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POLICING DESIRE: IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN *MY POLICEMAN* (2022)

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Abstract

This study examines the tension between social duty and personal desire in *My Policeman* (2022), focusing on how individual identity is shaped and constrained by systemic social pressure. The analysis addresses three central issues: the mechanisms of identity suppression experienced by Tom Burgess, the influence of moral and societal norms on personal choice, and the broader ideological implications of these conflicts. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study draws upon Feminist Literary Criticism, Queer Theory, and the Sociology of Literature to interpret the film's narrative and character dynamics. The findings reveal that patriarchal expectations limit Marion's autonomy, while heteronormative institutions compel Tom to repress his sexual identity, effectively criminalizing his private self. Rather than portraying social expectations merely as cultural pressures, the film presents the legal and moral framework of 1950s Britain as an active "policing force" that regulates private emotions and desires. This perspective offers a deeper understanding of how desire becomes socially monitored and ideologically controlled. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that these restrictive structures not only suppress personal freedom but also fracture emotional integrity and undermine authentic human relationships.

Keywords: *feminist literary criticism; Heteronormativity; identity conflict; My Policeman; Queer theory; sexual repression*

1. Introduction

Film functions as a cultural text, offering a critical lens through which social and psychological, particularly when individual identity deviates from dominant moral norms. In such circumstantial realities can be examined. A recurrent theme in cinematic narratives is the tension between personal desire and social obligations, the pursuit of authenticity often clashes with the pressure to conform, producing internal conflict shaped by institutional, cultural, and domestic forces. This endeavor to harmonize personal ethics with societal obligations has emerged as a recurring motif in literary and cinematic works, particularly within narratives that portray marginalized sexual identities.

In *My Policeman* (2022) directed by Michael Grandage, offers a profound exploration of this theme. Set in 1950s England, the film follows Tom Burgess (played by Harry Styles), a young police officer caught between his affection for museum curator Patrick Hazelwood

and his domestic duty to his wife, Marion Taylor. During this era, homosexuality was not merely a social taboo but a criminal offense under the Buggery Act, which remained in force until the partial decriminalization of 1967. In the specific social atmosphere of 1950s Brighton, a town that balanced a seaside holiday persona with rigid, conservative middle-class values. Tom is compelled to suppress his emotional truth to maintain his social standing.

Although numerous queer period dramas examine taboo romance, *My Policeman* stands out as a case study because of what can be described as the "Triad of Repression." The narrative strength of the film resides in the convergence of three unique foundations of 1950s society: the officer (symbolizing the Law), the curator (symbolizing Culture), and the spouse (symbolizing Domesticity). Tom's identity is not only suppressed by an abstract society, but also by the institutions he supports and the home life he contributed to creating.

This organizational oppression is key to the film's struggle. According to Nguyen & Sharma, (2024), governmental procedures regulate and repress sexual minorities via moral legislation, law enforcement methods, and systemic standards, compelling individuals to hide their identities for survival. This historical context cultivates Internalized Homophobia and strengthens a Heteropatriarchal framework in which the "oppressor" (Tom as a police officer) is also a victim of the system he is committed to maintaining.

For modern viewers, these themes continue to be very pertinent. Hennessee, (2015), contends that in the absence of an appropriate historical and analytical context, contemporary audiences might view queer media depictions uncritically, perceiving them merely as indicators of heightened visibility. Thus, a thorough analysis is essential to comprehend the dynamics of historical oppression. This research aims to explore the protagonist's clash between duty and longing, delve into the ethical consequences of his conflict, and apply Queer Theory to assess how heteronormative pressures disrupt identity formation. This study demonstrates how film stories can depict the harmful effects of a socially limiting setting on emotional wholeness.

2. Literature Review

This study integrates perspective from queer theory, feminism, and the sociology of literature to explore the tension between individual needs and societal obligations in the film *My Policeman* (2022). In order to comprehend how social process shape and suppress identity, this part examines relevant literature and the underlying theoretical framework.

2.1 Prior Research on Identity and Social Pressure

Recent research has increasingly concentrated on the overlap of identity struggles, sexual suppression, and institutional monitoring. Rather than seeing identity as solely an internal conflict, researchers highlight the influence of external structural factors. Institutional and societal pressures frequently establish a "parallel existence" for individuals whose identities diverge from the standard, a phenomenon especially common in the mid-20th century (Drydak, 2021; Lin et al., 2022).

Researchers contend that identity conflict arises when people cannot achieve harmony between their true selves and societal expectations Ziyi & Kamaruzaman (2025). This tension is intensified by heteronormative portrayals in media and governmental bodies, which regulate non-heterosexual bodies through monitoring (Susmayani et al., 2024; van

Meer & Pollmann, 2022). Within *My Policeman*, this results in the strategic application of "intentional marriage" as a means of survival to evade legal shame and social exclusion Nauman & Khan Nawaz, (2024). Although previous research has explored these factors individually, a void persists in understanding how the "triad" of law, culture, and domesticity forms a comprehensive system of oppression.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations

To analyse the phenomenon of identity suppression in *My Policeman*, this study utilizes an integrated theoretical framework consisting of queer theory, feminist literary criticism, and the sociology of literature.

2.2.1 Queer Theory and Performativity

The basis of queer theory in this study is grounded in Butler, (2016) and her concept of gender performativity, which posits that gender and sexual identities are not innate but are socially constructed through repeated performance. Consequently, what is considered "natural" heteronormative behaviour is the result of a cultural power system that forces individuals to conform. In *My Policeman*, Tom Burgess's struggle reflects the theoretical view of Russell et al., (2023), where hiding his orientation is not merely a personal choice but a reaction to structural factors that favour heterosexuality as the only accepted norm. and her concept of gender performativity, which posits that gender and sexual identities are not innate but are socially constructed through repeated performance. Consequently, what is considered "natural" heteronormative behaviour is the result of a cultural power system that forces individuals to conform. In *My Policeman*, Tom Burgess's struggle reflects the theoretical view of Russell et al., (2023), where hiding his orientation is not merely a personal choice but a reaction to structural factors that Favor heterosexuality as the only accepted norm.

2.2.3. Sociology of Literature and Genetic Structuralism

The sociology of literature examines the reciprocal relationship between cinematic works and the society in which they are produced. This approach is anchored in the genetic structuralism of Goldmann (1964), which views the main character's decisions as reflections of 1950s institutions, laws, and social conventions. Tom's conflict functions as a protest against social conventions that limit self-authenticity, placing human struggle within a broader societal context.

2.2.4. Synthesis of the Theoretical Framework

By synthesizing the theories of Butler, (2016) and Beauvoir, (1949) and Goldmann (1964), this research establishes a unified framework to examine the intersection of institutional power and personal identity. While the sociological lens provides the historical backdrop of 1950s British repression, the queer and feminist lenses offer the analytical tools to understand how that repression targets sexual orientation and gender roles. This integrated approach allows for a deeper critique of how social structures and homonegativity demonstrates the systematic dismantling of individual emotional integrity.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

To interpret the tension between duty and desire as depicted in *My Policeman* (2022), this study employs a qualitative descriptive method. This approach is used to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problem Creswell, (2018), Specifically, this study utilizes content analysis to examine how the movie constructs and portrays personal identity and social expectations. As Benyamin et al., (2025) emphasizes systematic investigation of literary texts to expose the development of social identity. The data analysis in this research follows the interactive proposed by Miles et al., (2014), which consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/ verification. In this process, the researcher selected and simplified the visual and narrative sequences from the film that directly relate to the protagonist's internal conflict between genuine aspirations and social obligations.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study implemented theoretical triangulation and prolonged engagement through repeated viewings of the film. Data validation was achieved by cross-checking the analysis with the three established theoretical frameworks mentioned: the sociology of literature, feminist literary criticism, and queer theory. This rigorous cross-examination ensures that the interpretations are consistent with both the historical context of 1950s Britain and the internal logic of the film's narrative.

3.2 Object of the Study

Michael Grandage's 2022 film *My Policeman* is the subject of this study. The film depicts the struggle that the protagonist, Tom Burgess, has between his personal desire and civic obligations. This subject aligns with the theoretical framework of the study, which employs queer theory, feminist literary criticism, and the sociological theory of literature to reveal the social and ideological relevance of the character's conflict.

3.3 Data and Data Source

The scene and visual components from *My Policeman* (2022), which highlight the tension between duty and desire, serve as the main source of information for this study. Scholarly journals and internet pieces on queer theory, feminist criticism, gender identity, and research on social expectations are example of secondary data.

The data were collected using purposive sampling, a technique commonly used in qualitative research to select data that are most relevant to the research objectives. Scenes were deliberately chosen based on their explicit depiction of identity conflict and the tension between personal desire and social obligation.

The data collection process involved the following steps:

- a) Watching *My Policeman* (2022) repeatedly to gain an in-depth understanding of the narrative and visual elements.
- b) Identifying and selecting scenes that illustrate internal conflict, social pressure, and identity suppression.
- c) Transcribing relevant dialogue and documenting significant visual cues related to the research focus.

- d) Collecting secondary sources to support theoretical analysis and contextual interpretation

3.4 Data Collection Technique

To identify scenes that illustrate the tension between duty and desire, the researcher employed the following techniques:

- a) Watching *My Policeman* repeatedly to closely examine significant dialogues, character interactions, and cinematic elements that portray the conflict between personal desires and social obligations.
- b) Collecting relevant secondary sources, such as books, journal articles, and previous studies, to support the theoretical framework and enrich the interpretation of the film's themes and character dynamics.

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

This study uses descriptive qualitative analysis with an emphasis on interpretive coding. The analysis follows these steps:

- a) Data Condensation (Coding): Categorizing the selected scenes into three thematic codes: Identity Suppression (The Closet), Heteronormative Surveillance (The Law), and Domestic Subordination (The Wife).
- b) Data Display: Presenting the coded dialogue and visual elements alongside their theoretical interpretations.
- c) Theoretical Triangulation: Cross-analyzing the findings using Queer Theory (Performativity), Feminism, and Sociology to ensure the reliability and depth of the interpretation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The film *My Policeman* (2022), directed by Michael Grandage, depicts the conflict that arises when an individual's identity clashes with strict social norms. The main character, Tom Burgess, is a young police officer in 1950s England who is caught in a conflict between his duty to society and his partner, and his desire to love someone who goes against social norms. This conflict reflects the global tension between moral obligations and personal desires, which is the main focus of this study.

Through thematic analysis using queer theory, feminist theory, and literary sociology approaches, this study reveals four key elements in the representation of the conflict between duty and desire:

- a) Identity Repression and Institutionalised Homonegativity, which highlights how the duty as a law enforcement officer forces the repression of one's true identity;
- b) Moral Pressure and Patriarchal Domestication, which analyses marriage as a form of 'social obligation' that obscures personal desires;
- c) The Spatiality of Secrecy: 'The Closet' and Institutionalised Homonegativity, which dissects hidden physical spaces as places where desires can manifest beyond the reach of the law; and

- d) The Quest for Identity and The Meaning of Freedom: The Long-term Psychological Cost, which evaluates the long-term impact on psychological wellbeing when a person prioritises social obligations over the integrity of their desires.

4.1.1 Identity Repression and Institutionalized Homonegativity

This behavior is theoretically a form of internalized oppression. According to research by Berg et al., (2016), internalized homonegativity is a process whereby individuals unconsciously internalize society's negative messages about sexuality as part of their self-image. This creates a psychological dilemma between romantic desires and negative beliefs about oneself, triggering feelings of guilt, shame and low self-esteem. In this context, Tom's police uniform becomes an instrument of "performativity" Butler, (2016) that forces him to suppress his emotional integrity in order to maintain his social status under the pressure of heteronormative structures. The presence of a police uniform in a room that should be intimate and relaxed shows Tom's motivation to maintain his social 'shield'. Tom feels the need to validate his masculinity and obedience to the law through these physical attributes. Patrick's reflection in the mirror symbolizes the other side of Tom's life. His hidden desires and passions are placed behind his back, as if Tom is trying to turn his back on or suppress this reality in order to maintain his professional image. In theory, this visual composition represents internalized homonegativity. According to Berg et al., (2016), individuals experiencing this condition often engage in strict self-monitoring of their public image to avoid social stigma. Tom's rigid pose and use of his uniform as his sole identity indicate that he has internalized society's negative message that he is only 'safe' when appearing as a heteronormative law enforcer. Tom's inability to take off his uniform, even in front of Patrick, reflects a deep psychological dilemma. As explained in the study, the pressure to continue hiding behind this artificial identity ultimately triggers an emotional burden in the form of self-isolation and persistent guilt.

The following scene provides a visual representation of Tom's identity oppression.

Figure 1.

Tom Burgess performing his professional identity through the uniform, with Patrick's reflection representing the hidden self (Grandage, 2022).



4.1.2 The Spatiality of Secrecy: "The Closet" as a Physical and Symbolic Prison

Tom Burgess's double life manifests itself not only through his behavior, but also through the physical space he occupies. The concept of 'The Closet' in this narrative shifts from being merely a metaphor to a physical space that limits the existence of his true identity. The scene in Figure 2 shows Tom and Patrick in a narrow, enclosed space with minimal lighting. The composition of the image shows them in a relaxed position but confined by shadows and limited space. The contrast between the darkness of this room and the brightness of public spaces creates a sharp dividing line between the outside world and their secret world. Tom's motivation for choosing this hidden space is to create a 'safe zone' where he can temporarily shed his social role. However, the fact that they have to hide indicates a motivation based on extreme fear of institutional surveillance. Tom feels that only in this narrow, invisible space can he express himself without the threat of punishment or stigmatization from heteronormative structures.

Theoretically, this area serves as a physical representation of the idea of The Closet suggested by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Sedgwick (1990) contends that The Closet is not just a site of concealment, but a framework that governs the lives of gay people through societal knowledge and ignorance. Viewed through the lens of Literary Sociology, this area serves as the opposite of the 'Social Mask' that Tom wears in public; in this place, the mask is lifted, yet it results in physical solitude. This occurrence is also strongly connected to Internalized Homonegativity. Berg et al., (2016) suggest that people who accept negative stigma frequently confine their self-expression to solitary, private areas because of psychological conflicts and intense shame regarding their authentic identity. This restricted area represents how social institutions restrict personal freedom to a highly constrained environment.

Figure 2

Tom and Patrick in a secluded, dimly lit space representing the physical manifestation of "The Closet" (Grandage, 2022)



4.1.3 Moral pressure and patriarchal Domestication

In this narrative, marriage is portrayed not just as a romantic bond but as a tool of systemic oppression that compels individuals to assume deceptive identities for social stability. According to research, Marion, a symbol of women in the 1950s, also endured oppression. "I thought if I loved him enough, he'd change." Marion says. This statement illustrates how women were positioned within the heteronormative institution of marriage as moral protectors and "healing" agents.

As depicted in Figure 3, Tom Burgess and Marion Taylor are seen at their wedding reception. Marion smiles at the camera with a sincere expression of happiness, reflecting the fulfillment of her hopes for married life. In contrast, Tom displays a strained and stiff smile with a gaze that is not fully focused at that moment, creating a sharp emotional contrast between them. Marion's motivation was influenced by classic 1950s values that placed women's happiness in the success of managing the household. Meanwhile, Tom's reason for marrying was as a defensive way to create heteronormative legitimacy in the eyes of society. By marrying Marion, Tom hoped to divert the police's suspicion of his sexual orientation and gain protection from his social status as a husband. From the perspective of Literary Sociology, this marriage was a manifestation of Social Masking. Tom utilized his position as a husband to conceal his true identity, which was considered 'abnormal' by the laws of the time. This also reflects a form of Internal Oppression. according to Berg et al., (2016), people who absorb negative messages from society often engage in self-deception and social deception to avoid stigma. Furthermore, Feminist Theory Beauvior, (1949) views Marion as an individual trapped in domestic norms, where her identity is determined solely through her interactions with men, even though these interactions are based on inauthentic performativity

This moral constraint is illustrated in the wedding scene below:

Figure 3

Tom and Marion's wedding ceremony as a representation of the "social mask" and patriarchal domestication (Grandage, 2022)



4.1.4 The quest for Identity and The Meaning of freedom: The Long-term Psychological Cost

Analyzing the impact of the identity repression experienced by Tom Burgess in his youth on his quality of life and search for meaning in old age, a reflection on the social structure of mid-20th century Britain, which demanded a false life in order to maintain social morality. As seen in Figure 4, the older version of Tom is shown in a close-up composition with a melancholic, expansive landscape in the background. His facial expression reflects deep contemplation, with traces of enduring sadness. The dim natural light emphasizes the emotional isolation felt by this character after years of rejection of his identity. In his old age, Tom's motivation is no longer to avoid, but rather an effort to make peace with his life history. After spending his adolescence seeking social acceptance by wearing the 'mask' of heteronormativity, Tom is now driven by regret over the price he had to pay for social morality. His search for true freedom only began when he realized that emotional integrity was far more valuable than superficial social status.

Tom's psychological state is the long-term result of severe internalized homonegativity. According to research by Morandini et al., (2015), acceptance of negative stigma from society has a significant impact on reducing psychological well-being and causing uncertainty about sexual identity. Tom's limitations in finding emotional support which, according to Drydakis., (2021), is crucial for breaking free from social constraints result in him being trapped in a cycle of constant guilt. The regret shown in Figure 4 supports the findings of Morandini et al., (2015) that low psychological well-being in gay men is usually influenced by shame and pressure to continue hiding their identity. This statement is also supported by Sepúlveda-páez et al., (2022), who note that such suppression of identity has detrimental emotional consequences. Finally, this moment serves as a reminder that hiding one's true self not only harms oneself but also damages those around them, such as Marion and Patrick, affirming that true freedom requires the courage to fully accept oneself. The following images illustrate Tom's emotional turning point and the price of oppression

Figure 4

An old Tom Burgess reflecting on the psychological burden and the cost of long-term identity repression (Grandage, 2022)



4.1.4 Social Significance and Contemporary Relevant

My Policeman's depiction of the conflict between duty and personal desire is not only relevant to the 1950s but also addresses current social issues. Even though awareness has grown more inclusive, many people today still view LGBT identities as "different". This demonstrates the timelessness and universality of the film's main premise. For example, there is a public debate in Indonesian society regarding the recognition of LGBT identity. Consequently, conflicts like Tom's are not just personal issues; rather, they reflect a social system that is not fully equitable to the diversity of human identities, which is why this research is so important. This analysis concludes that, in addition to being a tale of forbidden love, *My Policeman* critiques social norms that limit people's freedom and honesty in self-expression.

4.2 Discussion

The analysis in this study proves that the film *My Policeman* (2022) deeply depicts the struggle between duty and desire through four main components. This discussion elucidates the manner in which the convergence of Queer Theory, Feminist Literary Criticism, and Literary Sociology engenders a comprehensive understanding of the structural forces and public morality that suppress self-identity and engender collective suffering.

4.2.1 Identity Repression and Institutionalized Homonegativity

The suppression of Tom Burgess' identity is a clear manifestation of the heteronormative social structure of 1950s Britain. Within the framework of Queer Theory, Tom's decision to hide his sexual orientation was not merely a personal choice, but a reaction to institutionalized homonegativity. Visually, Tom's police uniform serves as a symbol of 'Duty' and state authority, which paradoxically demands the denial of his own emotional truth. This is consistent with the findings of Morandini et al., (2015) that the pressure to conform to heteronormative norms creates chronic sexual identity uncertainty. This oppression is not merely a legal issue, but a systemic effort by state institutions to ensure that their subjects remain within the confines of uniform public morality.

4.2.2 Moral Pressure and Patriarchal Domestication

This film shows that patriarchal norms cause mutual oppression from a feminist literary criticism perspective. According to literary sociology, Tom and Marion's marriage is considered a 'social mask'. Tom uses marriage to gain social status, while Marion is trapped in patriarchal domestication, where her identity is only referred to as 'the ideal wife'. The conflict between duty (being an obedient husband) and desire (his attraction to Patrick) creates emotional suffering for both parties. Tom entered into this sham marriage out of fear of stigma, a phenomenon validated by contemporary research showing that homosexual individuals often find themselves trapped in heteronormative institutions to avoid social rejection. Tom's stiff smile during the wedding ceremony serves as a visual representation of the 'mask' that hides his internal turmoil.

4.2.3 The Spatiality of Secrecy: "The Closet" as a Physical and Symbolic Prison

The manifestation of the conflict between duty and desire is further evidenced through the division of space. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concept of The Closet is applied here to the physical spaces—such as the basement or secluded rooms—that separate Tom's

secret world from public surveillance. This cramped space symbolizes how law and public morality imprison freedom of expression. Outside this space, Tom must perform his "Duty," yet it is only within the darkness of "the closet" that his "Desire" can manifest. This spatial dichotomy emphasizes that in 1950s society, emotional integrity could only exist if it remained invisible to the law.

4.2.4 The Quest for Identity and The Meaning of Freedom: The Long-term Psychological Cost

Ultimately, prioritizing social obligations over emotional authenticity leads to profound and enduring psychological consequences. According to Morandini et al., (2015), the identity repression Tom undergoes triggers Internalized Homonegativity, where he absorbs societal stigma into his own self-perception. This tension between duty and desire not only affects Tom's mental health but also diminishes the psychological wellbeing of those around him. As evidenced by Sepúlveda-páez et al., (2022), the guilt and emotional pressure of concealing one's identity have long-term consequences that prevent individuals from achieving true freedom. The film serves as a critique of social structures that continue to view identity diversity as a threat, asserting that true freedom requires the courage to dismantle the "social mask" in favor of self-honesty.

5. Conclusion

Through the lenses of Queer Theory, Feminist Literary Criticism, and Sociological Literary Theory, this study has examined how the conflict between social obligations (duty) and personal desire is constructed and portrayed in Michael Grandage's film *My Policeman* (2022). The analysis concludes that the intense societal pressures of 1950s Britain shaped the protagonist Tom Burgess's central struggle, manifesting primarily as the repression of sexual identity enforced by a pervasive heteronormative social structure. The Policing of Desire Across Eras Ultimately, the tragedy depicted in the film serves as more than a historical snapshot; it is a profound critique of the "policing of desire" that continues to exist in various guises today. While the overt criminalization seen in the 1950s has receded in many parts of the world, the underlying structural forces that demand a "Social Mask" remain active. In the contemporary era, this policing often takes the form of subtle social exclusion, digital surveillance, or familial pressure, which as evidenced by Morandini et al., (2015) still leads to significant internalized homonegativity and diminished psychological wellbeing. The struggle for "wholeness" remains a universal human challenge. Tom's story is a poignant reminder that as long as social institutions prioritize rigid moral conformity over emotional integrity; individuals will continue to face the devastating choice between social acceptance and authentic selfhood. The film warns us that the cost of such repression is a "living ghosthood" a state of existence where one is physically present but emotionally dead. Therefore, the search for freedom is not merely a legal battle but an ongoing quest for the courage to be true to oneself in the face of ever-evolving social constraints.

Several suggestions for more scholarly research in adjacent domains might be made in light of these findings:

1. Expanding the Scope of Characters Analysis

- **Marion's Perspective:** To thoroughly explore the internal conflict and psychological harm Marion Taylor experiences as both a victim and an unconscious upholder of a

heteronormative patriarchal system, future research could examine her character through a more comprehensive feminist psychoanalytic lens. This approach could provide deeper insight into how gender norms constrain personal choice, even for individuals who appear to conform to societal expectations.

- **Patrick's Role as a Catalyst:** In the oppressive social climate of the 1950s, researchers might focus on museum curator Patrick Hazelwood to explore his identity and role as a symbol of artistic authenticity and resistance. This approach would allow for a comparison between Patrick's expression of desire and Tom's institutional repression.

