images, and Artwork, References,** and a **Biographical Statement of the Author(s)**. Some manuscripts may also include **Appendices** or **Supplementary Materials**.

The **Introduction** outlines the background, current knowledge, rationale, and objectives of the study. The **Materials and Methods** section details how the study was designed and conducted. The **Results** section presents the findings, while the **Discussion** interprets their meaning, significance, and implications, and often proposes directions for future research.

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Aimee Henderson[1] and Nayan Kanwal[2]

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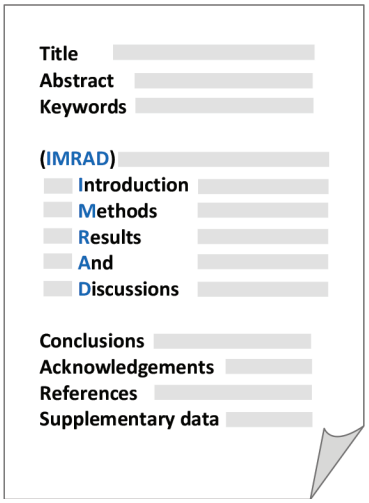
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JHSSR aspires to advance research in the field of social sciences through a collection of quality, relevant, and advanced interdisciplinary articles in the fields associated with the scope of the journal.

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Horizon Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences Research

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