2. Exploring Comparative and Media Studies:

- **Intertextual Comparison:** *My Policeman* could be compared with other historical or contemporary works that explore the tension between individual identity and state-enforced morality to highlight common themes in the human struggle against societal norms.
- **Semiotics and Conventional Cinematography:** Future research could focus on the visual semiotics of the film, including the generational contrast (young Tom vs. old Tom), the artistic setting (the museum), and the recurring motif of the police uniform. This approach would enhance understanding of how themes of identity suppression and emotional repression are visually constructed and conveyed through the film's cinematography.

3. Delving into Cotemporary Relevance

- **Cross-Cultural Application:** Future research could explore how the film's central conflict is perceived and interpreted across different cultural contexts, considering its relevance in diverse social settings, including Indonesian society. This approach would further demonstrate how the film reflects a social structure that has yet to fully embrace the diversity of human identities worldwide.
- **Sociopsychological Impact:** Utilizing the framework of Morandini et al., (2015), future studies could investigate how modern social media pressures mirror the psychological burdens of the 1950s, particularly regarding how contemporary "closets" continue to generate collective suffering and mediate feelings of guilt.

Overall, by combining queer, feminist, and sociological viewpoints to emphasize the persistent conflicts between social responsibilities and individual desires within heteronormative and patriarchal power structure, this study broadens the conversation on the construction of intersectional identity in contemporary film analysis.

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GLOBALIZING JAVANESE CULTURE THROUGH LITERARY TRANSLATION: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF JAVANESE TERMS IN RATIH KUMALA'S *GADIS KRETEK*

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Abstract

This study analyzes Javanese cultural terms in Ratih Kumala's *Gadis Kretek* and their English translations within the context of cultural globalization. As a contemporary Indonesian novel rich in local cultural expressions, *Gadis Kretek* presents challenges for translators in mediating Javanese social practices and cultural values for international readers. This study aims to identify Javanese cultural terms, classify them according to Katan's cultural levels (surface, formal, and deep culture), and examine their ideological implications using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The data are drawn from the Indonesian source text and its official English translation, translated by Annie Tucker and published by Monsoon Books in 2016 (2024 edition). Employing a qualitative discourse analysis approach, this study compiled 167 culture-specific items and analyzed their corresponding renderings in the target text. Translation strategies were identified based on Baker's taxonomy and interpreted through Venuti's domestication and foreignization frameworks. The findings reveal a predominance of domestication-oriented strategies, particularly cultural substitution and neutralization, alongside selective foreignization through loan-word retention. This pattern indicates an ideological tendency to prioritize accessibility for global audiences while partially maintaining Javanese cultural markers. As a result, the cultural meanings intended for global introduction are not fully transmitted, as domestication tends to simplify, generalize, or dilute culture-specific nuances embedded in the source text. In this respect, the study demonstrates that translation acts as a mediating practice that reshapes cultural identity in globalization by negotiating between cultural visibility and readability, contributing to discourse-oriented research in literary translation.

Keywords: *cultural globalization; discourse analysis; foreignization; Javanese culture; translation ideology*

1. Introduction

The translation of Ratih Kumala's *Gadis Kretek* illustrates how Javanese culture enters global literary circulation through English. In the context of globalization, translation plays a crucial role as a medium through which local cultures are introduced to international

audiences. As a cross-cultural practice, translation does not merely transfer linguistic meaning but negotiates cultural values, worldviews, and social practices embedded in the source text (Siregar et al., 2022). In this sense, translation functions as a mediating space where local identities are represented, reinterpreted, and made accessible to global readers.

Translation is not simply a mechanical process of transferring meaning from a source language into a target language, but a complex intercultural practice that negotiates meaning between linguistic and cultural systems (Mukhtarovna & Tanjung, 2020). This negotiation becomes particularly challenging when translation involves culture-specific terms, as meaning is closely intertwined with culturally shared knowledge, beliefs, and social practices (Zitouni, 2022). Javanese culture, in particular, embodies distinctive practices, symbols, philosophies, and social norms rooted in its historical and cultural background, which pose significant challenges for translators when rendered into another language (Maksvytytė, 2019).

These challenges are especially evident in literary translation. Cultural exchange through translation is prominently reflected in literary works, which often contain dense cultural expressions that represent the identity of the source community (Fitriana, 2016; Zahrawi, 2018). In the context of globalization, literary translation plays a vital role in globalizing local culture by mediating culturally embedded expressions for international audiences. Literary works function not only as aesthetic artifacts but also as cultural media that convey values, traditions, and ways of life (Indrastuti, 2018). However, when Indonesian literary works rich in local cultural elements are translated into English, inaccurate or ideologically driven translation choices may result in textual distortion, simplification, or the loss of cultural nuance, thereby limiting target readers' comprehensive understanding of the source culture. As a literary work deeply rooted in local traditions, social hierarchies, and cultural expressions, *Gadis Kretek* presents numerous cultural markers that are closely tied to Javanese ways of life. When translated into English, these cultural elements require careful negotiation to maintain their meanings while remaining accessible to global readers.

Although numerous studies have examined the translation of cultural elements in literary texts, research that specifically focuses on the translation of Javanese cultural expressions in contemporary Indonesian novels remains limited. In particular, few studies have explored the translation of Javanese cultural terms in *Gadis Kretek* by linking translation strategies with translator ideology within the broader context of cultural globalization. Moreover, studies that integrate domestication and foreignization strategies with a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective to conceptualize translation as a discursive and ideological practice are still scarce.

To address this gap, the present study focuses on the English translation of *Gadis Kretek*. This study aims to identify Javanese cultural terms in the novel, classify them based on Katan's cultural levels, and analyze their ideological implications using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. By doing so, this research contributes to translation studies and cultural globalization by demonstrating how translator ideology shapes the global visibility and representation of Javanese culture in international literary circulation.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies have explored *Gadis Kretek* in both its novel and film adaptations, applying various analytical perspectives. A significant emphasis has been placed on translation studies: (a) studies on *Gadis Kretek* and its cultural element (Hardiyanti et al.,

2021; Virtianti et al., 2024; Arifianto & Asmarani, 2024; Widarwati & Purnomo, 2025; Wulandari et al., 2025); (b) studies on translation ideology (Mukminin & Sajarwa, 2025a-c; Sianipar et al., 2025; Azizah et al., 2025). Several studies have examined the translation of cultural elements in *Gadis Kretek*, but their analytical scope is often limited. While Hardiyanti et al. (2021) focus on translation issues in general terms, their framework lacks ideological analysis, which this study addresses through CDA. On the other hand, Wulandari et al. (2025) point out information loss due to cultural and social gaps but do not analyze the specific mechanisms through which this loss occurs or how translation strategies can help preserve cultural nuances. Widarwati and Purnomo (2025) also discuss how gender representation is influenced by Javanese cultural elements; however, they do not systematically apply critical discourse analysis to reveal how cultural ideology is constructed and conveyed through translation.

Furthermore, Virtianti et al. (2024) analyze cultural words in the first episode of the *Gadis Kretek* series, while Arifianto and Asmarani (2024) examine subtitle translations using Newmark's translation procedures. Although these studies make valuable contributions, they do not extend beyond micro-linguistic analysis to explore how translation choices serve as strategies for promoting local culture to a global audience. In contrast, Sianipar et al. (2025) address the challenges of translating sarcasm and irony, especially with machine translation tools like ChatGPT. However, their focus remains on technological limitations rather than the broader concept of cultural globalization. Additionally, Azizah et al. (2025) identify variations in the techniques used to translate interrogative sentences, specifically single, couplet, and triplet structures. Mukminin and Sajarwa (2025a-c) examined Javanese address terms and cultural negotiation but did not explore globalization. Hence, these studies provide valuable insights but remain limited in scope.

Based on the explanation above, few studies integrate discourse analysis and ideology to examine Javanese cultural terms in *Gadis Kretek*. This study redefines literary translation, viewing it not just as a linguistic transfer but as a strategic tool for cultural globalization. Unlike earlier studies, this research applies Katan's cultural levels and CDA to reveal ideological implications. It seeks to identify Javanese cultural terms in the novel *Gadis Kretek*, classify these terms according to Katan's three levels of culture (surface, formal, and deep), and analyze their implications using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. By employing discourse analysis to explore the translation of Javanese cultural terms, this research goes beyond merely identifying translation techniques; it investigates how translation choices construct, negotiate, and globalize local cultural meanings for international audiences. By integrating insights from translation studies, discourse analysis, and cultural globalization, this study highlights how local Javanese culture is represented, recontextualized, and circulated through literary translation. This perspective provides new insights into the role of translation as an active agent in shaping cultural meanings in a global context, an aspect that has not been systematically addressed in previous studies of *Gadis Kretek*. Hence, this study extends translation research by showing how translator ideology mediates Javanese culture in global literary circulation and shifts from micro-linguistic focus to macro-level discourse and ideology.

In sum, the analytical framework is constructed by integrating three main theoretical perspectives: Venuti's ideology of translation, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, and Katan's cultural classification. These frameworks are complementary in explaining how cultural elements are represented, mediated, and negotiated in translated texts. Venuti's

concepts of domestication and foreignization are employed to identify the translator's ideological orientation in selecting translation strategies, particularly in determining the extent to which source-culture elements are preserved or adapted to the target culture.

Katan's cultural classification, meanwhile, serves as the basis for identifying and categorizing cultural elements found in the source text according to their levels of cultural depth, ranging from surface culture to deep culture. This classification enables a more systematic analysis of which types of cultural elements are most frequently modified or maintained in the translation process. Furthermore, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis is applied to interpret the ideological implications of these translation choices, particularly at the level of *discursive practice*, where translation is understood as a non-neutral social practice shaped by power relations, ideology, and target readers' expectations. By integrating these three perspectives, this study conceptualizes translation not merely as a linguistic process, but as a discursive practice that plays a significant role in the globalization of local culture. To clarify the integration of these theoretical perspectives and their analytical functions in this study, a conceptual framework is presented in Table 1, summarizing the relationship between cultural elements, translation strategies, ideological orientation, and discursive practice.

Table 1.
Conceptual Framework of Cultural Translation Analysis

Theoretical Framework	Key Concept	Analytical Function in This Study
Katan (2009)	Cultural levels (surface, intermediate, deep culture)	Identifying and classifying types of cultural elements in the source text.
Baker (1992)	Translation strategies	Analyzing how cultural terms are translated in the target text.
Venuti (1995)	Domestication & Foreignization	Interpreting the ideological orientation of the translator.
Fairclough (1995)	Discursive practice	Explaining translation as a social and ideological practice within cultural globalization.

Note: Table X summarizes the analytical framework of this study, illustrating how cultural classification, translation strategies, and ideological analysis are systematically integrated to examine the representation of Javanese culture in the translated text.

3. Research Method

This study analyzes the translation of Javanese cultural terms in Ratih Kumala's *Gadis Kretek* and its English translation using a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in discourse analysis. The focus of the analysis is on how culture-specific expressions are translated and how translation strategies reflect the translator's ideological orientation in the context of cultural globalization. The data consist of the Indonesian novel *Gadis Kretek* by Ratih Kumala, first published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama in 2012, and its official English translation. The analysis is based on the English version of *Gadis Kretek*, translated by Annie Tucker and published by Monsoon Books in 2016 (2024 edition). A purposive sampling technique was employed to select the data. The entire source text was read closely to identify lexical items, expressions, and references that explicitly or implicitly represent Javanese cultural values, traditions, social practices, and belief systems. Only terms that

carry culture-specific meanings and pose potential translation challenges were included, resulting in a total of 167 cultural terms. Terms with purely denotative meanings or without cultural relevance were excluded from the dataset.

The analytical procedure was conducted in three systematic stages. First, identification was carried out by extracting culture-specific expressions from the source text and pairing them with their corresponding renderings in the target text. Second, categorization was performed by classifying each identified term according to Katan's (2009) cultural levels—surface culture, formal culture, and deep culture—to determine the depth of cultural meaning involved. Third, interpretation was conducted through comparative discourse analysis by examining how the selected terms were translated and how translation strategies reflect ideological positioning within the broader context of cultural globalization. Translation strategies were coded based on Baker's taxonomy, including cultural substitution, loan words, paraphrase, and omission. The application of these strategies was then interpreted in relation to Venuti's domestication and foreignization frameworks to identify the translator's dominant ideological tendency (as cited in Gang, 2024). To support analytical rigor, the frequency of each translation strategy was tallied to identify dominant patterns and tendencies in the translation.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, expert triangulation was employed through consultation with translation scholars. This process was conducted to verify the consistency of term selection, cultural categorization, strategy identification, and ideological interpretation. Overall, this methodological design ensures analytical rigor and provides a replicable framework for examining cultural globalization through literary translation.

4. Results and Discussion

This study reveals how translation strategies mediate the representation of Javanese culture in the novel *Gadis Kretek*. Before examining the specific strategies applied in the English translation, it is necessary to map the cultural landscape of the source text by identifying and classifying the Javanese cultural terms embedded in the narrative. The classification of these terms provides an analytical foundation for understanding which aspects of Javanese culture are most frequently represented and how they function within the story. By organizing the cultural terms into structured categories, this study establishes a basis for interpreting subsequent translation choices and assessing how different types of cultural elements are treated in the process of translation.

Table 2.

The Classification of Javanese Cultural Terms in the Novel Gadis Kretek

No.	Cultural Level	Total	Data
1.	Technical/Surface Culture	45	<i>Abab, Cendol, Dingklik, Kendil</i>
2.	Formal/Intermediate Culture	95	<i>Bejo, Boro-boro, Cethot</i>
3.	Informal/deep culture	27	<i>Dedemit, Menyan, Sanggul, Kebaya, Batik</i>
Total		167	

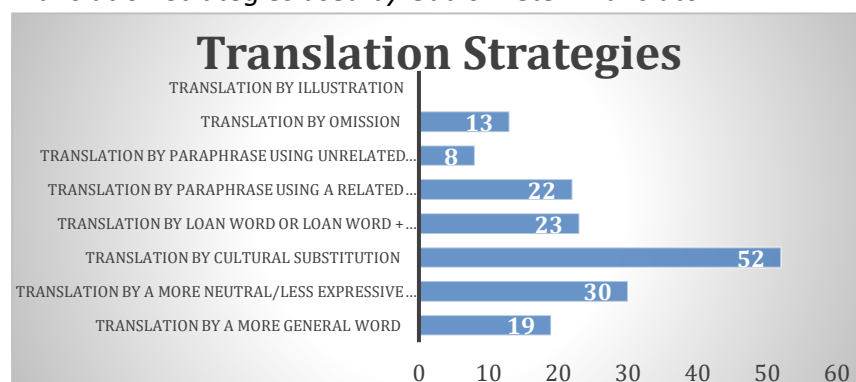
Note. The table classifies Javanese cultural terms found in the English translation of *Gadis Kretek* based on their cultural depth, adapted from surface, intermediate, and deep cultural levels.

The classification results indicate that formal or intermediate cultural elements constitute the largest proportion of the data, followed by technical or surface cultural elements, while informal or deep cultural elements appear less frequently. This distribution suggests that the novel predominantly represents Javanese culture through socially embedded practices, institutional norms, and everyday interactions rather than through deeply implicit cultural values. Such a pattern has important implications for translation, as intermediate cultural elements tend to be more visible and context-dependent, making them more susceptible to strategic adaptation in the target text. This classification therefore provides a necessary basis for examining how different types of cultural elements are negotiated through translation strategies.

Building on this cultural classification, the following section examines the translation strategies employed to render these cultural elements into English, as summarized in chart 1.

Chat 1.

Translation Strategies used by Gadis Kretek Translator



Of the 167 identified cultural terms, translation by cultural substitution emerges as the most frequently applied strategy, accounting for 52 instances (31.1%). This is followed by translation by a more neutral or less expressive word with 30 instances (18.0%), translation by loan word or loan word plus explanation with 23 instances (13.8%), and translation by paraphrase using a related word with 22 instances (13.2%). Another strategy that appears with a noticeable frequency is translation by a more general word, which occurs in 19 cases (11.4%), indicating a tendency to reduce cultural specificity while maintaining core meaning. Less frequently employed strategies include translation by omission with 13 instances (7.8%) and translation by paraphrase using unrelated word with 8 instances (4.8%). Meanwhile, translation by illustration is not observed in the data. These proportions suggest that the translator predominantly prioritizes readability and accessibility for target readers while selectively retaining culturally specific elements.

4.1 Translation Strategies in Translating Cultural Terms

The findings indicate that the translator employed various translation strategies as proposed by Baker (2018). These strategies were used to address semantic gaps and cultural differences between the source language and the target language. The results reveal a clear tendency toward target-oriented translation practices, with domestication emerging as the dominant ideological orientation.

Among the eight strategies identified, translation by cultural substitution appears most frequently, with 52 instances. This strategy involves replacing source-culture elements with culturally familiar terms in the target language to enhance readability and comprehension. The dominance of this strategy suggests that the translator prioritizes accessibility for international readers by adapting culturally specific concepts into more familiar referential frameworks. One illustrative example is the translation of *jimat* as *magic charm*. In Javanese culture, *jimat* embodies complex spiritual, metaphysical, and ritual meanings closely associated with *kejawen* beliefs and inherited traditions (Fauzia, 2020). However, when rendered as *magic charm*, these multilayered cultural meanings are simplified into a more general notion of a supernatural object commonly found in Western fantasy narratives. This shift results in semantic narrowing and cultural reduction; whereby philosophical and spiritual dimensions embedded in the original term are diminished in favor of conceptual proximity and reader familiarity.

Such cultural substitution aligns with the findings of Yonamine (2022) and Husin (2022), who argue that translators often resort to more universal concepts to balance cultural specificity and communicative effectiveness. From Fairclough's perspective, this practice represents a form of cultural re-representation, in which linguistic choices function ideologically to reshape how the source culture is constructed within target-language discourse. In this context, the translator implicitly positions Javanese culture as requiring adaptation to meet global readability norms, thus reinforcing domestication as a dominant translation ideology (Venuti, as cited in Gang, 2024).

In addition to cultural substitution, the strategies of translation by a more neutral or less expressive word (30 instances) and translation by paraphrase using a related word (23 instances) are also frequently employed. These patterns indicate the translator's consistent emphasis on clarity and textual fluency, suggesting a prioritization of readability for target readers over the retention of culturally embedded affective meanings. For instance, the translation of *simbok* as *mother* demonstrates semantic neutralization: while *mother* accurately conveys kinship relations, it fails to capture the emotional closeness, social hierarchy, and cultural intimacy inherent in *simbok* within Javanese society. This loss reflects a broader tendency in cross-cultural literary translation to streamline culturally specific terms for global accessibility. As noted by Kirana, Widhyasmaramurti, and Wrihatni (2025), Javanese maternal terms carry pragmatic and affective meanings that resist full representation through neutral lexical equivalents in English. Consequently, such translation choices not only shape textual fluency but also influence how Javanese cultural values are mediated and circulated within global literary spaces.

Similarly, the translation of *dolan* as *pleasure of some leisure time* illustrates the use of paraphrase to explicate culturally embedded concepts. In Javanese culture, *dolan* refers to communal and socially oriented leisure activities rather than individual recreation. Consistent with Baker (2018), paraphrasing is often employed when implicit cultural meanings may lead to ambiguity in the target language. While this strategy enhances explicitness and comprehension for global readers, it simultaneously reduces the expressive distinctiveness of the source culture by reframing collective social practices into more generalized notions of leisure.

Viewed through the lens of translation ideology, the dominance of neutralization and paraphrasing strategies further reinforces domestication as the guiding principle of the

translation. As Venuti (2017) argues, domestication prioritizes reader comfort and textual fluency by minimizing cultural strangeness. However, as Munday and Zhang (2017) note, translation also functions as a discursive process that shapes how cultures are represented and interpreted, meaning that excessive simplification may result in partial cultural representation, particularly in translations of culturally dense literary texts such as *Gadis Kretek*.

Conversely, instances of translation by loan word or loan word plus explanation (22 instances) demonstrate selective efforts toward foreignization. The retention of cultural terms such as *kebaya* indicates the translator's decision to preserve culturally significant symbols that embody identity, tradition, and social values. By maintaining the original term, the translator allows the source culture to remain visible within the translated text, inviting target readers to encounter cultural difference rather than its erasure. This practice supports Zaid and Bennoudi's (2023) assertion that translation is inherently ideological, with translators actively shaping cultural representation rather than merely transferring meaning. Beyond dominant domestication-oriented strategies, several secondary strategies were identified, including translation by a more general word (19 instances), translation by paraphrase using unrelated words (8 instances), and translation by omission (13 instances). For example, translating *kembang setaman* as *a plant* results in the loss of ritualistic and symbolic meanings associated with Javanese traditions. Likewise, the omission of terms such as *kromo*, *kulo*, and *paitan* eliminates markers of social hierarchy and politeness that are central to Javanese sociolinguistic practices. Omission thus reduces the representation of social hierarchy, limiting readers' exposure to Javanese relational systems that structure respect, social distance, and interpersonal positioning. In this sense, omission does not merely simplify the text but fundamentally alters the cultural logic through which social relations are understood, risking a flattened and decontextualized portrayal of Javanese society. As Kruger and van Rooy (2016) argue, omission functions ideologically by regulating which cultural meanings are made visible or invisible in the target discourse, thereby shaping how the source culture is selectively framed for the target audience.

Notably, the absence of translation by illustration suggests that the translator did not employ visual or explanatory mediation to bridge cultural gaps. Overall, these findings indicate that target-oriented strategies dominate the translation of *Gadis Kretek*, reinforcing the prevalence of domestication while allowing limited space for foreignization to sustain cultural authenticity.

4.2 Translator's Ideology

The ideological orientation of the translation is examined through Venuti's framework of domestication and foreignization. The findings reveal that domestication is the dominant ideology guiding the translation process. This is evident in the frequent use of cultural substitution and neutralization strategies, which aim to align Javanese cultural expressions with the expectations and interpretive frameworks of international readers. Nevertheless, foreignization is not entirely absent. The use of loan words and loan words accompanied by explanations indicates the translator's awareness of the importance of preserving local cultural elements that lack direct equivalents in English. These instances function as ideological interventions that resist complete cultural assimilation and maintain the visibility of Javanese identity within global literary circulation.

The coexistence of domestication and foreignization suggests ideological hybridity rather than a strict binary opposition. While domestication enhances accessibility and global reach, selective foreignization serves as a corrective strategy to prevent excessive cultural dilution. This finding supports Fitriyantisya and Munandar's (2021) and Haseeb et al.'s (2025) arguments that balanced translation practices are necessary to sustain cultural identity in the context of globalization. In this sense, the translation of *Gadis Kretek* operates as a site of ideological negotiation, where readability for a global audience is continuously weighed against the responsibility to preserve culturally embedded meanings. Such negotiation highlights the translator's agency in mediating local values for international circulation, demonstrating that translation is not merely a technical act but a culturally and politically situated practice.

4.3 The Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis

Within Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, the translation of *Gadis Kretek* is understood as a discursive practice shaped by ideology and power relations (Ali & Jassim, 2022). At the textual level, the dominance of domestication strategies reflects the translator's tendency to universalize Javanese cultural meanings in accordance with global readership norms (Martynyuk & Akhmedova, 2022). These choices align with globalization logic that prioritizes readability and market accessibility (Bołtuć, 2021), but they also risk reducing cultural complexity (Hasmiati et al., 2025).

At the level of socio-cultural practice, the translation operates as a site of negotiation between local identity and global circulation. The translator functions as a mediating agent who selectively filters cultural meanings for an international audience that occupies a dominant position in the global literary system (Tymoczko, 2021). In the case of *Gadis Kretek*, this mediation is evident in the consistent prioritization of culturally neutral lexical choices alongside the selective retention of emblematic cultural terms, which together shape how Javanese social life, values, and traditions are made legible to global readers. Although domestication prevails, the selective use of foreignization through retained cultural terms represents limited resistance to cultural homogenization (Tian, 2023), allowing fragments of Javanese cultural specificity to remain visible within a translation otherwise oriented toward global readability.

Thus, the translation of *Gadis Kretek* exemplifies how translation ideology operates as a mechanism of compromise, balancing cultural adaptation with the preservation of local identity within global discourse. The predominance of domestication, tempered by selective foreignization, demonstrates how Javanese cultural meanings are not fully erased but strategically reshaped to align with global readability norms. This pattern confirms that the translator's choices actively structure which aspects of Javanese identity become visible, simplified, or marginalized in the English version of the novel. As argued by Njonge (2024), translation is not a neutral act but a socially embedded practice that reflects broader power relations in cross-cultural communication, a dynamic that is clearly manifested in the mediated global circulation of *Gadis Kretek*.

5. Conclusion

By positioning translation as an ideological site where domestication, foreignization, and global power asymmetries intersect, this study offers a novel contribution by

demonstrating that the global circulation of local literature is shaped not only by linguistic choices but also by discursive constraints that regulate the visibility and legitimacy of local culture within the international literary sphere. This study is also among the first to apply CDA and Katan's cultural levels to *Gadis Kretek*. The findings confirm that the translation of *Gadis Kretek* operates as a non-neutral social practice, in which translators' decisions are influenced by readability demands, global readership expectations, and the position of Javanese culture within the global literary hierarchy. The dominance of domestication reflects an adaptive strategy that enables wider circulation of the text, while simultaneously revealing an ideological negotiation that risks reducing the complexity of source-culture meanings. Nevertheless, the selective use of foreignization indicates that translation also functions as a limited site of resistance against cultural homogenization, allowing certain local elements to remain visible and recognizable in the translated text. Hence, domestication facilitates accessibility, while selective foreignization preserves cultural authenticity. This suggests that the translation ideology in *Gadis Kretek* is hybrid and contextual rather than strictly dichotomous, operating as a strategic compromise shaped by global power relations. Therefore, the findings inform translator decision-making in balancing readability with cultural preservation.

However, this study is limited by its focus on a single novel and a single language pair, which restricts the broader generalizability of the findings. In addition, the analysis relies primarily on qualitative interpretation and does not incorporate readers' reception or translators' perspectives, both of which could provide deeper insights into ideological motivations and interpretive effects. Future studies may expand the scope by comparing different Indonesian novels, examining multiple language pairs, or investigating readers' responses to translated cultural terms. Nevertheless, this study contributes to translation studies and cultural globalization by demonstrating how translator ideology mediates the global representation and visibility of Javanese culture.

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CULTURAL AWARENESS IN EFL PEDAGOGY: A SCOPING REVIEW

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Abstract

This scoping review maps 25 studies (2021–2025) on cultural awareness integration in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts using Arksey and O'Malley's framework. Analysis identified four central themes: materials and curriculum representation, teacher beliefs and practices, learner perceptions and outcomes, and pedagogical strategies. Findings reveal persistent implementation challenges across all themes. Textbook analyses revealed systematic Western bias, with 70% of cultural content emphasizing target-culture contexts versus 30% local contexts. Teacher studies disclosed significant gaps between stated beliefs and classroom practices, which remained incidental rather than systematic. Learner research demonstrated positive attitudes toward intercultural learning, yet showed limited competence beyond familiar cultural contexts. Methodologically, databases searched included ERIC, Scopus, and Google Scholar using keywords including "cultural awareness in ELT," "intercultural competence in EFL," and "intercultural communicative competence." Qualitative approaches dominated (44% of studies). All reviewed studies were conducted in Indonesian EFL contexts, limiting generalizability. Critical gaps include scarcity of longitudinal designs, limited comparative multi-site research, insufficient experimental studies, concentration on tertiary education (75% of learner studies), and minimal investigation of technology-mediated intercultural learning. Pedagogically, findings indicate two reform priorities. First, curriculum design needs balanced cultural representation and assessment frameworks valuing intercultural competence alongside linguistic proficiency. Second, teacher development requires systematic training in intercultural communicative competence frameworks, particularly Byram's model, integrated with task-based, project-based, and technology-mediated pedagogies. This synthesis provides evidence-based guidance for curriculum designers, teacher educators, and researchers advancing intercultural communicative competence in EFL contexts.

Keywords: *cultural awareness; intercultural communicative competence; EFL pedagogy; scoping review; teacher development.*

1. Introduction

Cultural awareness in EFL pedagogy remains insufficiently synthesized systematically, despite its growing recognition as a fundamental component of effective English language

teaching and the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence. Although researchers have increasingly produced individual studies that examine cultural representation in teaching materials, teacher beliefs and classroom practices, as well as learners' perceptions and attitudes toward culture, there is still no comprehensive mapping that clarifies how cultural awareness is conceptualized, researched, and pedagogically applied across diverse global EFL contexts. This lack of an integrative overview creates a significant gap in the field, as it prevents educators and curriculum designers from clearly understanding existing theoretical frameworks, methodological trends, and practical strategies supported by empirical evidence. Consequently, their ability to design coherent, culturally responsive, and evidence-based instructional practices is limited, particularly in contemporary EFL classrooms that are becoming increasingly diverse, intercultural, and digitally connected.

To address this gap effectively, it is essential to first define cultural awareness within EFL contexts. In English Language Teaching (ELT), cultural awareness refers to learners' understanding of cultural norms, values, and communicative conventions, both within their own culture and those of other communities, as well as their ability to critically reflect on and respond appropriately to cultural differences. (Byram, 1997). Related constructs such as intercultural communicative competence (ICC), intercultural sensitivity, and multicultural competence offer additional conceptual resources for pedagogy. In practice, teachers integrate cultural awareness through multiple forms: incorporating multicultural literature, adapting textbook content, designing intercultural tasks, or embedding reflective activities that foster perspective-taking.

Building on this conceptual foundation, recent empirical studies from diverse contexts demonstrate both the potential and challenges of cultural integration. Recent empirical studies from diverse global contexts demonstrate both the potential and challenges of cultural integration in EFL. Research from China shows that task-based approaches enhance learners' critical cultural awareness and willingness to communicate (Xu et al., 2025). In Colombian contexts, (Ávila & Riveros, 2024) demonstrate that intercultural communication activities in EFL enable learners to develop intercultural understanding, show respect for diverse cultures, and engage meaningfully with global perspectives through autonomous language practice. Across these contexts, systematic reviews indicate that multicultural literature and game-based approaches can enhance engagement and intercultural awareness.

However, three critical gaps persist in this expanding literature. First, researchers have not comprehensively mapped prevailing themes, pedagogical strategies, research designs, participant populations, and educational settings in recent EFL cultural awareness research, leaving practitioners without a coherent overview of current trends. Second, comparative analyses distinguishing patterns across primary, secondary, and tertiary education or across geographic regions remain limited, hindering context-sensitive curriculum development. Third, while materials analysis is well represented, fewer studies synthesize findings on enacted classroom practices and their documented effects on learners' intercultural development (Mokoginta, 2024; Permatasari, 2023). These gaps create an urgent need for systematic synthesis that maps the current research landscape and identifies priority areas for future inquiry.

The primary aim of this scoping review is to strengthen theoretical clarity and pedagogical decision-making in EFL by providing a systematic and integrative understanding of how cultural awareness has been studied and implemented in diverse educational

contexts. By organizing fragmented findings into a coherent research landscape, this review seeks to support evidence-based curriculum design and culturally responsive teaching practices. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: This scoping review addresses these gaps by systematically mapping recent research (2021–2025) on cultural awareness integration in EFL classrooms. Analyzing 25 studies published across global contexts, this review addresses three research questions:

- RQ1: What are the principal research themes and pedagogical focuses in recent studies of cultural awareness in EFL classrooms?
- RQ2: What methodological approaches, participant populations, and educational settings characterize this research?
- RQ3: What pedagogical implications emerge from recent research, and what gaps warrant future investigation?

The review follows (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) five-stage framework for scoping reviews: (1) identifying the research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data, and (5) collating and summarizing results. This framework has proven effective for educational and applied linguistics research, providing systematic and transparent procedures for literature mapping.

By synthesizing findings across empirical and review studies from diverse EFL contexts, this article offers three contributions. Theoretically, it clarifies how researchers currently operationalize cultural awareness across varying educational and cultural contexts. Pedagogically, it provides actionable insights for EFL teachers and curriculum designers developing culturally responsive curricula. Methodologically, it identifies underexplored participant groups, educational levels, and research designs, suggesting priority areas for future empirical work. The underlying argument is straightforward: systematic synthesis enables more targeted, evidence-based pedagogical innovations that enhance learners' intercultural communicative competence in an increasingly interconnected world.

2. Literature Review

To frame the discussion, this literature review synthesizes key theoretical perspectives on culture, intercultural communicative competence, and their evolving role in EFL pedagogy, establishing the conceptual foundation for the subsequent subsections.

Culture functions as a complex system that shapes meaning, identity, and communicative practices rather than merely a collection of traditions or artifacts. Indonesian EFL scholars emphasize that language and culture are inseparable, with language serving as a cultural mediator, symbol, and discourse construct that frames communication (Aulia, 2022). Because language both reflects and constructs culture, cultural understanding becomes essential to language learning.

Cultural awareness refers to learners' understanding of their own and others' cultures, accompanied by the ability to reflect on cultural similarities and differences critically. In EFL pedagogy, this awareness bridges linguistic competence and intercultural understanding (Byram, 1997), enabling learners to encounter language as a lived social practice where they actively co-construct meaning through culturally-situated interactions (Liao & Li, 2023). This positions learners as active participants in meaning-making processes.

Intercultural sensitivity refers to learners' emotional readiness to recognize, respect, and appreciate cultural differences, including attitudes of openness and empathy, and

functions as an affective foundation for the development of more complex intercultural abilities (Chen & William, 1997). A UNESCO manual further emphasizes the role of affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions in developing intercultural competencies (Deardorff, 2020).

Byram (1997) identifies five interrelated components of ICC: attitudes (curiosity and openness), knowledge (of social groups and their cultures), skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. This framework shifts EFL learning objectives from "native-like" proficiency toward effective and appropriate cross-cultural communication. (Deardorff, 2020) extends this perspective with an intercultural competence process model extends this by emphasizing the cyclical nature of competence development, incorporating attitudes, knowledge/comprehension, internal outcomes (adaptability, flexibility, empathy), and external outcomes (effective and appropriate communication).

The incorporation of cultural awareness within EFL pedagogy has evolved from culture as content toward culture as practice. Early ELT traditions prioritized linguistic accuracy, positioning culture as peripheral or limited to factual information about target countries. Contemporary approaches recognize that language is not merely a linguistic endeavor but also a moral and cultural practice, viewing culture as a dynamic process of meaning-making that extends beyond familiarizing learners with foreign cultural norms to cultivating interpretive skills for negotiating cultural differences (Siahaan et al., 2025).

This pedagogical shift challenges traditional approaches that reproduce cultural stereotypes or exoticized representations, encouraging learners to critically examine underlying values and ideologies embedded in discourse (Liao & Li, 2023; Siahaan et al., 2025).

Cross-cultural research demonstrates that intercultural awareness development is mediated by learners' local cultural identities, revealing distinct patterns across global EFL contexts. In Asian contexts, (Wang et al., 2024) found that task-based collaborative projects requiring cultural comparison significantly enhanced Chinese learners' metacultural awareness, the ability to recognize how culture shapes meaning-making processes. Students developed critical perspectives on both their own cultural frameworks and target cultures through analyzing cultural products such as films and advertisements from multiple countries.

Research conducted in Morocco by (Bellaarabi & Bouguerba, 2025) revealed a persistent gap between teachers' beliefs about intercultural education and actual classroom implementation. Despite teachers recognizing the centrality of intercultural competence for language learning, multiple systemic and institutional constraints disrupted the coherence between their educational ideals and actual classroom practices. These constraints included curriculum limitations, inadequate pre-service training, lack of professional development programs, and insufficient resources, highlighting systemic barriers to intercultural pedagogy even when teachers hold positive beliefs about its importance.

Studies conducted in Southeast Asian contexts by (Vuong et al., 2025) documented tensions between local cultural identities and dominant native-speaker representations in EFL textbooks. Their analysis of Vietnamese EFL materials revealed that textbooks still heavily favored native speaker norms while local culture remained inadequately represented, risking the undermining of national cultural identity. This cultural imbalance

limited opportunities for learners to develop bidirectional intercultural awareness that values both local and global perspectives.

These cross-cultural studies collectively challenge assumptions about native-speaker culture dominance in ELT materials. They advocate for pedagogies that integrate local contexts with global relevance through glocalisation, an approach that promotes mutual understanding and shared values while requiring teachers to develop culturally responsive pedagogies (Wright, 2025). The comparative evidence reveals that effective cultural awareness pedagogy must be contextually responsive, acknowledging learners' cultural positionality rather than imposing uniform target-culture frameworks.

Table 1
Distinctions among Related Constructs

Construct	Definition	Focus	Scope
Cultural Awareness	Recognition and understanding of cultural similarities and differences	Cognitive understanding of cultural frameworks	Foundation for intercultural engagement
Intercultural Sensitivity	Affective response and appreciation of cultural differences	Emotional readiness and openness	Attitudinal dimension
Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)	Ability to communicate effectively across cultures	Integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical awareness	Comprehensive framework encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions

Cultural awareness thus becomes a bidirectional process acknowledging both "self" and "other" (Byram, 1997), aligning with intercultural competence models across contexts. Teaching language without cultural awareness risks reducing communication to surface-level exchange detached from social context. Conversely, integrating cultural awareness encourages learners to interpret pragmatic cues, negotiate meaning, and engage authentically in intercultural communication.

The theoretical frameworks reviewed underscore cultural awareness as a central component of communicative competence in EFL education. The shift from native-speaker norms to an intercultural orientation that values plural perspectives reconceptualizes cultural awareness as a transformative process rather than a body of information. This orientation equips learners with interpretive, reflective, and critical capacities to engage with language as a culturally situated practice, thereby broadening ELT objectives from linguistic proficiency toward intercultural competence responsive to the demands of global communication.

Despite these well-established frameworks and cross-cultural insights, recent empirical studies examining the integration of cultural awareness in EFL curricula remain fragmented across different educational contexts, methodological approaches, and conceptual interpretations. This fragmentation limits comprehensive understanding of how cultural awareness is operationalized in diverse EFL settings and what pedagogical practices

prove most effective. Consequently, a scoping review is warranted to systematically map existing research, identify patterns and gaps, and provide evidence-based directions for future investigation and practice.

3. Research Method

This study employed a scoping review design to systematically map research trends, theoretical orientations, and practical implications concerning cultural awareness integration in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The scoping review approach was selected for its capacity to provide a comprehensive overview of how cultural awareness has been conceptualized and operationalized in English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly where research remains emergent and heterogeneous. The review followed the five-stage methodological framework proposed by (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) and refined by (Levac et al., 2010): identifying the research question, identifying relevant studies, selecting studies, charting the data, and collating and summarizing results.

The review was conducted within the field of applied linguistics, focusing specifically on the pedagogical intersection between *language learning* and *culture*. Cultural awareness has increasingly been recognized as a crucial dimension of English language education, particularly in EFL settings where learners' exposure to authentic intercultural experiences is limited. Given the rising emphasis on global competence and intercultural communication in educational policy and practice, this review examines how cultural awareness has been implemented, interpreted, and theorized in recent EFL research. The temporal scope was restricted to studies published between 2021 and 2025 to capture contemporary pedagogical approaches and align with journal requirements for currency of evidence.

A systematic search was conducted across four major academic databases: Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), ResearchGate, and Scopus. This multi-database approach ensured comprehensive coverage of both indexed and open-access literature in applied linguistics and language education. The search strategy employed combinations of keywords including "*cultural awareness in ELT*," "*intercultural competence in EFL*," "*teaching English through culture*," "*intercultural communicative competence*," and "*multicultural EFL pedagogy*." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine and expand searches systematically across databases.

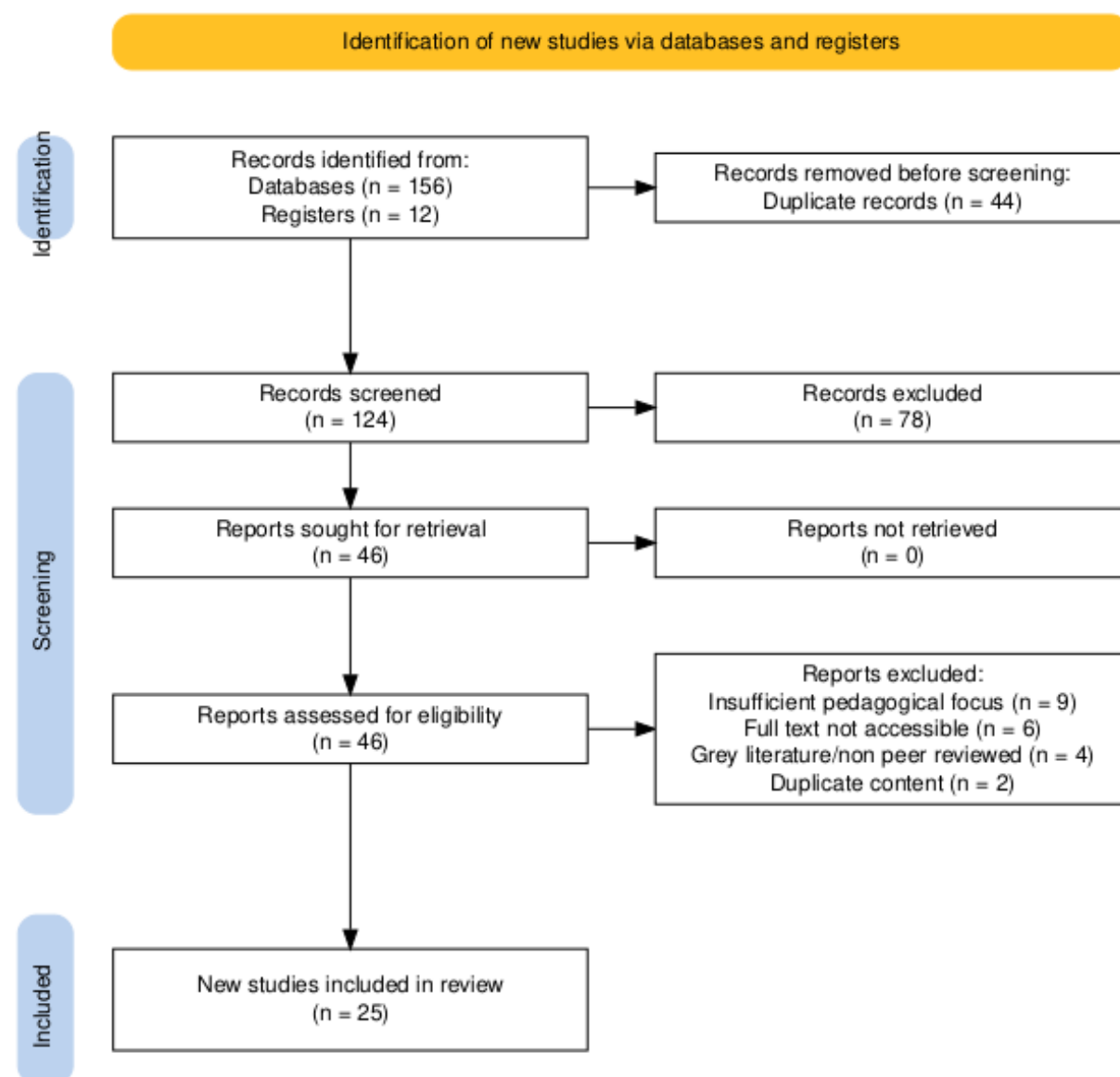
Studies were included if they addressed cultural awareness or intercultural competence within EFL or ELT pedagogical contexts, were published between 2021 and 2025 in peer-reviewed journals or conference proceedings, were written in English or Indonesian, were accessible in full-text form, and focused explicitly on pedagogical dimensions such as teaching practices, curriculum materials, or learner outcomes. Studies were excluded if they addressed cultural studies without pedagogical application, were published before 2021, consisted of grey literature such as unpublished reports or non-peer-reviewed documents, were inaccessible in full text, or did not specifically address EFL or ELT contexts.

Following PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018), the selection process proceeded through four systematic stages. Initial database searches yielded 168 records, comprising 156 records from database searches and 12 additional records identified through reference list examination and citation tracking. After removing 44 duplicate records, 124 unique records underwent title and abstract screening, resulting in exclusion of 78 records that did not meet inclusion criteria (primarily due to insufficient focus on cultural awareness,

irrelevant contexts, publication dates outside the specified range, or language restrictions). The remaining 46 records were retrieved for full-text assessment. All 46 records were successfully retrieved ($n = 0$ reports not retrieved). Following full-text review, 21 records were excluded based on the following criteria: insufficient pedagogical focus ($n = 9$), full text not accessible ($n = 6$), grey literature/non peer-reviewed status ($n = 4$), and duplicate content ($n = 2$). This process yielded a final corpus of 25 studies for qualitative synthesis.

Figure 1

PRISMA flow diagram illustrating this selection process in detail.



Data extraction employed a structured matrix developed specifically for this review, capturing key study characteristics including author(s) and publication year, research design and methodology, participant characteristics and sample size, educational context and level, geographic location, main research focus and objectives, key findings related to cultural

awareness, and pedagogical implications. Table 1 presents a comprehensive summary of all included studies organized by these dimensions.

Table 2

Summary of included studies

No	Name	Year	Focus	Design	Participants	Key findings
1.	Mokoginta, K.	2024	How culture is represented and taught in Indonesian ELT	Qualitative Literature Review	15 journal articles (Indonesia, 2018-2023)	Cultural integration remains surface-level; many teachers lack theoretical understanding of intercultural competence
2.	Permatasari, I.	2023	Extent of ICC integration in Indonesian ELT	Systematic Literature Review	25 articles (2020-2023)	ICC often implicitly included rather than systematically taught
3.	Tika, A., & Fithriani, R.	2023	Identify multicultural values in ELT textbooks	Qualitative Content Analysis	3 English textbooks for primary schools	Limited representation of local cultures; Western bias observed
4.	Jayanti, L. N.	2023	Evaluate cultural representation in textbooks	Descriptive Qualitative	4 ELT textbooks (junior-senior high)	70% of content emphasizes target (Western) culture; 30% local
5.	Dwi Prastiwi, F., & Lestari, T. D.	2025	Use of game-based media for English vocabulary learning	Systematic Literature Review	18 studies (EFL Indonesia)	Game-based tools (e.g., Drops, Quizizz) enhance engagement and motivation
6.	Nafisah, S. L., Oktarina, I., Santri, D., & Suwartono, T.	2024	Teachers' perception and practices of ICC integration in EFL	Systematic Literature Review	10 studies	Most EFL teachers value ICC, but classroom practice remains language-focused due to time limits, rigid curriculum, lack of training, and limited materials.
7.	Wardhani, A., & Syahrial, D.	2024	Observe ICC integration in classroom teaching	Case Study	8 teachers in Java-based schools	ICC appears incidentally, not via structured lesson plans
8.	Sari, D. K.	2023	Measure students' intercultural awareness	Mixed Methods	100 EFL students (universities)	Students aware of diversity but lack global perspective

9.	Hidayati, A.	2022	Integrate culture via project-based learning	Action Research	EFL class at private university	Improved students' empathy and curiosity about other cultures
10.	Rahmah, R.	2024	Teacher perspectives on local culture inclusion	Qualitative Survey	20 teachers (West Java)	Teachers want local context inclusion but face curriculum constraints
11.	Santoso, B.	2021	Measure students' attitudes toward cultural learning	Quantitative Study	120 university EFL students	Positive perception but limited classroom implementation
12.	Mahendra, Y., & Kusuma, D.	2023	Design intercultural-based ELT tasks	Design & Development Research	Senior high school classes	Tasks improved cultural curiosity and awareness
13.	Wijayanti, F.	2024	Compare cultural representations across curricula	Comparative Content Analysis	Two textbook series (K13 & Merdeka)	New (Merdeka) curriculum shows more localized culture integration
14.	Rini, D.	2022	Teacher beliefs and awareness of cultural teaching	Qualitative Interview Study	10 EFL teachers (Bali)	Teachers acknowledge importance but lack pedagogical guidance
15.	Sulastri, E.	2023	Students' perceptions of intercultural activities	Survey Research	EFL learners in universities (n=80)	Students enjoy intercultural topics and peer collaboration
16.	Nugraha, A., & Dewi, R.	2023	Cultural content integration in vocational contexts	Case Study	Vocational school English classes	Cultural teaching exists but limited to celebrations
17.	Kusnadi, H.	2024	How teachers promote intercultural competence	Descriptive Qualitative	15 EFL teachers (Central Java)	Teachers promote tolerance & empathy via discussions
18.	Utami, P.	2022	How local culture is integrated into national curriculum	Curriculum Analysis	EFL curriculum documents	Cultural values present but not pedagogically implemented
19.	Aulia, M.	2022	Teacher beliefs and intercultural profiles	Qualitative Narrative Inquiry	8 university English lecturers	Ambivalence and contradictions in teachers' beliefs about intercultural pedagogy

20.	Batunan, D., Kweldju, S., & Wulyani, A. N.	2023	Teacher perceptions of ICC and culturally laden instruction	Qualitative Interview Study	6 English teachers (Eastern Indonesia)	Most teachers unfamiliar with ICC; cultural elements not explicitly taught
21.	Madkur, A.	2025	How teachers promote intercultural awareness in multilingual Islamic boarding schools	Qualitative Case Study	10 English teachers (Pesantren schools, Lampung)	Teachers use code-switching and local cultural references to promote awareness
22.	Gozalib, A., Muslem, A., Usman, B., & Ghazali, M.	2024	Design English syllabus integrating local culture to maintain students' identity	Design-Based Research	Primary school students (Grade 4)	Local culture integration enhances comprehension and preserves cultural identity
23.	Butarbutar, R., Weda, S., Nur, S., & Leba, S. M. R.	2023	Impact of intercultural communication via social media on EFL speaking motivation	Quantitative Survey	40 university students (multi-ethnic groups)	Positive correlation between IC integration and speaking motivation
24.	Setiawan, B. N.	2023	Explore ELT practices in culturally diverse Indonesian settings	Qualitative Exploration	EFL teachers in multilingual contexts	Teachers navigate linguistic and cultural diversity through translanguaging
25.	Widiastuti, R., Asri, A. S., & Patmawati, T.	2025	Difficulties and contextual factors in implementing intercultural competence	Qualitative Narrative Inquiry	8 English teachers (Indonesian universities)	Teachers use interactive approaches and authentic materials but face student engagement issues

Data analysis followed an iterative thematic synthesis approach adapted from framework analysis procedures. First, descriptive characteristics of all studies were systematically extracted and tabulated, documenting research designs, participant types, educational contexts, and geographic distributions to establish the methodological and contextual landscape of reviewed literature. Second, findings from each study were coded inductively using open coding procedures to identify recurring concepts, practices, and outcomes related to cultural awareness integration. Third, initial codes were grouped into broader thematic categories through constant comparison, examining similarities and differences across studies to construct coherent patterns. Finally, themes were refined and

organized into a conceptual framework directly addressing the review's research aims, ensuring both systematic coverage and interpretive depth in identifying patterns, tensions, and gaps within the field.

To enhance reliability and transparency, the primary researcher conducted systematic coding and theme development, with iterative consultation with the research supervisor at key decision points regarding theme construction and interpretation. While formal inter-rater reliability procedures were not employed given the scoping review's exploratory rather than evaluative purpose, all coding decisions and thematic groupings were documented through reflective memos and returned iteratively to raw data for verification. This approach aligns with established scoping review methodology, which prioritizes comprehensive mapping over formal quality appraisal of individual studies (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Tricco et al., 2018).

All 25 studies included in the final synthesis were conducted in Indonesian EFL contexts. This geographic concentration emerged through the study selection process rather than as a predetermined criterion. While the initial search strategy and inclusion criteria permitted studies from any EFL context globally, the combination of database coverage, language restrictions (English and Indonesian), and the search terms employed resulted in retrieval predominantly of Indonesian scholarship. This concentration reflects both the active research community examining cultural awareness in Indonesian ELT and the review's search parameters. The geographic homogeneity presents both limitations (reduced transferability to other contexts) and strengths (contextual depth regarding a major Southeast Asian EFL setting), which are addressed in the Discussion section's treatment of review limitations and future research directions.

4. Results and Discussion

Systematic analysis of the 25 studies published between 2021 and 2025 disclosed four major themes characterizing recent research on cultural awareness integration in EFL contexts: (a) materials and curriculum representation, (b) teacher beliefs and practices, (c) learner perceptions and outcomes, and (d) pedagogical strategies and innovations. These themes emerged from iterative coding and constant comparison across diverse research designs, participant groups, and educational settings. The findings illuminate dominant patterns, methodological characteristics, and persistent tensions within the field, while revealing critical inter-theme relationships that shape the implementation of cultural awareness.

4.1 Methodological and Contextual Landscape

4.1.1 Research Design Distribution

Thematic convergence across the corpus reveals pronounced methodological patterns (see Table 3). Qualitative approaches dominated, encompassing content analysis, descriptive studies, and interviews (n=11, 44%), followed by systematic or literature reviews (n=5, 20%), case studies (n=4, 16%), and single instances of action research, mixed methods, quantitative surveys, design-development research, and comparative content analysis (n=1 each, 4% respectively).

Table 3.*Distribution of Research Designs (N=25)*

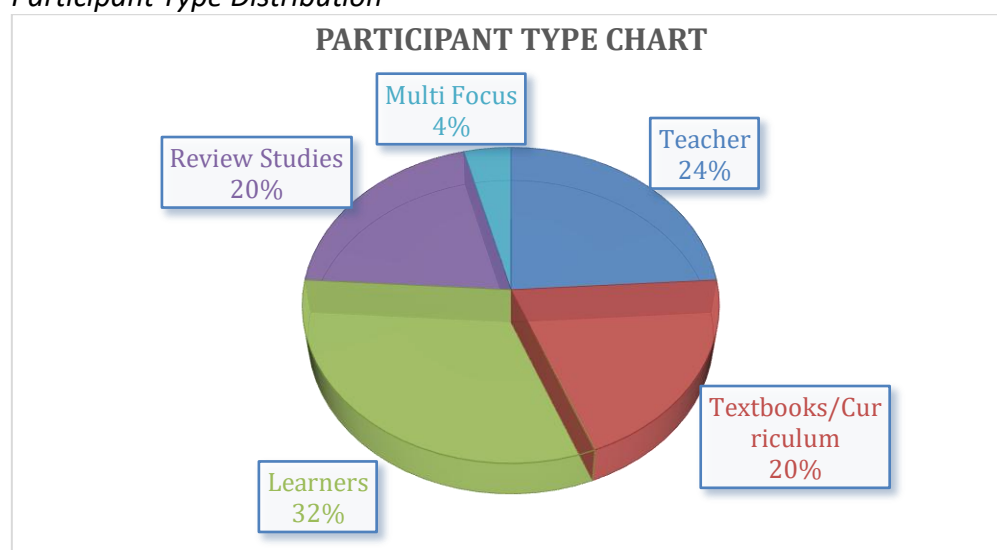
Research Design	Frequency	Percentage
Qualitative (content analysis, interviews, descriptive)	11	44%
Systematic/literature reviews	5	20%
Case studies	4	16%
Action research	1	4%
Mixed methods	1	4%
Quantitative surveys	1	4%
Design-development research	1	4%
Comparative content analysis	1	4%

This distribution reflects the field's emphasis on understanding context-specific practices and stakeholder perceptions. Yet the dominance of qualitative studies (68% when including case studies) presents dual implications. It enables deep contextual exploration but limits generalizability across diverse EFL settings. The scarcity of experimental designs (n=1 action research) and longitudinal studies (n=0) restricts causal inference regarding which pedagogical interventions effectively enhance intercultural competence.

4.1.2 Geographic and Participant Characteristics

All 25 studies originated from Indonesian EFL contexts, providing valuable regional depth while constraining broader transferability. This concentration emerged organically through database searches rather than predetermined selection, reflecting both Indonesia's active scholarship community and the review's methodological parameters.

Cross-sectional analysis of participant profiles (see Figure 2) revealed relatively balanced distribution: teachers (n=6, 24%), textbooks or curriculum documents (n=5, 20%), learners (n=8, 32%), and review studies synthesizing multiple contexts (n=5, 20%), with one study examining both textbooks and teacher perceptions.

Figure 2*Participant Type Distribution*

Educational levels spanned primary schools (n=1, 4%), secondary schools (n=4, 16%), tertiary institutions (n=8, 32%), and vocational settings (n=1, 4%), while 11 studies (44%) addressed multiple educational levels or synthesized research across diverse settings. The concentration of tertiary-focused research (32%) alongside multi-level studies (44%) suggests recognition that cultural awareness integration requires systemic consideration beyond individual classrooms. However, this creates an empirical gap in understanding younger learners' intercultural development during formative educational stages.

4.2 Thematic Findings and Cross-Theme Synthesis

4.2.1 Materials and Curriculum Representation: Persistent Imbalances

Converging evidence across nine studies analyzing textbooks and curriculum revealed systematic Western bias in cultural content. Ratri et al. (2025) documented that Indonesian primary-level textbooks allocated 70% of cultural content to target culture (Western culture) versus 30% to local contexts. This ratio was consistently observed across several studies (Jayanti & Mustofa, 2023; Tika & Fithriani, 2023), suggesting that it reflects a structural pattern rather than an isolated occurrence.

Comparative curriculum analyses have highlighted shifting educational policy priorities. Jayanti & Mustofa (2023) found that textbooks developed under *Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum* contain more localized cultural content than those produced under the K13 curriculum, indicating deliberate efforts to achieve a more balanced cultural representation. Similarly, Utami (2024), through curriculum document analysis, revealed that although cultural values are embedded within national educational guidelines, the pedagogical strategies for implementing them remain insufficiently specified. As a result, a significant gap persists, as revised instructional materials are not adequately supported by clear frameworks for classroom implementation.

The materials-practice disconnect manifests through inter-theme relationships. Teachers' reported institutional constraints (Theme 2) directly link to curriculum rigidity documented in materials analyses. When textbook content privileges Western perspectives so heavily, teachers simultaneously report lacking culturally relevant resources (Azahary & Fatimah, 2024). This circular relationship perpetuates Western dominance despite educators' stated values for local integration.

These findings align with (Lo, 2025) critique that traditional ELT practices often privilege native-speaker norms and fail to reflect the sociolinguistic realities of English as a global lingua franca, reproducing culturally homogeneous Anglo-American representations in materials. This contradicts contemporary ICC frameworks' positioning cultural awareness as bidirectional reflection on self and other (Byram, 1997). As Lo (2025) argues, if English functions as a multilingual franca, pedagogy must move beyond traditional ELT toward transcultural approaches that emphasize intercultural negotiation across multilingual, multimodal, and multicultural contexts rather than assimilation into Western norms. Current materials have not embraced this paradigm shift.

4.2.2 Teacher Beliefs and Practices: The Implementation Chasm

Cross-sectional comparison of teacher-focused studies (n=10) disclosed consistent implementation gaps between stated beliefs and classroom actualization. Teachers across contexts acknowledged culture's importance and recognized ICC's relevance for

communicative competence (Nafisah et al., 2024). Yet observational data revealed cultural integration occurring incidentally through casual discussion or celebratory activities rather than systematically through theory-driven pedagogy (Hapsari et al., 2022; Kartini et al., 2025).

Meta-analytic synthesis across teacher studies indicates three primary barriers. First, insufficient professional training in intercultural pedagogy left educators lacking conceptual equipment to construct lessons encouraging critical cultural awareness (Batunan et al., 2023). Second, institutional constraints including standardized assessments prioritizing linguistic accuracy over intercultural competence created misalignment between policy rhetoric and classroom realities (Nafisah et al., 2024; Yan, 2022). Third, limited familiarity with explicit ICC frameworks resulted in treating culture as peripheral enrichment rather than core communicative competence (Mokoginta, 2024).

Notably, teacher beliefs directly influence material design and selection. When teachers lack theoretical grounding in ICC, they cannot critically evaluate textbook cultural content or adapt materials toward balanced representation. This explains why Western-biased textbooks persist despite teachers' expressed desire for local integration. The materials-teacher practice relationship operates bidirectionally: inadequate materials constrain practice, while unprepared teachers cannot compensate for material limitations.

These patterns echo research by Bellaarabi & Bouguerba (2025) on teachers' intercultural beliefs and practices, demonstrating that positive beliefs alone prove insufficient for pedagogical change. Their study revealed that despite teachers recognizing the centrality of intercultural competence for language learning, multiple systemic and institutional constraints, including curriculum limitations, inadequate pre-service training, lack of professional development programs, and insufficient resources, disrupted the coherence between their educational ideals and actual classroom practices. Without systematic professional development grounded in frameworks like (Byram, 1997) ICC model, cultural integration remains superficial. Moreover, standardized assessment structures must value intercultural outcomes to enable meaningful implementation.

4.2.3 Learner Perceptions and Outcomes: Unrealized Potential

Thematic convergence across eight learner-focused studies revealed paradoxical patterns. Students demonstrated positive attitudes toward cultural content and expressed desire to learn about other cultures (Yan, 2022). Yet actual intercultural competence remained limited to familiar contexts, with restricted understanding of global cultural dynamics (Aulia, 2022; Hapsari et al., 2022).

When explicitly engaged through structured intercultural tasks, learners displayed heightened empathy, curiosity, and critical awareness (Butarbutar et al., 2024). This indicates receptivity to cultural learning when appropriately scaffolded. However, the gulf between learners' local awareness and limited global perspectives reflects the parochial nature of current curricula documented in Theme 1. Students cannot develop competencies not represented in materials or modelled through teaching practices.

Cross-theme synthesis clarifies causal pathways. Western-biased textbooks (Theme 1) taught by educators lacking ICC training (Theme 2) produce learners aware of diversity yet unable to navigate unfamiliar intercultural contexts (Theme 3). This chain reaction demonstrates how systemic failures compound across educational components. Learner

outcomes serve as downstream indicators of upstream curricular and pedagogical inadequacies.

The concentration of learner research at tertiary levels (75% of learner-focused studies) creates an empirical gap. Since foundational intercultural attitudes form during childhood and adolescence (Byram, 1997), primary and secondary contexts warrant greater investigation. Current evidence cannot illuminate how cultural awareness develops across educational stages or which interventions prove most effective at different developmental periods.

4.2.4 Pedagogical Strategies and Innovations: Fragmented Promise

Emerging research documented several promising approaches, particularly project-based learning (Berkane, 2025), project-based learning (Fitria, 2025; Ravindran & Amini, 2023), and technology-mediated pedagogies (Dwi Prastiwi & Lestari, 2025; Puspitasari et al., 2025). Project work proved effective in fostering cultural competence, empathy, and open-mindedness when students engaged in research and collaborative projects that involved cultural comparison and analysis. These interventions enhanced students' cultural curiosity and critical awareness when activities involved collaborative cultural inquiry.

Systematic review evidence indicated that multicultural literature strengthens ICC by exposing learners to alternative perspectives and culturally situated language use (Xu et al., 2025). Technology-based environments including simulations, virtual exchanges, and multimedia resources facilitate cultural sensitivity by enabling exploration of diverse contexts (Puspitasari et al., 2025). Multimodal digital storybooks represent particularly promising tools, as they integrate reflection sheets, portfolio assessment, authentic materials, and online interactive elements that foster both teacher creativity and learner engagement (Tarwiyah et al., 2024). These approaches align with cultural-historical activity theory perspective which views culture as a dynamic, enacted practice realized through social interaction and language use in context (Kim, 2020), as well as emphasis on discovery and critical analysis skills (Byram, 1997).

Implementation remains uneven despite these promising findings. Most strategies appear in small-scale, context-specific studies, raising questions about scalability and transferability. Few studies reported longitudinal data on sustained effects or comparative data across diverse learner populations. Moreover, innovations occur despite rather than because of systemic support. Teachers implementing task-based approaches (Theme 4) simultaneously face institutional constraints limiting cultural integration (Theme 2). They also lack access to balanced materials (Theme 1).

This reveals a critical tension. Pedagogical innovations demonstrate cultural awareness can be effectively integrated. Yet systemic conditions prevent widespread implementation. Isolated successes cannot compensate for structural barriers embedded in curriculum design, teacher preparation, and assessment frameworks. Without institutional scaffolding, promising innovations remain confined to motivated individual educators rather than becoming standard practice.

4.3 Integrative Discussion: Systemic Gaps and Interconnected Challenges

Together, these findings highlight systemic gaps between policy, practice, and learner outcomes that operate through interconnected pathways. The predominance of Western

cultural content (Theme 1) constrains what teachers can enact (Theme 2), limits what learners experience (Theme 3), and necessitates compensatory pedagogical innovations (Theme 4) that remain fragmented. Each theme represents one facet of broader systemic dysfunction.

Three critical insights emerge from cross-theme synthesis. First, cultural awareness integration failures stem from misalignment across educational components rather than isolated weaknesses. Curriculum reform without teacher preparation proves insufficient, as does teacher training without corresponding assessment reform or material redesign. Second, downstream learner outcomes reflect upstream systemic inadequacies. Students' limited intercultural competence indicates not an individual deficit but predictable consequences of Western-biased materials taught by educators lacking ICC training under assessment structures privileging linguistic accuracy. Third, promising pedagogical innovations occur in tension with rather than supported by institutional structures, limiting their scalability.

These patterns contradict the transformative approach advocated in contemporary ICC frameworks, where cultural awareness constitutes core communicative competence (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2020). Current Indonesian EFL contexts remain anchored in peripheral cultural enrichment despite policy rhetoric emphasizing intercultural objectives. The persistent gap between stated values and enacted practice reveals that cultural awareness integration requires coordinated systemic reform across curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and teacher education.

The concentration of evidence from Indonesian contexts enables valuable regional depth while limiting broader generalizability. Cross-cultural research demonstrates that intercultural awareness development manifests distinctly across contexts (Al-Afifi et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025). Systematic reviews across diverse educational contexts reveal that implementation effectiveness varies significantly based on school subject, grade level, national context, and institutional resources (Al-Afifi et al., 2025). Comparative analyses between Eastern and Western educational systems show that while national policies may emphasize intercultural competence, practical implementation demonstrates considerable inconsistency, primarily attributable to limited teacher training, institutional resources, and culturally specific orientations toward language learning (Xu et al., 2025).

Indonesian patterns may reflect specific policy environments, cultural orientations toward language learning, or educational infrastructure. Comparative research examining cultural awareness integration across diverse national and educational contexts would illuminate how local factors shape implementation challenges and effective practices.

4.4 Implications for Policy and Practice

Findings generate five evidence-based implications requiring coordinated action across educational levels:

1. Curriculum Reform Toward Balanced Representation

Textbook developers must prioritize triadic cultural representation (local, target, international) rather than Western-dominated content. The documented imbalance requires explicit design principles embedding diverse cultural perspectives throughout rather than tokenistic inclusion. Materials should move beyond surface-level cultural facts toward activities fostering critical reflection, comparison, and intercultural dialogue.

2. Systematic Teacher Professional Development

Pre-service and in-service teacher education programs should provide explicit training in intercultural communicative competence (ICC) frameworks, particularly Byram's (1997) model. Such training should encompass both theoretical understanding and practical strategies for designing intercultural tasks, facilitating reflective discussions, and assessing intercultural learning outcomes. In addition, professional learning communities can support teachers by encouraging the exchange of effective practices and fostering collaborative inquiry into challenges encountered during implementation.

3. Assessment Alignment with Intercultural Objectives

Language assessment must value intercultural competence alongside linguistic proficiency. Alternatives to traditional accuracy-focused tests include performance-based assessments, reflective portfolios, and project-based evaluations capturing learners' intercultural development. Without assessment reform, curricular changes, and teacher training cannot overcome institutional pressures toward exam-oriented instruction.

4. Institutional Support for Pedagogical Innovation

Teachers implementing task-based, project-based, or technology-mediated approaches require institutional support including flexible curriculum structures, access to diverse materials, and recognition within evaluation systems. Promising innovations must transition from isolated experiments to systematically supported practices.

5. Research-Practice Integration

The field needs mechanisms translating empirical findings into actionable guidance for practitioners. Professional development should incorporate recent research on effective intercultural pedagogies, while researchers should investigate scalability and transferability of promising interventions across diverse contexts.

4.5 Methodological Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations warrant consideration. First, restriction to English and Indonesian publications likely excluded relevant scholarship from other EFL environments, particularly East Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. Future reviews incorporating multilingual sources would provide greater international breadth.

Second, excluding grey literature, institutional reports, and unpublished theses may omit valuable insights into grassroots innovations and context-specific challenges not represented in peer-reviewed publications. These sources could illuminate practical strategies educators develop despite systemic constraints.

Third, the 2021–2025 temporal scope captures recent developments but may miss earlier foundational work continuing to influence practice. The emergent nature of AI-integrated and digital pedagogies means emerging practices may not yet appear in published research.

Fourth, scoping reviews prioritize comprehensive mapping over formal quality appraisal. Included studies therefore vary in methodological rigor, ranging from robust

designs to those offering limited methodological detail. Future systematic reviews incorporating quality assessment would strengthen confidence in synthesized findings.

Fifth, the concentration of Indonesian-focused studies, while enabling valuable regional depth, limits transferability to other EFL settings. Comparative research examining cultural awareness integration across diverse national and educational contexts would illuminate how local factors shape pedagogical approaches. Priority should be given to multi-context studies investigating how implementation challenges and effective practices vary across cultural and institutional settings.

Sixth, the scarcity of experimental and longitudinal designs prevents causal inference about pedagogical interventions' effectiveness. Future research should employ quasi-experimental designs comparing intervention and control groups, longitudinal studies tracking intercultural competence development across educational stages, and mixed-methods approaches combining quantitative outcome measures with qualitative process data to understand implementation mechanisms.

Seventh, the empirical gap regarding primary and secondary learners requires targeted investigation. Research should examine how cultural awareness develops across age groups, which interventions prove most effective at different developmental periods, and how early intercultural education influences subsequent competence.

4.6 Strengths and Contributions

Despite limitations, this review exhibits several strengths. Its holistic coverage encompassing empirical research, curriculum analyses, and systematic reviews provides a comprehensive field mapping. The theoretically informed analytical framework grounded in Byram's (1997) ICC model and distinctions between culture-as-content and culture as practice enabled systematic pattern identification.

Transparent methodological procedures including systematic search strategies, clearly defined inclusion criteria, and iterative thematic analysis enhance credibility and replicability. The focus on recent scholarship means findings reflect contemporary pedagogical priorities and challenges relevant to current practice.

Most significantly, the cross-theme synthesis clarifies interconnected relationships between materials, teacher practices, learner outcomes, and pedagogical innovations. By illuminating how systemic components interact to constrain or enable cultural awareness integration, this review moves beyond descriptive cataloging toward explanatory synthesis identifying leverage points for educational improvement. This integrative perspective provides actionable guidance for coordinated reform efforts addressing cultural awareness integration as a systemic rather than isolated challenge.

5. Conclusion

This scoping review synthesized 25 studies (2021–2025) examining cultural awareness integration in Indonesian EFL classrooms, revealing four interconnected themes: materials representation, teacher practices, learner perceptions, and pedagogical innovations. Analysis illuminated systematic Western bias in materials, theory-practice gaps in implementation, and unrealized learner potential despite positive attitudes.

The review provides a comprehensive mapping of cultural awareness research in Indonesian EFL contexts, exposing systemic failures where curriculum inadequacies constrain teacher practice and limit learner intercultural development. Methodologically, qualitative dominance restricts causal inference, highlighting needs for experimental and longitudinal designs. Promising innovations task-based and technology-mediated strategies, demonstrate effectiveness when systematically implemented, yet occur despite institutional support.

Theoretically, findings extend the ICC framework by demonstrating the necessity of integrating digital and technology-mediated intercultural learning. Where English functions as a global lingua franca, cultural awareness must emphasize pluricentric cultural competence rather than Anglo-American norms. Practically, curriculum designers should adopt triadic cultural representation transitioning from static facts toward critical reflection activities. Teacher educators must combine explicit ICC training with concrete techniques for designing intercultural tasks. Assessment reform should develop valid instruments measuring attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness through performance-based evaluations.

Findings directly inform Indonesia's Merdeka curriculum implementation through three recommendations: (1) prioritize intercultural competence as an explicit learning outcome with clear indicators; (2) mandate triadic cultural representation in government-sponsored textbooks; (3) incorporate ICC frameworks in national teacher certification. Curriculum policy alone proves insufficient without coordinated teacher preparation, material redesign, and assessment reform.

This review is limited to Indonesian contexts, restricting transferability. Peer-reviewed article restriction excluded grey literature containing grassroots innovations. Qualitative dominance and tertiary-level concentration create gaps in causal claims and younger learner understanding. Five priority areas warrant investigation: (1) longitudinal designs tracking intercultural trajectories; (2) comparative multi-context studies across diverse EFL settings; (3) experimental and mixed-methods designs establishing causal relationships; (4) primary-secondary education research; (5) technology-mediated learning investigating virtual exchanges and AI-driven scenarios.

This synthesis advances EFL scholarship by demonstrating that cultural awareness integration requires coordinated reform across curriculum design, teacher education, assessment practices, and institutional policy. As English increasingly functions as a global lingua franca, developing learners' capacity to navigate cultural differences with critical awareness becomes essential for meaningful participation in an interconnected, culturally pluralistic world.

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INTERPERSONAL METAFUNCTION IN BIRTHDAY AND CONDOLENCE MESSAGES: A COMPARATIVE REGISTER ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study applies Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to compare interpersonal meanings in birthday and condolence messages. The study focuses on mood, modality, and pronoun use to examine how language constructs and sustains social relationships in celebratory versus grief contexts. A descriptive qualitative research design was employed to collect and analyze the data, which consisted of 250 birthday messages and 250 condolence messages obtained from online message sources. Data were annotated with the *UAM Corpus Tool, 6.2*, to identify the interpersonal features of the texts. Results indicate that both registers are dominated by a declarative mood, but they differ in orientation. Birthday messages emphasised positive affect through certainty, possibility, and intention, while condolence messages use greater syntactic complexity, deontic modality, and third-person pronouns to acknowledge loss and express sympathy. The study advances an SFL-based register of short-form digital discourse and reveals how linguistic choices encode empathy, solidarity, and emotional alignments in contextually contrasting, yet relationally intimate genres. This study contributes to register analysis in digital discourse by highlighting interpersonal metafunctions in contrasting genres.

Keywords: *birthday messages; condolence messages; interpersonal metafunction; modality; mood; pronouns; Systemic Functional Linguistics.*

1. Introduction

Language functions as a social tool that enables individuals to fulfil various communicative purposes depending on the context in which interaction occurs (Thi Ngu 2023). Since language use is shaped by social settings and communicative intentions, registers, defined as the conventional language used in specific contexts (Bentum et al. 2022), have become imperative to the understanding of how people engage with language. Egbert and Gracheva (2022) argue that registers are shaped and maintained by the speech communities, adding that the study of register involves examining distinct corpora with close attention to the situational context, linguistic features, and their functional relationships. This view aligns with Halliday's (1985) foundational framework of Systemic Functional

Linguistics (SFL), which posits that language serves three broad metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

According to Halliday (1985), the ideational metafunction allows individuals to represent their experiences and ideas. The textual metafunction, he maintains, organises these experiences into a coherent discourse. Most relevant to this study is the interpersonal metafunction, which enables speakers to enact social roles and express attitudes with others (Halliday 1985). According to Sánchez (2021), the metafunctions operate simultaneously in all communication to shape the form and function of discourse. Language cannot be separated from its context (Bowcher 2021). According to Bowcher, the functions language serves are inherently tied to the situations in which it is used. SFL, therefore, views language as a resource for meaning-making that operates between text and context (Halliday & Hasan 1989). This relationship is essential to the production of meaningful communication and to its interpretation. Halliday and Hasan (1989) further argue that linguistic meaning cannot be fully realised without considering the context in which an utterance occurs. This position is further supported by Chen and Brown (2024), who argue that context is central to how meaning is constructed and understood.

Bowcher (2021) argues that without proper consideration of context, a text risks becoming semantically ambiguous or devoid of meaning. This symbiotic relationship, as observed by Allan (2020) and Amphaeris et al. (2023), is necessary to the integration of contextual analysis into linguistic studies. In essence, the relationship between text and context is not merely a theoretical construct but a fundamental principle that governs the dynamics of communication across diverse contexts and species (Allan 2020; Amphaeris et al. 2023).

Ateca-Amestoy and Prieto-Rodriguez (2023) argue that in any given cultural framework, individuals routinely engage in a variety of social activities, such as casual conversations, debates, wedding ceremonies, service encounters, and storytelling. These activities are characterised by distinct structural and linguistic patterns that serve as markers of their identity and purpose. Yuryeva (2019) observes that conventionalised forms of communication in these social activities often emerge within cultures over time. According to him, this communicative process enables the effective realisation of these activities, which SFL models as genres. As defined by Martin and Rose (2008: 6), genre is “the recurrent configurations of meanings that enact the social practices of a culture. By identifying and describing genres linguistically and mapping their interrelations, SFL models the context of culture as a network of interconnected meanings that provides an empirical and methodical framework for analysing the relationship between culture and text. In the current study, the researchers seek to comparatively analyse 250 birthday and 250 condolence messages. Specifically, the analysis aims to explore how language used for birthdays and condolences as sub-registers reflects interpersonal metafunction. Additionally, it will demonstrate how interpersonal metafunction is employed to forge social bonds with participants and how linguistic expressions are used to exercise similarities and differences between birthday and condolence messages. The following questions serve to guide the study.

1. How are mood, modality, and personal pronouns realised in birthday and condolence messages?
2. What interpersonal meanings distinguish these two registers?
3. How do linguistic choices reflect socio-emotional alignment in celebratory versus grief contexts?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Text Messaging as a Communicative Practice

Text messaging has become an important tool for communication all over the world (Suleman et al. 2021; Nouri & Hussein 2023; Dobson et al. 2024). It is increasing at a noticeable rate, with an estimated eight trillion text messages to be sent each year (Olia 2024). Text messaging is beneficial when most users apply it for coordinating activities, maintaining social relationships, and providing information for each other (Bhattacharjee et al. 2023). To some extent, a number of studies have been conducted to look into the linguistic conventions in text messages. These include a study conducted by Soria, Gutiérrez-Colón, and Frumuselu (2020), who argued that the application of text messaging harms formal writing skills, particularly in spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. Liimatta (2023) posits that texters can show their function in constructing social relations and maintain the relationship with recipients by the use of lexico-grammatical structures in text messaging. Additionally, Coplan et al. (2022) believe that text messaging increases confidence and interaction among shy and lonely people. The authors posit that people interact with each other and share all kinds of information, such as expressing their status, social, and individual attitudes, by sending text messages.

Specifically on birthday and condolence messages, Lin and Walden (2023) assert that birthday messages are ceremonial tokens that may purposely or unintentionally transmit stereotyping messages about the ageing process whereas Ajayi and Akinrinlola (2024) identified condolence messages as those that are offered by friends, neighbours or acquaintances who try to sympathise with us when we are hit by an unpleasant situation or phenomena such as death of a beloved one. Despite these studies, little has been done to comparatively analyse the interpersonal metafunctions used in birthday and condolence messages. Chandra (2019) analysed the structure and function of birthday greetings within social interactions, particularly how these greetings are expressed and perceived in different contexts. His research, however, concentrated on the role of birthday messages in promoting solidarity and reflecting social relationships among community members. Additionally, Okafor (2022) investigated the address terms used by WhatsApp group members when expressing birthday wishes among their members. The studies examined the variety of address terms employed, such as first names, last names, titles, special nicknames, pet names, and instances of no address term, as well as the social factors that influence the choice of these address terms in the context of expressing birthday, leaving the metafunctions of these messages unexplored.

Even though these studies have examined text messaging in terms of linguistic conventions (Soria, Gutiérrez-Colón, and Frumuselu, 2020), social bonding (Liimatta, 2023), address terms (Okafor, 2022), and ceremonial functions (Chandra, 2019; Coplan et al., 2022; Ajayi and Akinrinlola, 2024), they have not systematically analysed how interpersonal meaning is realised through the interpersonal metafunction. Specifically, these studies have not explored how mood types, modality, and appraisal resources are deployed to enact social roles and negotiate relationships in birthday and condolence messages. They have also not comparatively examined these two genres. The current study, therefore, bridges this gap by applying the SFL framework to comparatively analyse how interpersonal meanings are constructed and differentiated in celebratory versus grief-oriented text messages.

2.2 Interpersonal Metafunctions in SFL

In Halliday's (1985) definition of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the linguistic and extra-linguistic properties of meaning-making are believed to be achieved through systems of choice rather than fixed syntactic rules. These choices are also influenced by the social contexts since meaning is hard to understand without knowing the background or context. SFL, therefore, conceptualises language as both "systemic" because it presents speakers with a network of interrelated options for meaning, and "functional," since its primary concern is with the purposes language serves in social interaction (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004). Unlike traditional grammar models, SFL prioritises how linguistic elements realise meaning in context, making the text, rather than the sentence, the central unit of analysis.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) proposed four ways of understanding meaning (metafunctions of language), of which three are realised within the structure of the clause. The fourth metafunction, however, manifests within the clause complex, that is, sequences of clauses interconnected through logico-semantic relations (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 61). These four metafunctions are as follows:

Table 1

Metafunctions and their reflexes in the grammar

Metafunction	Definition (kind of meaning)	Corresponding status in the clause	Type of structure
Experiential	Construing a model of experience	Clauses as representation	Segmental (based on constituency)
Interpersonal	Enacting social relationships	Clauses as exchange	Prosodic
Textual	Creating relevance to context	Clause as a message	Culminative
Logical	Construing logical relations	–	Iterative

Source: Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 61)

Chueasuai (2017) explains that the interpersonal metafunction of language looks at how language is used to establish and maintain relationships with people. This is done by, among other things, controlling their behaviour and giving them information. In analysing the interpersonal metafunctions that people assume when interacting with others, Herman et al. (2022) opine that there are speech functions or roles (i.e., giving a command, making an offer, asking a question, or making a statement) that communicators assume whenever texts are exchanged.

These speech functions fall under the domain of Mood, Modality, and the use of Personal Pronouns. The Mood is made up of the Subject and the Finite. The Subject supplies the rest of what it takes to form a proposition (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014:76). The finite, on the other hand, refers to the first functional element of the verbal group (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Interpersonal metafunctions are also realised in terms of Modality (Ijam & Al-Ameedi, 2024). Briones (2016) contends that modality is identified in terms of determining the degree by which a language user demonstrates the certainty or lack thereof of what they are communicating, which is known as Modalisation, and the degree of imposition that they are putting across when asking someone to do something or exchange

goods and services, known as Modulation (Briones 2016: 111). Ijam and Al-Ameedi (2024) opine that the uses of lexico-grammatical resources such as modal verbs (can/could, may/might, shall/should, must, etc.), adjectives (possible, certain, probable, inevitable, etc.), adverbs (probably, likely, perhaps, rarely, etc.), nouns (likelihood, possibility, probability, etc.), and other devices serve as triggers of Modalisation. On the other hand, Modulation shows the speaker's sense of obligation: allowed, supposed, and required, as well as inclination: willing, keen, and determined. It thus exposes the speaker's level of confidence while exchanging information through a wide range of linguistic resources, including modal verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and other forms such as "required to" and "inclined to."

In addition to mood and modality, Liping (2017) argues that interpersonal metafunction can also be analysed in terms of the choice of personal pronouns. For instance, the use of *I-You* establishes a direct relationship between the speaker and the addressee, which creates a dyadic interaction between the interlocutors (Ofosu, et al., 2023). Liping (2017) posits that this positioning allows speakers to assert their perspectives (*I*) while simultaneously acknowledging the presence and role of the listener (*you*). Similarly, the pronoun *we* can be used to create inclusivity, signalling solidarity or shared identity between the speaker and the audience (Ofosu et al., 2023), which can strengthen social bonds and collective alignment. This theory holds significance in the current study as it reveals how language is used to establish, maintain, or manage social relationships through mood, modality, and pronoun choices.

3. Research Method

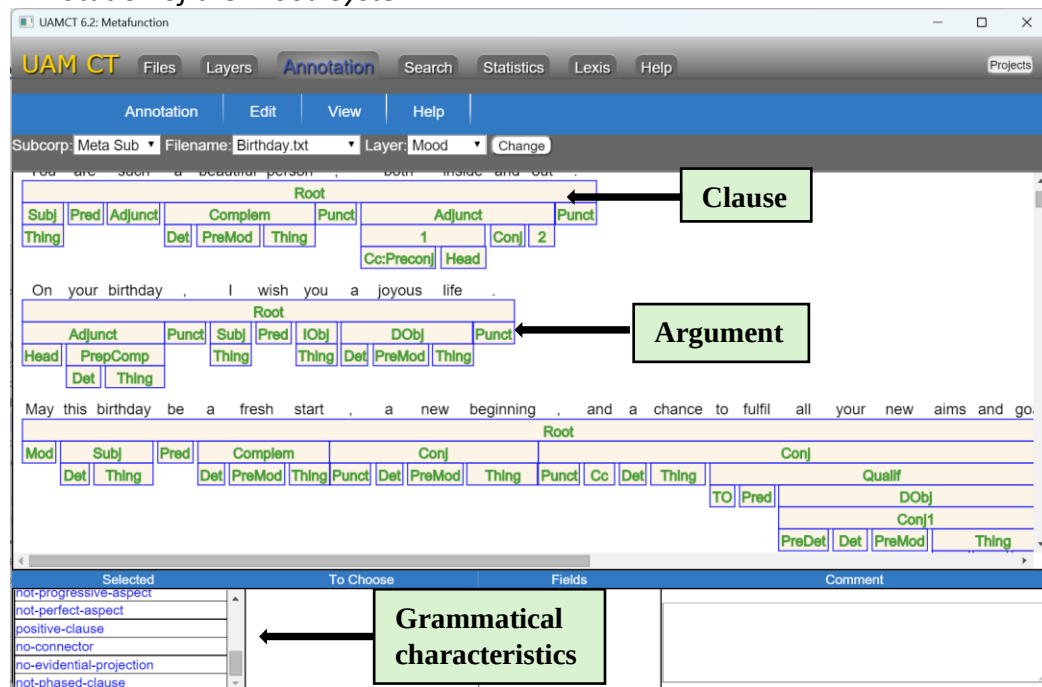
3.1 Research Design

The researchers used a descriptive qualitative research design for the collection and analysis of the data. This approach is suited for the exploration of language used to enact social relationships and to indicate the roles of participants in communication. The researchers used the simple random sampling technique to collect the data since all the text messages share the same characteristics and stand the chance of being selected at random. The data consists of 250 birthday messages and 250 condolence messages, sourced from the internet. The selected messages were those that were given by the close relatives (i.e., mothers, fathers, spouses, children, or siblings) as the inclusion criterion. Afreh and Ofosu (2024) argue, for instance, that the death of an individual has a heavy toll on the close relations because of the social and emotional proximity between them. This assertion is backed by Bottomley et al. (2017), who claim that interpersonal closeness with the deceased prior to death is a significant predictor of grief reactions following loss. The researchers contend that the severity of grief reactions often reflects the closeness of the relationship (Bottomley et al. 2017: 2), which, most often, is realised by the immediate family members. Thus, this data can serve as an appropriate corpus for analysis.

3.2 Data Handling and Mode of Analysis

The data were processed through a computer-mediated annotation software, *UAM Corpus Tool 6.2*, for interpersonal metafunction (O'Donnell 2008). The researchers used the in-built layers of SFL Mood, Modality, and Personal Pronoun analysis of UAM CT. Figure 1 below illustrates how the corpus tool has annotated clauses based on the Mood-system layer. The tool was also used to generate the statistical properties of the corpus and provided insights into patterns and characteristics of language use.

Figure 1
Annotation of the Mood System



Note:

The clause to be annotated appears in the body of the software, one at a time, and beneath the utterance are boxes for the accompanying argument that determines the function of the Mood (declarative, imperative, or interrogative). Beneath the interface are all the grammatical characteristics that input the Mood of the clause when the clause follows the structure of such a system.

To ensure systematic analysis and easy referencing, the data were coded according to the message type and reference numbers. Thus, messages were labelled with the code (BM for Birthday Message) and (CM for Condolence Message) together with a numerical identifier to specify individual messages within the corpus. This coding system allows for precise identification and discussion of specific texts during the analysis. Reliability was ensured through systematic coding and cross-checking.

3.3 Ethical Consideration

Since the data for the study were obtained from publicly accessible platforms, no formal ethical approval or permission was required. The materials did not involve direct interaction with human participants; however, the researchers observed strict ethical standards throughout the research process. Particularly, attention was given to maintaining the textual integrity of the data, ensuring that the content was neither altered nor misrepresented during collection, analysis, and reporting. In addition, the researchers carefully screened the data to ensure that it did not contain any information that could identify an individual or a specific group of people. Any personal identifiers, including names, usernames, images, or contextual clues, were cleaned. Consequently, the data was fully anonymised, and the study posed no risk of harm, private violation, or misrepresentation to individuals or communities.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The section presents the results of the analysis of the data as annotated by UAM CT. In the first section of the analysis, the lexical characteristics of the clauses are calculated and presented. This is followed by the mood systems analysis. The modality and the use of personal pronouns are also presented. In the discussion section, the researchers give a detailed qualitative interpretation of the interpersonal metafunction of the realisation of the mood, modality, and the use of personal pronouns in the data.

4.1.1 Lexical Patterns of the Data

The lexical patterns of the clauses in the data are presented in Table 2 below. These patterns include the number of clauses and tokens in each clause. The clause types (group or complex) are also presented.

Table 2

Lexical patterns of the data

GRAMMATICAL-RANK	Birthday		Condolences		Total
	N	%	N	%	N
Token	7282	48.1	7852	51.9	15134
Clause	870	40.8	1261	59.2	2131
Group	2464	49.4	2522	50.6	4986
Complex	187	38.4	300	61.6	487

Source: Statistical analysis with UAM Corpus Tool

The analysis of the data indicates similarity in the length and linguistic density of text message types. In Table 2, a marginal variation is observed in tokens, clauses, groups, and complex clauses. For instance, the birthday messages accounted for 7,282 (48.1%) tokens distributed across 870 clauses. In contrast, condolence messages comprised 7,852 (51.9%), along with 1261 clauses. These findings suggest that while both genres exhibit comparable textual volume, condolence messages tend to be structurally more elaborated.

4.1.2 Mood System

In this section, we examine the finiteness of the clauses, the polarity of finite clauses, and the types of finite clauses that signal the interpersonal metafunction in the text messages. Table 3 presents the distribution of finite and non-finite clauses.

Table 3

Finites in the clause

FINITENESS	Birthday		Condolences		Total
	N	%	N	%	N
finite-clause	676	39.0	1059	61	1735
non-finite-clause	194	49.0	202	51.0	396
TOTAL:	870	40.8	1261	59.2	2131

Source: Statistical analysis with UAM Corpus Tool

The analysis reveals that the data contained 2131 clauses, of which 1735 are finite clauses, and 396 are non-finite clauses. Finite clauses occurred 676 times in birthday

messages (39%) and 1059 times in condolence messages (61%). These are the clauses from which the interpersonal metafunctions are inferred. Among these finite clauses, there are positive and negative finites; thus, some of the verb arguments express positive sensitivity while others express the negative. Table 4 presents the positive and negative realisations of the finite clauses in the data.

Table 4

Polarity of the finite clauses

POLARITY	Birthday		Condolences		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N
positive clause	651	39.2	1011	60.8	1662
negative clause	25	34.3	48	65.7	73
TOTAL:	676	39.0	1059	61.0	1735

Source: Statistical analysis with UAM Corpus Tool

Of the 1735 finite clauses, positive clauses constitute 651 clauses, representing 39.2% in birthday messages, while 1011 positive clauses, representing 60.8%, were realised in condolences messages. Similarly, negative clauses were realised more in condolence messages than birthday messages, with 65.7% in condolence and 34.3% in birthday messages. In Table 5, the statistical representation of the types of mood: declarative, interrogative, and imperative, is illustrated.

Table 5

Types of mood (Finite clauses)

FINITE-CLAUSE-TYPE3	Birthday		Condolences		Total
	N	%	N	%	N
Declarative clause	599	38.4	961	61.6	1560
Interrogative clause	3	100	0	0	3
Imperative clause	74	43	98	57	172
TOTAL:	676	39	1059	61	1735

Source: Statistical analysis with UAM Corpus Tool

Visualisation from the table indicates that declarative clauses constitute the majority of the clauses in the data, with a total of 1560, representing 90% of the entire finite clauses. With a total of 1735 finite clauses, declarative clauses in birthday messages consist of 599 clauses representing 38.4%, while condolences messages are made up of 961 declarative clauses representing 61.6%. Following the declarative clauses are imperative clauses with 172 clauses, representing 9.9% of the total finite clauses. In terms of the message types, birthday messages have 74 (43%) imperative clauses, and condolence messages have 98 (57%) imperative clauses. Interrogative clauses were the least common clauses that occurred in the data. In both text message types, three (3) instances of interrogative clauses are used.

4.1.3 Modal Markers

This section presents the use of modality as a linguistic resource to express varying degrees of certainty, possibility, probability, and imposition in the selected messages. The

discussion is structured in two parts: first, the distribution of modality types (verbal and non-verbal) is examined, followed by an analysis of the modal semantic categories.

4.1.4 Modality Types

Table 6 provides an overview of the distribution between verbal and non-verbal modality types across the data. This is further elaborated in Tables 7 and 8, which present a breakdown of the specific verbal modality types (modal auxiliary and semi-modals) and non-verbal modality types (adjectival and adverbial modalities), respectively.

Table 6

Modality type

MODALITY-TYPE	Birthday		Condolences		Total
	N	%	N	%	N
verbal modality	141	31.2	311	68.8	452
nonverbal modality	5	71.4	2	28.6	7
TOTAL:	146	31.8	313	68.2	459

Source: Statistical analysis with UAM Corpus Tool

As presented in Table 6, verbal modality dominated the messages with a total of 454 instances, compared with seven (7) occurrences of non-verbal modality. This contrast highlights the centrality of verbal expressions in the linguistic encoding of certainty and interpersonal negotiation (Hartati 2015) within the communicative acts of the messages. This suggests that Condolence messages exhibited a higher frequency of verbal modality, accounting for 311 occurrences (68.8%), while Birthday messages registered 141 occurrences (31.2%).

Table 7

Verbal modality type

VERBAL-MODALITY-TYPE	Birthday		Condolences		Total
	N	%	N	%	N
modal auxiliary	137	33.5	272	66.5	409
semi modal	4	9.3	39	90.7	43
TOTAL:	141	31.2	311	68.8	452

Source: Statistical analysis with UAM Corpus Tool

The distribution of verbal modalities further highlights the predominant use of modal auxiliaries by the speakers across both message types. Specifically, modal auxiliaries accounted for 137 instances in Birthday messages, representing 33.5% of the total, and 272 cases in Condolence messages, representing 66.5%. Additionally, a distribution of semi-modals was observed, with Condolence messages accounting for 39 cases (90.7%) and Birthday messages with four (4) occurrences (9.3%).

Table 8

Nonverbal modality type

NONVERBAL-MODALITY-TYPE	Birthday		Condolences		
	N	%	N	%	N
adjectival modality	1	33.3	2	66.7	3

adverbial modality	4	100	0	00.0	4
TOTAL:	5	71.4	2	28.6	7

Source: Statistical analysis with UAM Corpus Tool

The analysis also identified adjectival and adverbial modalities as the two types of non-verbal modality present in the data. Although their frequency was relatively low compared to verbal modality, a slight distribution was observed between the message types, with five (5) appearances in birthday messages and two (2) in condolence messages. This indicates a marginal preference for such forms in celebratory contexts. Further disaggregation of the data revealed that adjectival modality accounted for three (3) occurrences, while adverbial modality constituted four (4) instances. Notably, all instances of adverbial modality were found exclusively in Birthday messages. This aligns with Machin and Mayr (2023), who contend that adverbial modalities are often used to convey optimism, possibility, and well-wishing, which is commonly associated with celebratory messages, as illustrated in the examples below.

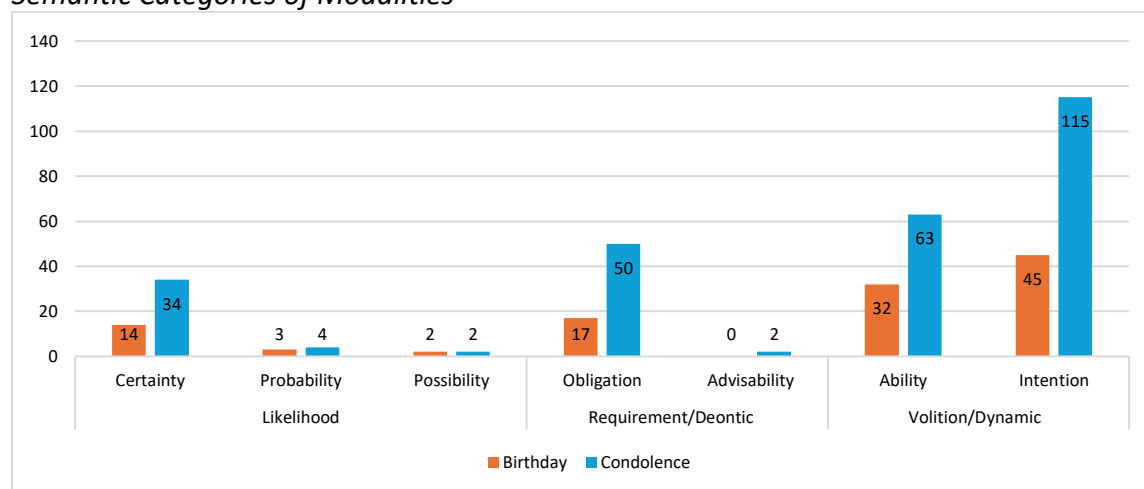
- (1) *Someone as amazing as you is surely a gift on earth sent from above (BM 48).*
- (2) *To me, you are like a box of chocolate: sweet and undeniably amazing (BM 217).*

4.1.5 Modal Semantics

This section presents the semantic realisation of the identified modality types in the data. It focuses on how speakers express epistemic, deontic, and dynamic meanings through linguistic choices. Figure 2 below illustrates the distribution of semantic categories across the data.

Figure 2

Semantic Categories of Modalities



Source: Statistical analysis with UAM Corpus Tool

The data from the figure above indicate that speakers predominantly employ modality to express intention, ability, obligation, and certainty. For instance, modality expressing intention occurred most frequently with 160 instances, followed by ability (95), obligation (67), and certainty (48). Probability, possibility, and advisability were the least occurring categories.

Certainty

Both BM and CM transmit different levels of assurance using modality expressions based on the evidence. Extracts (3-5), for instance, utilise the words “undeniably,” “clear,” and “sure” to convey a high degree of assurance, which positions the speakers as highly confident about the truth of their statements.

- (3) *To me, you are like a box of chocolate: **undeniably** amazing (BM 217).*
- (4) *It was **clear** to everyone to see how much you loved your father (CM 100)*
- (5) *The loss of a father and grandfather is devastating, but I’m **sure** his memory will always be with you (CM 119).*

In extract (3), the use of “undeniably” leaves no space for alternative interpretations. It operates as a linguistic resource for maximising certainty and persuasive force. Additionally, in extract (4), the speaker constructs a shared epistemological ground to imply that the truth is self-evident and collectively acknowledged. It provides solidarity and mutual agreement between the interlocutors. The addition of signalling certainty (extract 5) also intensifies the evaluative tone of the message. The use of “sure” is not only a factual prediction but an emotionally reinforced assurance that combines epistemic certainty with affective reassurance, particularly significant in the context of empathy.

Probability

In modality, probability expressions represent the likelihood that an event will occur. From the analysis of the data, it was revealed that both BM and CM convey high likelihood via modality expressions based on the facts. Expressions in extract 6 exemplify this probability.

- (6) *Someone as amazing as you is **surely** a gift on earth sent from above (BM 48).*

The use of the adverb “surely” encodes a high probability that highlights the speaker’s strong epistemic commitment that the statement is a possibility and an almost certain truth. The use of this modality positions the speaker as a credible evaluator of the proposition. This aligns with Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2014) interpersonal metafunction that connects the audience to the speaker on an affective level. For instance, in the birthday and celebratory contexts, the messages foster intimacy and positive relational alignment between the interlocutors.

Possibility

In the Hallidayan interpersonal metafunction modules, possibility allows the speaker to keep claims tentative and avoid overstatements (Hadi & Guo 2020). In the extracts below, the statements support the notion that something is feasible but not always true. The use of “maybe,” as exemplified in extracts (7) and (8), indicates the speakers’ capacity to prove something.

- (7) *I know that it only takes a second or **maybe** less than a second to say I love you (BM 94).*
- (8) *Well, **maybe** that’s why mothers are great and next to God (BM 234).*

The use of *maybe* marks a lower degree of commitment. It demonstrates that the propositions are conceivable but not assertive as absolute truth. This creates space for alternative perspectives. The expression of “maybe” as a possibility can also express

politeness in that the speaker avoids imposing their views as a definite claim that protects both their face (avoiding being proven wrong) and the other's face (avoiding direct contradiction).

Obligation

In Halliday and Mathiesen's (2014) SFL framework, obligation falls under the deontic modality. This metafunction encodes the speaker's stance towards the expression of the degree of compulsion, necessity, or permission. Expressions of obligation could be strong, weak, or non-existent. From the analysis, it is realised that both CM and BM use these modal expressions frequently.

(9) *If there's anything you **need to** help get through this awful time, just ask (CM 15).*

(10) *The bond of a brother can't be described; you **have to** have known it (CM 184).*

In example (9), the use of the modal "need to" denotes weak or conditional obligation because it does not impose an action but rather positions the offer of help within the addressee's control. The conditional clause in extract (9) further mitigates imposition and functions as a politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson 1987) by preserving the addressee's negative face (the desire to act without undue constraint). In extract (10), however, the phrase carries a strong obligation to imply that knowing the bond is a prerequisite for full understanding of its meaning.

Advisability

Modal verbs that imply what is desirable or advisable in a certain circumstance, such as "should," "ought to," and "would like to," are frequently used to convey advisability (Zhang 2019). According to Zhang (2019), the context and the particular words used determine how strong the advice is. From the analysis, the use of this type of modality is used to communicate suggestions or recommendations and frequently implies a certain level of obligation or desire, as exemplified in the example in extract (11) below.

(11) *But her memories **should** be treasured, and her life celebrated for the amazing woman she was. (CM 14).*

From the extract, it is realised that the speaker advises the addressee on a socially desirable action that invites alignment with the speaker's values and emotional note.

Ability

Modal verbs play an essential role in expressing a speaker's attitude towards the addressee (Zeng & Wang, 2019). Imre (2017) has observed that "can" is one of the most frequently used modal verbs used convey ability, possibility, and permission. In the data, "can" and its negative form "cannot" are used to express ability. This is exemplified in extracts (12) and (13).

(12) *I **can never** thank God enough for blessing me with you as my father (BM 22).*

(13) *You make me the happiest, and I **cannot** express how much I love you (BM 141).*

It is realised from the data that both condolence and birthday messages employ the modal terms for mental ability. Thus, the expression of ability is not limited to the literal capacity of the verb, but it extends to the metaphorical, social, and emotional domains (see Olson et al., 2006). In extract (12), for instance, the negative modal "can never" demotes a

metaphorical and bounded ability where the speaker acknowledges the impossibility of fully expressing gratitude. This message frames the capacity to thank as inherently insufficient. A similar emotional limitation is conveyed in extract (13), where the speaker's inability to communicate their affection translates it into words.

Intention

Viebahn (2018) espouses that modal expressions of intentionality express a person's plans, intentions, or readiness to carry out a specific action. As seen in examples (14-16), modal verbs such as "will" and "would" are frequently used to convey intentionality.

(14) *Even if we are near or miles apart, we **will** still be together by heart (BM 133).*

(15) *It doesn't matter how old you become; I **will** never stop loving you (BM 157).*

(16) *Though nothing could ever make up for losing your dear mother, I **will** be praying that you are looked after and helped through the shock of her passing (CM 232).*

From extract (14), for instance, the speaker affirms the endurance of emotional connection despite the physical distance. This helps the speaker to shift togetherness from spatial to emotional closeness. In extract (15), the intention expressed unconditional and timeless affection to highlight commitment and stability. Additionally, the speaker in extract (16), for instance, acknowledged the irreplaceability of the loss to offer emotional support to the addressee.

4.1.6 Personal Pronouns

Liping (2017) has contended that the choice of personal pronouns also triggers the realisation of interpersonal metafunction. The frequency distribution has been presented in the table below.

Table 9

Personal pronoun types

PERSONAL PRONOUN TYPE	Birthday		Condolences		Total
	N	%	N	%	N
1p-pronoun	442	45.5	529	54.5	971
2p-pronoun	536	46.1	627	53.9	1163
3p-pronoun	44	14.3	267	85.8	311
TOTAL:	1022	41.8	1423	58.2	2445

Source: Statistical analysis with UAM Corpus Tool

The analysis of personal pronouns reveals significant patterns in the expression of interpersonal alignment. This indicates that speakers in both message types exhibited marked preferences for second-person pronouns. A total of 1163 instances of second-person pronouns were recorded across the data, followed by 971 instances of first-person pronouns. The third-person pronoun, by contrast, occurred far less frequently, with only 311 instances, indicating that direct engagement between sender and recipient dominated the communicative style.

In terms of message-type distribution, condolence messages contained a higher frequency of personal pronouns than birthday messages. This suggests a greater degree of personalised and relational focus in emotionally sensitive contexts. As presented in the table above, 1423 personal pronouns were identified in condolence messages, compared to 1022

in birthday messages. Concerning first-person pronoun usage, Condolence messages accounted for 529 instances, slightly surpassing the 422 instances recorded in birthday messages. Similarly, second-person pronouns appeared 627 times in condolence messages, as opposed to 536 times in birthday messages. A more pronounced contrast in the use of third-person pronouns, with 267 instances in condolence messages compared to 44 instances in birthday messages, is realised.

These findings may suggest that condolence messages tend to be more interpersonally intensive. The relatively higher use of third-person pronouns in condolences discourse may also reflect references to the deceased or broader family network, thus expanding the interpersonal frame beyond the immediate dyad of speaker-addressee. This finding is consistent with (e.g., Biber et al. 2021; Holmes & Wilson, 2022), which emphasise the role of pronouns in shaping relational dynamics and discourse intimacy across communicative genres.

4.2 Discussion

The comparative analysis of birthday and condolence messages as distinctive communicative registers reveals significant insight into how interpersonal metafunctions are realised through mood, modality, and the use of personal pronouns. From the analysis, it was revealed that condolences messages have a higher frequency of clauses and the increased presence of grouped and complex clause structures. This points to a greater degree of syntactic complexity. This observation aligns with Absattar et al.'s (2022) proposition that language use in emotionally charged contexts, such as expressing sympathy or grief, often necessitates a more elaborate syntactic organisation to convey affective meanings effectively. Similarly, Eggins (2004) and Cheng (2023) note that the deployment of clause complexes can serve interpersonal functions that enable speakers or writers to manage face-threatening acts delicately, as is often required in condolence text messages.

Although both message types function in contexts of interpersonal closeness, they are different in emotional tone, communicative purpose, and linguistic strategies. A key finding is the predominant use of the declarative mood across both registers. Dąbrowska (2019) contends that the use of declarative moods functions as a vehicle for sharing statements, sentiments, and evaluation rather than solicitation of information, something both message types sought to do. Specifically, regarding birthday messages in the current study, it was realised from the analysis that declarative statements tend to be positively valenced. This allows the senders of the message to appreciate, admire, and express joy with the addressee. In condolence messages, on the other hand, declarative statements were used to convey empathetic acknowledgement or negative polarity, which recognises the loss of a loved one and the expression of solidarity with the bereaved.

The prevalence of negative polarity in condolence messages comes as no surprise since Schaefficke et al. (2021) argue that this type of polarity expresses a lack of something or a negative state. For instance, in the extracts below, the senders express their inability to share the same emotions as the bereaved family to heighten the pain the demise of the deceased has caused the family.

(17) *I can't tell you how sorry I was to hear about your sister* (CM 138).

(18) *I can't imagine how hard this is for you* (CM 151)

The analysis also demonstrates disparity between the use of verbal and non-verbal modalities, suggesting that the expression of affect, obligation, or epistemic commitment in

emotionally charged contexts such as condolences necessitates a greater reliance on verbal modal forms (see Duku et al. 2024). This is reinforced by the communicative function of modality as a resource for interpersonal alignment and social politeness (Van Linden 2012; Slipetska et al. 2023).

In terms of verbal modality distribution, the analysis revealed the use of modal auxiliaries across both registers. However, a sharp contrast is realised in terms of semi-modals. The analysis demonstrates that condolences messages are heavily dense with semi-modals such as “have to,” “need to,” “supposed to,” which often express necessity, advisability, or emotional sensitivity (Van Linden 2012; Tseronis & Forceville, 2017). These verbs are more strategically deployed in messages of sympathy where interpersonal alignment and softening of speech acts are linguistically significant. For instance, in examples (19-21), the speakers express a strong sense of necessity and obligation.

(19) *You feel responsible for what happened and **need to** be there to help when he is in trouble* (CM 163).

(20) *The bond of a brother can't be described; you **have to** know it* (CM 184).

(21) *I wish you everything the world **has to** offer* (BM 177).

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the interpersonal metafunction highlights how modality also plays a part in meaning transmission between speakers and listeners. According to Chandra (2019) and Dąbrowska (2019), positive, joyous, and optimistic attitudes are frequently reflected in birthday messages in particular. In the current study, certainty, possibility, and intention are the categories of modality that indicate a high level of positive expectancy or assurance for the future well-being of birthday celebrants. From the analysis of the data, it was realised that senders of birthday messages projected optimism and affirmed their positive relational bond with the birthday celebrants. In contrast, condolence messages made greater use of obligation, necessity, and epistemic certainty to position the senders as sympathisers who wish to provide support and consolation to the deceased's family. The prevalence of semi-modals in the data, especially in condolence messages, demonstrates the use of deontic modality to convey shared values and emotional commitments (Jarmużek & Klonowski, 2020), often framed in ways that respect the addressee's autonomy. This is in alignment with Brown and Levinson (1987), where speakers seek to mitigate imposition while affirming solidarity. It also noted that birthday messages frequently use modulation to convey wishes, desires, and tactful instructions for the recipient to have fun.

The use of a variety of modality types, including modulation (i.e., obligation and willingness, modality (high probability/certainty), median probability, low probability, and modalisation (probability and usuality), provides tangible support and respect to the grieving process. A closer examination of the message-type distribution reveals that condolence messages consistently exhibited higher frequencies across all the semantic categories compared with birthday messages. This highlights that modalities are relied on to articulate emotional support for others (Tseronis & Forceville, 2017). These patterns also confirm the study by Cheung (2021), that modality, in condolences, for example, serves as a rhetorical and pragmatic resource for managing interpersonal affects, which tends to project supportive commitments and reinforce social expectations.

Additionally, a great level of civility and respect for the bereaved person's emotional state is demonstrated by the circumspect and indirect modal language used in condolence messages. Liping (2017) found that personal pronouns play a significant role in establishing

relationships between speakers and addressees. The study found that speakers preferred second-person pronouns to indicate a direct and rational mode of address. Condolence messages contained a higher frequency of personal pronouns than birthday messages. This suggests a greater degree of personalisation and relational focus in emotionally sensitive contexts. The higher use of third-person pronouns in condolences may also reflect references to the deceased or broader family network, which expands the interpersonal frame beyond the immediate dyad of speaker-addressee. This strategy situates the grief within a broader social circle. Lucidly, condolence messages highlight understanding, support, and a tactful recognition of loss and the mourning process, whereas birthday messages concentrate on optimistic future predictions and joyous wishes. In order to negotiate positions and actualise social interactions between speakers and listeners, modality is essential.

Together, the study shows that mood, modality, and personal pronouns function synergistically as interpersonal resources, with positively valenced declarative moods, modalisation, and second-person pronouns in birthday messages constructing optimism and solidarity. Additionally, increased clause complexity, deontic modality, negative polarity, and expanded pronoun use in condolence messages negotiate empathy, face, and social alignment in contexts of loss.

5. Conclusion

The study aimed to analyse the interpersonal metafunction between birthday and condolence messages as distinct communicative registers. Drawing on Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) SFL, the study revealed that mood, modality, and personal pronouns are central to how social relationships are enacted and maintained in each register. From the analysis, it has been established that positive, joyous, and optimistic attitudes are frequently reflected in birthday messages. Certainty, possibility, and intention are the categories of modality that indicate a high level of positive expectancy or assurance for future well-being. Additionally, birthday messages frequently use modulation to convey wishes, desires, and tactful instructions for the recipient to have fun. These features reinforce intimacy and strengthen the bond between the addresser and the addressee. However, sensitive communications meant to acknowledge loss, offer consolation, and show sympathy are used in condolence messages.

The findings affirm that the interpersonal metafunction of the choice of the modal types is reflective of the relationship of the sender and recipient, as well as the socio-emotional context and cultural expectations of the communicative event. Mood, modality, and personal pronouns work systematically to realise register-specific interpersonal meaning and illustrate a linguistic resource to differentiate their social purpose. Thus, this study is underpinned by the idea that language in ceremonial and affective contexts is far from formulaic (s); rather, it is a dynamic resource that speakers use to suit the tenor, emotional demands, and social function of the interactions. The study also informs digital discourse analysis by showing how linguistic choices encode empathy and solidarity.

This study is limited to online messages; therefore, it is recommended that future research should include spoken interactions and compare interpersonal metafunctions across cultures and platforms. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study demonstrates how interpersonal metafunctions shape relational intimacy in contrasting genres of digital discourse.

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EQUIVALENCE PROBLEMS FOUND IN MACHINE TRANSLATION OUTPUT: INSIGHTS FROM POST-EDITING ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examines post-editing strategies and equivalence problems in Google Translate (GT) outputs of a non-literary text, *International Relations Theory* by Ferreira (2017). Focusing on the English–Indonesian translation, the analysis is limited to five levels of equivalence proposed by Baker (2018): word, above-word, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic. Using a qualitative descriptive approach supported by LF Aligner, AntConc, and AntPConc, the study identifies equivalence problems in a parallel corpus. The findings reveal frequent word-level issues, particularly loanwords and lexical mismatches, requiring paraphrasing and cultural substitution. Problems also occur at the above-word and grammatical levels, including idiomatic expressions, collocations, singular–plural mismatches, and passive constructions. Textual issues relate to cohesion gaps, while pragmatic problems are less frequent but involve implicit meaning loss. Overall, GT performs better with high-frequency nouns, adjectives, and adverbs than with verbs. The study highlights the importance of post-editing machine translation (PEMT) and recommends its integration into translation curricula to enhance linguistic competence, digital literacy, and professional readiness in AI-assisted translation contexts.

Keywords: *equivalence; google translate; machine translation; post-editing; translation pedagogy.*

1. Introduction

Machine translation (MT) is a prominent product of Artificial Intelligence (AI) that enables the automatic conversion of texts between languages through technological systems (Lihua, 2022). Among various MT tools, Google Translate (GT) has become one of the most widely used platforms due to its accessibility and its ability to respond to the rapidly increasing demand for translation in the global market—demands that often exceed the capacity of conventional human translation alone (Harto et al., 2022). Consequently, MT has been increasingly adopted in academic, professional, and institutional contexts.

Despite continuous improvements in MT quality, numerous studies have demonstrated that MT outputs still contain a wide range of errors, with translation accuracy varying across language pairs (Harto et al., 2022; Karibayeva et al., 2021; Ziganshina et al.,

2021). Harto et al. (2022) synthesize existing MT error classifications into several key frameworks. First, errors can be examined from the perspectives of acceptability, which includes grammar, syntax, vocabulary, coherence, style, register, and spelling, and adequacy, which involves omissions, additions, mistranslations, and shifts in meaning (Daems et al., 2017). Second, MT errors may be categorized as grammatical, lexical-semantic, and syntactic errors (Sycz-Opon & Galuskina, 2017). Third, Sin-Wai (2017) proposes a broader classification encompassing linguistic, referential, stylistic, syntactical, terminological, and typological errors. These findings indicate that, despite technological advances, MT systems continue to exhibit systematic weaknesses.

As a result, several scholars argue that MT outputs often fail to meet the quality standards expected by end-users (Jia et al., 2019). In academic translation contexts, these end-users include journal reviewers and editors, while the ultimate audience consists of readers who rely on translated texts for accurate and clear information (Harto et al., 2022). To address these shortcomings, MT outputs require human intervention through post-editing machine translation (PEMT). The primary objective of PEMT is to enhance translation quality by identifying and correcting errors in MT outputs, thereby producing texts that are “accurate, faithful, grammatical, idiomatic, and informative” (Sin-Wai, 2017, p. 127). Through PEMT, translators address a range of linguistic, referential, stylistic, syntactical, terminological, and typological issues.

While PEMT has gained increasing scholarly attention, existing research has predominantly focused on literary texts or has examined MT errors without systematically applying post-editing frameworks. While previous studies explored equivalence in literary contexts, limited attention has been given to non-literary texts analyzed through post-editing frameworks, particularly in the English–Indonesian language pair. Non-literary texts are defined as texts intended to inform, explain, instruct, argue, or present factual information for practical purposes (Dordevic, 2017). Such texts are typically characterized by clarity, conciseness, objectivity, structural organization, and a strong emphasis on precision and unambiguous meaning. Dordevic (2017) further argues that non-literary translation follows different principles from literary translation, as it prioritizes accuracy and pragmatic appropriateness over stylistic flexibility. Consequently, translation strategies effective in literary contexts may not be suitable for non-literary texts, especially when processed through MT systems.

Addressing this research gap, the present study investigates equivalence problems in Google Translate outputs of a non-literary text through a post-editing perspective. Drawing on Baker’s (2018) framework of equivalence, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What types of equivalence problems are found in Google Translate outputs at the word, above-word, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic levels? (2) How can post-editing strategies be applied to resolve these equivalence problems? In addition, this study examines the distribution of equivalence problems across major word classes—nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs—to identify patterns in machine translation performance. By doing so, this research contributes to the growing body of PEMT studies and reinforces the critical role of human expertise in ensuring translation quality in AI-assisted translation practices.

2. Literature Review

The idea of equivalency, which describes how well meaning, function, and communicative intent are maintained between the source language (SL) and the target

language (TL), is frequently used to evaluate translation quality. According to Widya and Ayu (2015), a translation should sound accurate and natural, especially when it comes to grammar and lexis. Thus, equivalency entails the faithful transfer of meaning, message, and purpose from the SL to the TL and goes beyond formal resemblance (Hidayat et al., 2019). Words, phrases, clauses, sentence structure, and semantic and pragmatic aspects are just a few of the language levels at which translation accuracy functions (Zawawi & Maghfiroh, 2020).

Non-equivalency is still a problem despite progress in machine translation (MT), particularly in MT outputs when contextual and cultural awareness is lacking. MT systems frequently fail to account for linguistic diversity and cultural specificity, in contrast to human translators, which leads to inconsistencies between SL and TL interpretations. In translation studies, Baker's concept of equivalency has been widely used to systematically account for these incompatibilities. Baker divides equivalency into five interconnected levels: word, above-word, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic equivalency, as opposed to treating it as a single idea (Baker, 2011, 2018). This paradigm is especially useful for post-editing machine translation (PEMT) since it allows researchers and translators to use targeted post-editing strategies and pinpoint the precise levels at which MT outputs fail.

2.1 Equivalence in Word Level

Non-equivalency occurs at the word level when a lexical item in the SL has a culturally distinctive meaning or has no direct counterpart in the TL. Baker draws attention to recurrent problems such loanwords, semantically complicated words, non-lexicalized concepts, and variations in expressive meaning. These issues frequently show up in MT outputs as literal translations that are correct in theory but incorrect in practice. Research continuously demonstrates that in order to maintain naturalness and clarity in the target language (TL), human intervention is necessary through techniques like paraphrase, cultural replacement, or the use of superordinate terms.

2.2 Equivalence above Word Level

In addition to carrying individual meanings, words often pose translation challenges when they come together to form meaning, called in phrases. The variations in how words are structured in the SL compared to the TL make it challenging, particularly when dealing with collocations, idioms, and fixed expressions (Supardi, et al., 2021). Baker (2018, p. 60-67) as cited in Nufus (2022, p. 2589) describes some problems, namely engrossing effect of source text patterning, misinterpreting the meaning of a source language collocation, tension between accuracy and naturalness, culture specific collocation, marked collocation in the source text, second language fixed expression which has no equivalent in TL and different context of idioms in SL and TL. Furthermore, Baker (2018) explains the strategies to address non-equivalence above word level such as encompass utilizing expressions in the target language with similar meanings or form, opting for idioms with comparable meanings but different structures, directly incorporating SL idioms, expressing the intended meaning through paraphrasing, removing linguistic play associated with the idioms, and omitting the entire idiom when equivalence proves challenging.

2.3 Equivalence in Grammatical Level

Number, tense, voice, person, gender, and other structural variations between languages are the root cause of equivalency issues at the grammatical level. These distinctions are especially noticeable when translating from English to Indonesian because numerous English grammatical categories are not required to be marked in Indonesian. MT systems frequently directly translate SL grammatical patterns into the target language (TL), producing awkward or deceptive sentences. As a result, post-editing frequently entails rearranging sentences or using lexical strategies to make up for grammatical errors.

2.4 Equivalence in Textual Level

Coherence and cohesiveness between sentences and paragraphs are important aspects of equivalency at the textual level. MT systems often fail to preserve logical flow and discourse organization that are consistent with TL norms, even when they may be successful in translating particular coherent devices (Sayogie & Supardi, 2021). This problem is particularly important in nonliterary works because informational accuracy and clarity are crucial. Therefore, the goal of textual post-editing is to improve readability and coherence by modifying conjunctions, reference chains, and theme progression.

In Mona Baker's framework, the textual level aligns with the sentence level. Equivalence in translation at textual level is achieved when cohesive words in the source language are translated literally, maintaining a resonance for the target readers. While a corresponding word in the target language may exist, it carries a different expressive nuance. It becomes a significant translation challenge in a specific context, where the disparity might be explicit or implicit. When the structure of the TL is less equivalent with the norms of the target readers, adjustments are necessary. Furthermore, Mona Baker underscores that cohesion, based on the principle of automatic recognition, is objective.

2.5 Equivalence in Pragmatic Level

At last, pragmatic equivalency entails interpreting the SL's implicit meanings, presuppositions, and cultural presumptions. According to Rustandi et al. (2021), machine translation (MT) systems often produce grammatically accurate but unsuccessful translations because they are unable to deduce implicature or modify meaning to meet the expectations of target language users. At this stage, non-equivalency is frequently recognized from the viewpoint of the reader, highlighting the critical role that human judgment plays in post-editing.

Translators must work out implied meanings in the SL to effectively convey the intended messages. Their role is to create the author's intention in a manner suitable for another culture, ensuring the target culture readers to understand it clearly (Supardi, et al., 2021). This means that pragmatic equivalence is more concerned with the reader's perspective than theoretical considerations. It underscores the importance of the text, encompassing its cultural and emotional nuances. Translations failing under the pragmatic level, at the smallest unit, often employ strategies like paraphrasing with unrelated words to capture various implications. However, at the pragmatic level, if the implications for target readers differ, the translation is considered non-equivalent. The meaning of the sentence may be distracted due to an inappropriate rendering in target language.

2.6 Related Current Studies

The errors, shortcomings, and challenges of GT into Kazakh language, which is considered as a language with complex morphology and syntax, are investigated by Karibayeva, et al., (2021). They found many inaccurate terms in the translated sentences from English to Kazakh. Meanwhile, Ziganshina, et al., (2021) compare three MT namely DeepL, Google Translate and Microsoft Translator for Russian translations of Cochrane plain language summaries by evaluating the quantitative of human post-editing work in an established translation workflow and quality assurance process. The results show that GT achieved the highest average quality assessments for its output, and the lowest amount of human post-editing, while DeepL performed slightly less effectively, and Microsoft Translator performed the worst.

An interesting study has been conducted by Harto, et al., (2022) about the post-editing of machine translation (PEMT) concerning the actual academic practices of the students and investigating how students' experiences with the challenges posed by PEMT. The paper provides detailed insights into how students initially began practicing PEMT into their academic routines and practical translation exercises. Data is gathered through various means, including focused-group discussions (FGD), survey questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and examination of students' documents. The results reveal that engaging in the post-editing process equips students with the opportunity to enhance their textual knowledge, fostering awareness and sensitivity to academic texts.

The challenge of non-equivalence arises when translating the Harry Potter novel with Google Translate. These problems are analyzed by Alfian (2022). The study employs AntConc and AntPConc software to cluster the top ten-word classes, namely adjective, noun, verb, and adverb identified in the novel. AntConc is used for generating a wordlist to determine the frequency of the words in the English text, whereas AntPConc is employed to designate the English and Indonesian text files as parallel texts. The research determined that Google Translate successfully translated and offered accurate suggestions for the top ten lists of noun, adjective, verb, and adverb. However, non-equivalences are identified at both the word and above-word levels. The challenge of equivalence emerges particularly in various lines of verbs, adjectives and adverbs. The author suggests that to enhance the naturalness of the translation input, multiple translation strategies need to be employed in the post-editing process. Sibuea, et al., (2023) focuses on identifying challenges related to equivalence that emerged during the translation of the Harry Potter novel. The literary work is characterized by its abundance of cultural terms and intricate sentences. The issue of equivalence is scrutinized through the lens of Mona Baker's theory, proposing to classify translation errors evident in the GT-generated output text. The findings reveal challenges for GT when translating literary texts, particularly in terms or words that both languages do not share and sentences featuring multiple perspectives.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze equivalence problems in machine translation output of non-literary texts. A qualitative descriptive approach is particularly appropriate because the focus of this study is not to measure the

frequency of errors statistically, but to examine, interpret, and explain how meaning equivalence is realized or disrupted between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT).

The descriptive qualitative design allows the researcher to systematically describe translation phenomena as they naturally occur in machine translation output, without manipulation or experimental intervention. Because it allows for a thorough comparison between ST-TT pairs and makes it easier to categorize equivalency concerns using well-established theoretical frameworks, this method is appropriate for machine translation analysis. This paper offers a thorough explanation of how machine translation manages intricate linguistic and discourse elements in non-literary texts by utilizing Baker's five levels of equivalency.

Therefore, a qualitative descriptive method is considered the most appropriate research design for this study, as it supports comprehensive equivalence analysis, theory-driven classification, and interpretative explanation of translation problems found in machine translation output.

3.2 Source of Data

The nonliterary academic work *International Relations Theory*, which was authored in English as the source text (ST) and translated into Indonesian by Google Translate (GT) as the target text (TT), make up the data. The text was chosen because it is appropriate for analyzing equivalency issues in MT output because it has factual content and sophisticated terminology typical of nonliterary speech. Because Google Translate is so popular in Indonesia, it was selected. According to Hasyim et al. (2021), Indonesia is one of the top ten nations for Google Translate users, especially when it comes to reading online and scholarly texts.

3.3 Unit of Analysis and Criteria for Identifying Equivalence Problems

The unit of analysis in this study consists of aligned sentence pairs from the English source text (ST) and their corresponding Indonesian machine-translated target text (TT). Sentence pairs were chosen as the main analytical unit because equivalency in translation must be considered within a larger textual context that reflects meaning relations, grammatical structure, and pragmatic intent rather than being fully captured at the isolated word level (Baker, 2011). Smaller linguistic elements, such as words and phrases, were looked at inside each sentence pair when needed to pinpoint particular equivalency issues.

Equivalence problems were identified based on Baker's (2011, 2018) five levels of equivalence, namely: (1) word-level equivalence, (2) above-word-level equivalence, (3) grammatical equivalence, (4) textual equivalence, and (5) pragmatic equivalence. A translation segment was categorized as problematic when the GT output failed to convey the meaning, function, or discourse relationship of the source text appropriately in the target language. Specifically, equivalence problems were identified using the following criteria: (a) semantic mismatch, where the translated item did not accurately represent the source meaning; (b) grammatical inappropriateness, involving incorrect tense, number, voice, or syntactic structure; (c) textual incoherence, such as improper thematic progression or misuse of cohesive devices; and (d) pragmatic failure, where implicatures, presuppositions, or context-dependent meanings were not adequately transferred (Baker, 2011). These criteria enabled a systematic and consistent analysis of equivalence problems

across translation units, ensuring that classification was grounded in established translation theory rather than subjective judgment.

3.4 Data Collection Technique

There are several steps to collect the data. First, the writer downloaded the English source text provided by the lecturer and opened it with a google document type of file. Second, by using the *Translate document* menu in the *Tools tab*, the writer generated Indonesian text, as the target text. Third, the two documents of English text and Indonesian text are then converted and saved in txt file. Fourth, the writer uploaded the English and Indonesian txt files into LF Aligner, an application created by Farkas (2023) to create a parallel spreadsheet tables of source text (English) and target text (Indonesian). The last, in clustering the most top three-word (Noun, Adjective, Adverb, and Verb), the writer uses two software, namely *AntConc* and *AntPConc*. *Antconc* was utilized to generate a Wordlist to seek the frequency of the words in SL, while *AntPConc* was utilized to select the two text files (SL in English and TL in Indonesian) to be analyzed as parallel texts.

3.5 Research Procedures

To ensure systematic analysis, the study followed the following sequential procedures: (1) Data Extraction: The English source text was obtained and converted into a digital document. The Indonesian target text was generated using the *Translate Document* feature in Google Translate. (2) Data Alignment: Both the English and Indonesian texts were converted into .txt files and uploaded into LF Aligner to produce aligned sentence pairs in a parallel corpus format. (3) Classification by Equivalence Level: Each aligned sentence pair was analyzed using Baker's five levels of equivalence: word, above-word, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic. Identified equivalence problems were classified accordingly. (4) Post-editing and Analysis Post-editing strategies were applied to problematic segments to improve accuracy, naturalness, and readability. In addition, AntConc was used to generate word frequency lists from the ST, and AntPConc was employed to examine equivalence issues across major word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) in the parallel corpus.

3.6 Data Analysis Technique

LF Aligner's translation memories are employed to analyze and identify translation errors generated by GT, by using the concept of five equivalence levels' problems proposed by Baker (2011, 2018), namely: (1) word level equivalence, (2) above word level equivalence, (3) grammatical equivalence, (4) textual equivalence, (5) pragmatic equivalence. Strategies for translation are suggested during the post-editing GT output, with the aim of enhancing both the readability and naturalness of the translated text.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were applied. First, theoretical triangulation was employed by consistently applying Baker's equivalence framework across all data analysis stages. Second, tool triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple corpus tools (LF Aligner, AntConc, and AntPConc) to support analytical consistency. Third, peer review was conducted by discussing selected data samples and equivalence classifications with a fellow researcher in translation studies to

minimize subjective bias. These strategies help ensure the credibility, dependability, and transparency of the qualitative analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

This study reveals persistent equivalence problems in Google Translate (GT) outputs across Baker's (2018) five levels of equivalence: word, above-word, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic. Rather than presenting results and discussion separately, this section integrates detailed textual evidence with interpretive discussion to highlight how specific equivalence problems emerge in non-literary machine-translated texts and what these patterns suggest for post-editing practices.

Word-Level Equivalence Problems

Excerpt 1.

Line	SL	TL generated by GT	Post-editing
11	The idea originates from ...	<i>Ide ini berasal dari ...</i>	<i>Gagasan ini berasal dari ...</i>

Excerpt 1 is taken from line 11 of LF Aligner memories worksheet. According to online dictionary Merriam-Webster, idea means (1) a plan for action, (2) a formulated thought or opinion. The word idea is translated into *ide* by GT. It shows that GT applies loan words to the translation. Post-editing proposes to use paraphrase strategy as suggested by Baker (2018) to translate the word idea into ***gagasan***. According to the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian (KBBI) ***gagasan*** means the results of thoughts. *Ide* and ***gagasan*** have similar meaning, however from the native Indonesia's point of view, the word *gagasan* is more equivalence to substitute the word *ide*.

The implication of this finding is that GT's lexical choices, while technically acceptable, may not fully meet stylistic and pragmatic expectations in the target language. This suggests that post-editing through paraphrasing, as proposed by Baker (2018), remains necessary to enhance naturalness and academic appropriateness. Similar tendencies were reported by Ziganshina et al. (2021), who found that MT systems often favor direct lexical borrowing over context-sensitive equivalents, particularly in academic texts. Moreover, Harto et al. (2022) argue that identifying such lexical inadequacies during post-editing can foster students' critical language awareness, reinforcing the pedagogical value of PEMT.

Excerpt 2.

Line	SL	TL generated by GT	Post-editing
12	... and asserted that the increasing interconnectedness ...	<i>... dan menegaskan bahwa semakin meningkatnya keterhubungan ...</i>	<i>... dan menegaskan bahwa semakin meningkatnya keterkaitan ...</i>

Excerpt 2. is taken from line 12 of LF Aligner memories. According to online dictionary Merriam-Webster, interconnectedness means (1) mutually joined or related, (2) having internal connections between the parts and or the elements. The word interconnectedness is translated by GT into ***keterhubungan***. From the native Indonesia's point of view, the word ***keterhubungan*** has less neutral meaning. Post-editing suggests using the word ***keterkaitan*** to create natural sounds in target language. In other words,

post-editing applies paraphrasing as the strategy to address a problem occurring in word level equivalence.

The implication here is that GT's output may require human intervention to ensure that translations not only convey meaning accurately but also adhere to target-language conventions. This finding supports the view that MT systems still struggle with subtle semantic distinctions, particularly in abstract terminology. Comparable results were reported by Ziganshina et al. (2021), who observed that MT often produces semantically close but pragmatically weaker equivalents. In line with Harto et al. (2022), this example further suggests that post-editing activities can serve as an effective learning tool, enabling students to develop both linguistic sensitivity and evaluative skills when working with AI-generated translations.

At the word level, GT frequently relies on loanwords or near-literal lexical equivalents, which may preserve denotative meaning but reduce naturalness in the target language. For example, GT translates *idea* as *ide* (Excerpt 1) and *interconnectedness* as ***keterhubungan*** (Excerpt 2). Although these translations are semantically accurate, post-editing suggests ***gagasan*** and ***keterkaitan*** as more contextually appropriate alternatives. These findings suggest that GT prioritizes lexical proximity over discourse appropriateness, particularly when dealing with abstract or technical terms. Similar patterns have been reported by Alkatheery (2023), who observed that GT often struggles to select culturally and stylistically appropriate equivalents for abstract concepts. The need for paraphrasing in these cases highlights the limitations of MT in capturing subtle semantic preferences, reinforcing Baker's (2018) view that word-level equivalence often requires human judgment.

Above Word Level Equivalence Problems

Non-equivalence above the word level refers to a situation where entire phrases, expressions, or idioms on SL do not have a direct equivalence in TL. Translators must take into account equivalence on a larger scale, considering larger segments of text, including phrase, sentence, paragraph or entire text. Lexical patterning in the case of non-equivalence above word level, such as collocation and idioms and fixed expressions. Below are some examples of non-equivalence above word level.

Excerpt 3

Line	SL	TL generated by GT	Post-editing
14	... that meet the universalist principles of justice.	... yang memenuhi prinsip keadilan universalis.	... yang sesuai dengan asas-asas keadilan secara menyeluruh.

Excerpt 3 is derived from line 14 of LF Aligner worksheet. GT translated the clause meet the universalist principles of justice into ***memenuhi prinsip keadilan universalis***. From native Indonesian's point of view, this clause sounds less natural and there is a tension between accuracy and naturalness. Post-editing suggests to translate meet the universalist principles of justice into ***sesuai dengan asas-asas keadilan secara menyeluruh***. In this case, post-editing applies one of the strategies to address above word level equivalence problems provided by Baker (2018), that is engrossing effect of source text patterning.

The implication of this example is that GT may prioritize formal equivalence over naturalness, especially when translating abstract ideological concepts. This suggests that above word-level equivalence often requires human intervention to balance meaning accuracy with readability. By restructuring the phrase and expanding implicit meanings, post-editing applies Baker's (2018) strategy of accommodating source-text patterning at a broader textual unit. Similar tendencies were observed by Ziganshina et al. (2021), who reported that MT systems frequently struggle with complex noun phrases in academic texts due to their limited sensitivity to discourse conventions. From a pedagogical perspective, Harto et al. (2022) suggest that identifying such mismatches during post-editing may enhance students' ability to critically evaluate MT output rather than accept it unreflectively.

Excerpt 4.

Line	SL	TL generated by GT	Post-editing
21	There are two themes uniting these approaches that show the connective glue within ...	<i>Ada dua tema yang menyatukan pendekatan-pendekatan ini yang menunjukkan perekat penghubung dalam...</i>	<i>Ada dua tema yang menyatukan pendekatan-pendekatan ini yang menunjukkan hubungan erat dalam...</i>

Excerpt 4 is taken from line 21 of the worksheet generated by LF Aligner. Connective glue is a noun phrase that is translated by GT into **perekat penghubung**. It raises a problem in the tension between accuracy and naturalness. Post-editing suggests a strategy of collocational equivalence (Baker, 2018). Connective glue is better translated into **hubungan erat** in order to achieve above word level equivalence, in this case phrase-level (noun phrase).

The implication here is that GT may have difficulty processing non-compositional expressions and metaphoric collocations, particularly when such expressions require interpretive rather than literal rendering. This finding suggests that phrase-level equivalence is especially vulnerable in MT outputs, reinforcing the need for paraphrasing strategies as outlined by Baker (2018). Comparable findings were reported by Ziganshina et al. (2021), who found that MT systems tend to translate metaphors literally, often at the expense of communicative clarity. In line with Harto et al. (2022), this example further indicates that post-editing tasks can function as a pedagogical space where learners develop awareness of collocational norms and semantic acceptability in the target language.

Overall, Excerpts 3 and 4 imply that the system's limited capacity to negotiate meaning beyond specific lexical elements may be the cause of above-word-level equivalency issues in GT outputs. These results suggest that although GT can produce a translation that is semantically approximate, human post-editing is still crucial for obtaining naturalness and discourse-level appropriateness, especially in academic and nonliterary works.

Grammatical Level Equivalence Problems

When exploring grammatical rules in different languages, it can be challenging to discover an exact match in the TL. Therefore, translators may need to make adjustments to address the absence of certain grammatical categories. These key categories include singular and plural forms for number, the use of feminine and masculine for gender, participant roles for person, adverbials for indicating time reference in tense and aspect, and the use of

passive structures for voice. Below are some excerpts of non-equivalence grammatical level found in Indonesian translation produced by GT.

Excerpt 5.

Line	SL	TL generated by GT	Post-editing
14	This way, the writings of Kant and Marx ...	<i>Dengan cara ini, tulisan Kant dan Marx ...</i>	<i>Dengan cara ini, beberapa karya tulis Kant dan Marx ...</i>
73	... the protection of human rights and the political relevance of avoiding human wrongs is a sign of the relevance of these ideas.	<i>... perlindungan hak asasi manusia dan relevansi politik untuk menghindari kesalahan manusia merupakan tanda relevansi gagasan ini.</i>	<i>... perlindungan hak-hak asasi manusia dan relevansi politik untuk menghindari kesalahan-kesalahan manusia merupakan sebuah tanda relevansi dari gagasan-gagasan ini.</i>

Excerpt 5 illustrates grammatical-level equivalence problems related to number distinction (singular and plural forms) in Google Translate (GT) output. The first example eliminates the inferred plural reference in the source text by translating Kant and Marx's writings as *tulisan Kant dan Marx*. Even if number neutrality is permitted in Indonesian, leaving out plurality in an academic setting can lessen semantic accuracy because the writings pertain to several scholarly works rather than a broad concept of writing. The post-edited version ***beberapa karya tulis Kant dan Marx*** reinstates this plurality, suggesting that post-editing is necessary to preserve the conceptual scope of the source text. This finding may indicate that GT tends to generalize number distinctions when translating into languages with optional plural marking, a tendency also noted by Popović (2018), who found that MT systems frequently neutralize grammatical categories that are not obligatorily encoded in the target language.

In the second example (line 73), plural nouns like rights, wrongs, and ideas are transformed into singular forms (*hak*, *kesalahan*, *gagasan*), exhibiting a similar trend. Even while these translations are grammatically correct, they could lessen the original text's intended generality and abstract scope, especially in theoretical and normative speech. The plurality encoded in the original language is more clearly reflected in the post-edited forms (*hak-hak asasi manusia*, *kesalahan-kesalahan manusia*, *gagasan-gagasan ini*). This implies that readers' interpretations of arguments may be influenced by grammatical equivalency at the number level, particularly in academic and nonliterary works.

Additionally, GT renders the phrase "a sign" as *tanda* in the absence of an explicit singular identifier. Determiners are not necessary in Indonesian, yet formal academic writing may become unclear if ***sebuah*** is not used. The post-edited text clarifies single reference by adding *sebuah*, suggesting that GT might not effectively communicate countability and definiteness distinctions. This result is consistent with the findings of Baker and Saldanha (2020), who highlight that grammatical categories like definiteness and number are especially susceptible to loss in machine translation when they are implicit in the target language.

Taken together, these examples show that grammatical equivalency issues in GT output can have a subtle impact on precision and interpretability even though they are not

always immediately apparent. O'Brien (2012) argues that human post-editors are essential in compensating for MT's low sensitivity to context-dependent grammatical elements, particularly in academic and informational writings. This is supported by the requirement of post-editing in addressing such concerns.

Textual Level Equivalence Problems

Textual level equivalence deals with cohesion which refers to the network of lexical, grammatical, and other connections that link different components of a text. It employs referencing, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Baker (2018) suggests several methods to achieve textual equivalence, including literal translation, modulation, transposition, and adaptation. Below is an example of non-equivalence at textual level found in Indonesian translation generated by GT.

Excerpt 6.

Line	SL	TL generated by GT	Post-editing
82	Haman stares at the long night behind him when I surprise his absent gaze on the deck of the Blue Star ferry carrying us to the Greek port of Piraeus	<i>Haman menatap malam panjang di belakangnya ketika aku terkejut dengan tatapannya yang tidak ada di dek kapal Feri Blue Star yang membawa kami ke Pelabuhan Piraeus di Yunani</i>	<i>Haman sedang melamun di dek kapal Feri Blue Star yang membawa kami ke Pelabuhan Piraeus di Yunani dengan tatapan kosong saat aku membuatnya terkejut.</i>

Excerpt 6 illustrates a textual-level equivalence problem related to cohesion and sentence flow. The statement is mostly translated literally and word for word by Google Translate, producing an Indonesian translation that seems structurally disjointed and artificial in style. For example, the translation of Haman stares at the long night behind him is Haman **menatap malam panjang di belakangnya**. While this translation may be grammatically correct, it may not accurately capture the implicit thoughtful state that is conveyed in the original language. By using modulation to capture the intended experience meaning rather than the surface lexical form, the post-edited version, Haman **sedang melamun**, demonstrates a change in viewpoint.

This change implies that GT might find it difficult to comprehend narrative complexity and discourse-level meaning, especially when psychological feelings and images are implicitly transmitted. Cohesion in the target text necessitates restructuring beyond literal correspondence, as evidenced by the reordering of clauses—moving **di dek kapal Feri Blue Star...** to the middle of the sentence—and the reformulation of *when I surprise his absent gaze* into **dengan tatapan kosong saat aku membuatnya terkejut**. These changes could improve readability and coherence for Indonesian readers, suggesting that human involvement is frequently required to align syntactic flow with target-language norms in order to achieve textual equivalency.

These results are in line with earlier research showing that MT systems frequently ignore more general discourse relations in favor of operating at the sentence-by-sentence level (Amarasinghe & Senevirathne, 2020). According to Ziganshina et al. (2021), human post-editing is still required to address cohesiveness and stylistic naturalness, particularly in

lengthy or detailed passages, even though GT performs reasonably well at the lexical level. From an educational standpoint, this example further validates the claims made by Harto et al. (2022) that post-editing techniques foster students' awareness of meaning creation and textual coherence in addition to grammatical accuracy. In order to achieve textual equivalency in machine-assisted translation, Excerpt 6 emphasizes the significance of modulation as a post-editing technique and the ongoing involvement of human expertise.

Pragmatic Level Equivalence Problems

Translators should pay attention to achieving pragmatic equivalence. One of strategies to achieve pragmatic equivalence is implicature. Implicature, a captivating element in pragmatics, highlights the significance of not just explicit words, but also the implied meanings. Consequently, translators must work out implied messages to accurately convey the SL's intended meaning.

Excerpt 7.

Line	SL	TL generated by GT	Post-editing
62	Haman was one of them	<i>Haman adalah salah satunya</i>	<i>Haman adalah salah satu dari puluhan pengungsi dari Syria.</i>

Excerpt 7 demonstrates a pragmatic equivalence problem related to implicature and contextual reference. Google Translate renders *Haman was one of them* as *Haman adalah salah satunya*, a translation that is lexically accurate but pragmatically underspecified. The pronoun *them* refers implicitly to *dozens of refugees from Syria* mentioned in the preceding sentence; however, this contextual linkage is not made explicit in the GT output. The post-edited version, *Haman adalah salah satu dari puluhan pengungsi dari Syria*, explicates the implied referent, thereby restoring the intended meaning for target readers.

This instance raises the possibility that GT's ability to resolve discourse-level references and deduce implicit meanings between sentences may be limited. Such translations may result in ambiguity or lessened clarity in the absence of pragmatic enrichment, especially in educational nonliterary works where contextual accuracy is crucial. Pragmatic equivalency frequently necessitates human interpretation that goes beyond superficial correspondence, as seen by the necessity to explain implicit allusions.

These results are consistent with Munková et al. (2021), who contend that because MT systems rely on local linguistic signals rather than global discourse context, they often fail to process implicatures. In a similar vein, Harto et al. (2022) observe that post-editing exercises support the instructional usefulness of PEMT in fostering pragmatic awareness by encouraging translators and students to pay attention to suggested meanings and reader-oriented clarity.

Excerpt 8

'Line	SL	TL generated by GT	Post-editing
77	What unites critical theorists like Cox, Linklater, and others is ...	<i>Yang menyatukan teori-teori kritis seperti Cox, Linklater dan lain-lain adalah</i>	<i>Kondisi yang menyatukan teori-teori kritis seperti Cox, Linklater dan lain-lain adalah</i>

Excerpt 8 further illustrates pragmatic non-equivalence arising from underspecification. GT translates *What unites critical theorists like Cox, Linklater, and others is ...* as ***Yang menyatukan teori-teori kritis seperti Cox, Linklater dan lain-lain adalah*** While grammatically acceptable, this rendering leaves the abstract interrogative *what* vague in Indonesian, potentially causing interpretive difficulty for target readers. The post-edited version introduces the word ***kondisi*** (condition), resulting in ***Kondisi yang menyatukan teori-teori kritis...***, which clarifies the implicit conceptual reference.

Similar problems have been noted by Ziganshina et al. (2021), who state that MT systems frequently perform poorly when translating relational or abstract meanings that need for contextual elaboration. Similarly, Wei (2023) highlights that a critical post-editing technique to guarantee communicative efficacy is pragmatic enrichment, which can be achieved through explicitation or paraphrase. When combined, Excerpts 7 and 8 highlight the crucial involvement of human post-editors in deciphering and reconstructing suggested meaning and imply that pragmatic equivalency continues to be one of the most difficult areas for MT.

To provide a clearer synthesis of the findings and to highlight recurring patterns of equivalence problems, the following tables summarize the types, distribution, and post-editing strategies identified across the analyzed excerpts.

Table 1

Types and Frequency of Equivalence Problems Across Five Levels

Equivalence Level	Number of Identified Excerpts	Dominant Problem Types	Typical MT Behavior
Word level	2	Loanwords, semantic mismatch	Literal translation, lexical borrowing
Above-word level	2	Collocation, abstract phrase rendering	Literal phrase translation
Grammatical level	1 (multiple instances)	Number (singular/plural), voice (passive)	Neutralization of grammatical distinctions
Textual level	1	Cohesion, sentence flow, word order	Sentence-by-sentence processing
Pragmatic level	2	Implicature, underspecification	Failure to explicate implied meaning
Total	8 excerpts	—	—

Interpretive note:

As shown in Table 1, equivalence problems occur across all five levels, with word-level and pragmatic-level issues appearing most frequently. This distribution suggests that GT handles surface-level lexical transfer more consistently than discourse-level meaning, which often requires contextual inference and pragmatic enrichment.

Table 2

Summary of Equivalence Problems and Post-Editing Strategies

Excerpt	Equivalence Level	GT Output Issue	Post-Editing Strategy (Baker, 2018)
1	Word	Loanword (“ide”) lacks naturalness	Paraphrase
2	Word	Semantically weak equivalent	Paraphrase
3	Above-word	Abstract noun phrase sounds unnatural	Reformulation / paraphrase
4	Above-word	Literal metaphor translation	Collocational equivalence
5	Grammatical	Loss of plurality, passive voice	Grammatical adjustment
6	Textual	Disrupted cohesion and flow	Modulation
7	Pragmatic	Implicit reference unresolved	Explicitation (implicature)
8	Pragmatic	Abstract “what” underspecified	Pragmatic enrichment

Table 2 demonstrates that **paraphrasing and explicitation** are the most frequently required post-editing strategies, particularly at word, above-word, and pragmatic levels. This pattern reinforces Baker’s (2018) claim that equivalence problems often arise not from incorrect meaning but from inadequate contextual realization.

Table 3

Word-Class Frequency and Equivalence Stability

Word Class	High-Frequency Items	Frequency Range	Equivalence Outcome
Noun	theory, global, relations	13–21	Mostly equivalent
Adjective	critical, global, cosmopolitan	8–23	Mostly equivalent
Adverb	therefore, namely, especially	1–7	Equivalent
Verb	is, are, has	10–37	Frequent non-equivalence

Table 3 indicates that **verbs are the most problematic word class**, especially due to tense, voice, and aspect differences between English and Indonesian. This finding aligns with prior research (e.g., Karibayeva et al., 2021; Popović, 2018), suggesting that morphosyntactic complexity remains a persistent weakness of MT systems.

Top Three-Word of Word Class in a Non-Literary Text

Noun

No	Words	Frequency
1	Theory	21
2	Global	13
3	Relations	13

The top three lists of noun occurrences in *International Relations Theory* text are **theory** (21 times), **global** (13 times) and **relation** (13 times). Having analyzed the equivalence

problem by using AntPconc, it shows that these words do not need to be post-edited. **Theory** is translated *teori* itu, **global** is translated into *global*, and **relations** is translated into *hubungan*.

Adjective

No	Words	Frequency
1	Critical	23
2	Global	12
3	Cosmopolitan	8

The top three lists of adjectives occurring in *International Relations Theory* text are **critical** (23 times), **global** (12 times) and **cosmopolitan** (8 times). Having investigated the equivalence problem by using *AntPconc*, it shows that the words “critical”, “global” and “cosmopolitan” do not need to be post-edited. GT uses loan words to translate them.

Adverb

No	Words	Frequency
1	Therefore	7
2	Namely	2
3	Especially	1

The top three lists of adverbs occurring in *International Relations Theory* text are **therefore** (7 times), **namely** (2 times) and **especially** (1 times). Having analyzed the equivalence problem by using *AntPconc*, it shows that these words do not need to be post-edited. “Therefore” is translated into *oleh karena* itu, “namely” is translated into *yaitu*, and “especially” is translated into *terutama*.

Verb

No	Words	Frequency
1	Is	37
2	Are	13
3	Has	10

The first top three-word list of the verbs in *International Relations Theory* text is the verb “is” which has 37 occurrences. The verb “is” is translated by GT into *bahwa*, *adalah*, *merupakan*, *menjadi* dan *yang*. There are several “is” that are not translated because it refers to the passive voices. The writer finds an equivalence problem of the verb “is”

SL	TL generated by ST	Problem
It is Friday and he knows he much reach the Hungarian border before Tuesday	<i>Ini adalah hari Jumat dan dia tahu dia harus mencapai perbatasan Hongaria sebelum hari selasa</i>	Word level equivalence

From the excerpt above, it can be seen that GT did not translate the verb “is”. Post-editing suggests translating the verb “is” into *Ini adalah hari Jumat*, to achieve word level

equivalence. It has something to do with the problem that the SL concept is not lexicalized in the target language.

The second top list of the verbs in *International Relations Theory* text is the verb “are” which has 13 occurrences, mostly translated by GT into *bahwa* and *yang*. There are several equivalence problems occurring in translating the verb ‘are’, as can be seen in the following excerpts.

SL	TL generated by ST	Problem
...since the Second World war are being displaced from their homes	... sejak Perang Dunia Kedua terpaksa mengungsi dari rumah mereka.	Grammatical level equivalence

Grammatical equivalence problems occurring in the clause **are being displaced**. This is a passive voice, while GT translates it in the active voice form ‘*terpaksa mengungsi*’. Post-editing suggests to keep the passive voice in its translation, into ... *sejak Perang Dunia Kedua dievakuasi dari rumah mereka*. This problem includes the use of passive voice categories.

Meanwhile, the third top list of the verbs in *International Relations Theory* text is the verb “has” which occurs 10 times. GT translated the verb “has” into *mempunyai* and *telah*. The writer found non-equivalence problems in the translation of the verb “has” done by GT.

SL	TL generated by ST	Problem
The fact that it has been possible for states in the modern international system to agree ...	Fakta bahwa negara-negara dalam sistem internasional modern bisa menyepakati ...	Above word level equivalence

It can be seen that GT did not translate the clause **has been possible** in SL. It has something to do with the tension between accuracy and naturalness in TL. Post-editing suggests translating the clause into *memungkinkan*. The complete translation becomes *fakta bahwa memungkinkan bagi negara-negara dalam sistem internasional modern untuk menyepakati*.

5. Conclusion

This study has critically examined equivalence problems in the Indonesian output of Google Translate (GT) when applied to a non-literary English text, using Baker’s five levels of equivalence: word, above-word, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic. The findings suggest that although GT performs relatively well in translating high-frequency nouns, adjectives, and adverbs, substantial challenges persist across all equivalence levels, particularly in the translation of verbs, complex syntactic structures, and context-dependent meanings. At the word level, lexical mismatches and the excessive use of loanwords may result in translations that sound unnatural to target-language readers, while at the above-word level, idiomatic expressions and collocations often fail to convey their intended meanings, indicating a tension between formal accuracy and naturalness. Grammatical non-equivalence, especially in number marking and passive constructions, further distorts meaning and highlights the necessity of syntactic adjustments during post-editing. Moreover, problems at the textual and pragmatic levels reveal GT’s limited discourse awareness, as cohesion breakdowns and failures to interpret implicatures frequently undermine contextual clarity and communicative intent. Despite its contributions, this study’s limitations arise from its use of

a single machine translation engine and its concentration on a single nonliterary text, which limits how broadly the results may be applied. In order to investigate equivalency issues more thoroughly across genres and languages, future study may increase the corpus, compare several MT systems, or use mixed-method approaches. Overall, this study emphasizes that human post-editing is still necessary to guarantee contextual fidelity, pragmatic accuracy, and communicative effectiveness in translation, especially for non-literary texts that require precision, coherence, and sensitivity to meaning. This highlights the critical role of human expertise in the era of AI-assisted translation, even as machine translation continues to advance in efficiency and accessibility.

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NAVIGATING PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING CHALLENGES IN PEKALONGAN SECONDARY EFL READING CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This study investigates the systemic and pedagogical challenges faced by English teachers in implementing Problem-Based Learning (PBL) under the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Grounded in a qualitative design, data were collected from nine EFL teachers in Pekalongan Regency through interviews, observations, and pedagogical audits. The analysis employed Miles and Saldaña's (2018) interactive model and Fullan's (2015) theory of educational change. The findings reveal two interrelated barriers: chronic resource deprivation and a prevalent state of 'False Clarity.' This conceptual ambiguity occurs when teachers adopt the PBL label without its analytical substance. Consequently, these constraints compel teachers to revert from facilitators of inquiry to translators of content. This shift effectively pushes learners into a 'Zone of Frustration' where linguistic barriers stifle critical engagement. The study highlights the urgent need for contextually grounded teacher training and equitable infrastructure investment to foster sustainable educational reform.

Keywords: *critical thinking; educational change; EFL reading; Kurikulum Merdeka, problem-based Learning*

1. Introduction

In the Society 5.0 era, critical thinking is a vital component of global education curricula. To address recent PISA performance gaps, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Indonesia has adopted student-centered models, specifically Problem-Based Learning (OECD, 2023). In EFL reading classes, PBL interactions occur across all levels, from comprehension to evaluation. This makes critical reading a prerequisite skill. It is essential for navigating complex information in digital contexts. However, a gap remains between national policy and regional classroom realities. In Pekalongan Regency, teachers struggle with infrastructural constraints while implementing high-tech inquiry. Many teachers struggle with severe infrastructural constraints. Traditional mindsets and the "digital divide" further obstruct the integration of critical thinking skills (Mailizar et al., 2020; Nursyahidah et al., 2021). Furthermore, severe time constraints often force teachers to prioritize syllabus completion over deep inquiry (Rasmitadila et al., 2020).

These challenges are analyzed through Michael Fullan's (2015) theory of educational change. Fullan posits that successful innovation depends on two factors: resource input and conceptual clarity. Clarity refers to the teachers' understanding of an instructional model

and its local contextualization. Resources include the physical and digital infrastructure necessary for investigative work. In regions with unstable connectivity, educators often experience pedagogical frustration. They are frequently forced to deviate from orthodox PBL methods due to logistical complexities (Saputra et al., 2019).

Limited qualitative evidence currently describes how these PBL challenges manifest in regional EFL classrooms. Most research focuses on well-resourced urban contexts or higher education. Consequently, there is a lack of data regarding how junior high school teachers in regional Indonesia navigate structural and pedagogical constraints. This study fills this gap by investigating the obstacles experienced by practitioners in Pekalongan Regency. It aims to understand how systemic support influences the sustainability of critical thinking instruction.

2. Literature Review

The implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) to foster critical thinking in regional EFL classrooms is a multi-layered process that requires a robust theoretical foundation. To understand the underlying resistance to this pedagogical transformation, an analysis must be conducted at the intersection of instructional models, cognitive standards, and systemic educational change. This review first traces the evolution of PBL from a medical education tool to a classroom practice, emphasizing the need for linguistic and cognitive scaffolding. It then conceptualizes critical reading through the lens of universal intellectual standards. Finally, the discussion employs Fullan's framework to analyze educational reform as a systemic reality, uncovering the hidden barriers that field practitioners confront. Together, these three theoretical strands—PBL pedagogy, critical literacy, and systemic change—offer a composite perspective for navigating the complexities of teaching critical literacy in diverse, resource-poor environments.

2.1 Problem-Based Learning: From Theory to Classroom Practice

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is a pedagogical approach that prioritizes the "problem" at the onset of learning rather than as a post-lecture exercise. Building on Barrows' (1996) early conceptualization of PBL in medical education, its adaptation to EFL contexts necessitates specific attention to linguistic and cognitive scaffolding (Hidayati et al., 2020). Anchored in contemporary student-centered paradigms, PBL challenges the traditional "banking" concept of education, where students passively receive linguistic rules. Instead, students engage with ill-structured, real-life dilemmas that require the target language as a tool for inquiry. As Arends (2012) noted, success in this model relies on a five-phase syntax ranging from problem orientation to the analysis of solving processes, which provides a structured yet elastic roadmap for cognitive exploration.

Translating this theory into daily classroom reality requires a profound shift in power dynamics, moving the teacher from an "expert" to a "cognitive coach." This role is deeply rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding, where the facilitator provides verbal or digital support for the inquiry process rather than delivering direct answers. This balance ensures that the struggle of problem-solving remains with the student, which is essential for both linguistic acquisition and critical development. Furthermore, PBL thrives on collaborative intelligence; when learners encounter complex texts, they must negotiate meaning and synthesize findings collectively. This peer interaction

allows low-proficiency students to receive scaffolding from more advanced peers, creating a dynamic environment where linguistic and cognitive growth support one another.

However, the path between theory and practice is often obstructed in regional or resource-limited settings (Lukitasari et al., 2020). The high-tech, inquiry-based vision often clashes with the reality of time constraints and inadequate infrastructure. Anazifa and Abu (2017) argue that for PBL to be effective, it must be adapted as a flexible formula rather than a rigid set of rules. In summary, while PBL provides the procedural blueprint for inquiry, its success in the field depends on the teacher's ability to maintain its integrity while navigating the practical tensions of a crowded curriculum.

2.2 Critical Thinking in the Reading Process

Reading comprehension has evolved from passive decoding into a dynamic exchange between the reader and the text. Students are no longer merely asked "what" the text says, but are encouraged to investigate "why" and "how" the information is presented. According to Paul and Elder (2008), reading critically is an intellectually disciplined process where the reader intentionally applies universal intellectual standards. This requires students to go beyond a literal understanding to determine whether an author's claim is articulate, accurate, and logically valid. In this information age, the ability to clarify ambiguous terms or verify statements represents the "disciplined mind" necessary for navigating complex discourses (Anazifa & Abu, 2017).

In EFL contexts, integrating critical thinking is vital as linguistic barriers often overshadow cognitive ones. Too often, reading is reduced to a perfunctory exercise in translation. True critical literacy, however, entails recognizing bias, identifying assumptions, and assessing the strength of arguments. By using intellectual standards—such as Clarity, Accuracy, and Logic—students can deconstruct text structures and develop genuine ownership of the language (Hidayati et al., 2020). Within the PBL framework, the text is viewed as evidence to be analyzed rather than just a sequence of sentences. This "purposeful reading" drives students to seek logical connections and deep processing, which are the hallmarks of 21st-century critical literacy (Tyas et al., 2019; Nuryanti et al., 2018).

This critical engagement is fundamentally a social-cognitive process that requires careful scaffolding. Collaborative discourse helps bridge the gap between a student's current ability and their potential level of critical analysis. As Vygotsky (1978) posits, peer interaction within the ZPD allows learners to gain diverse insights and challenge assumptions. Ultimately, critical thinking in reading is not an isolated skill but a disciplined practice. By applying Paul and Elder's standards within a social-constructivist environment, students can transition from passive recipients of information to evaluative and skeptical readers.

2.3 The Reality of Educational Change: A Systemic Perspective

Implementing an innovative model like PBL is not a solitary act but a complex process involving the entire school community. Meaningful change requires a shift across three dimensions: the use of new materials, the adoption of new teaching approaches, and a transformation in pedagogical beliefs. In Indonesian regional schools, this often creates "friction" between the idealistic mandates of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and entrenched traditional habits. While PBL emphasizes inquiry and problem-solving, Fullan's (2015) theory of change explains why implementation often falters in resource-poor settings, and

Vygotsky's ZPD provides a cognitive mechanism for understanding how learners can be supported within these conditions.

Fullan identifies two central pillars for successful implementation: Resources and Clarity. In regional districts like Pekalongan, the "digital divide" is a tangible barrier; without stable infrastructure, the inquiry phase of PBL suffers, throwing teachers into an "implementation dip" (Mailizar et al., 2020; Junaidi & Syahrani, 2023). Equally crucial is Clarity, or the depth of understanding teachers have regarding the innovation. A situation of "false clarity" may arise where teachers believe they are implementing PBL simply because they have grouped students, yet the cognitive engagement remains superficial (Yana et al., 2022). This ambiguity is the primary enemy of sustainable change, often leading to a gap between teacher intent and actual classroom outcomes.

Finally, the success of educational reform depends on "local capacity." Practitioners must internalize change within their specific context, balancing national syllabus pressures with the time-consuming requirements of critical inquiry. In conclusion, analyzing PBL through a systemic lens reveals that implementation is a navigation of complex realities. By acknowledging these structural and conceptual barriers, we can bridge the gap between rhetorical innovation and authentic classroom practice, ensuring that the "PBL label" translates into meaningful cognitive development for students.

3. Research Method

3.1 Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, comprising nine English teachers from diverse junior high schools in Pekalongan Regency. The participants were divided into three distinct categories based on their school's geographical and socioeconomic contexts: three teachers from well-resourced urban schools, three from developing suburban schools, and three from under-resourced rural schools. The inclusion criteria required participants to have at least 5 years of teaching experience and at least 2 years of experience implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This categorization was intentional to provide a representative balance and to understand how infrastructural disparities influence the systemic implementation of PBL.

3.2 Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

To ensure a multidimensional and credible dataset, this study employed three primary instruments: a semi-structured interview guide, an observation checklist for field notes, and a document analysis rubric. Data collection followed a sequential chronological order. First, a pedagogical audit was conducted through document analysis of teachers' lesson plans (RPP) to examine their conceptualization of PBL. This was followed by classroom observations, where the researcher recorded field notes to capture "unspoken" realities, such as technical hitches and student engagement levels. Finally, in-depth interviews were conducted to allow teachers to reflect on their pedagogical struggles, ensuring that their lived experiences remained central to the analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The analytical process followed the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification as proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018). To enhance the depth of the analysis, this qualitative framework was integrated with

Michael Fullan's (2015) educational change theory. This combination was chosen to link micro-level teacher narratives with macro-level systemic analysis, providing a transparent reasoning for how individual classroom struggles reflect broader structural barriers. Furthermore, Paul and Elder's (2008) Universal Intellectual Standards were used to evaluate the quality of critical thinking developed during the sessions. These theories were synthesized into a single analytical framework, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary of Theoretical Analytical Framework

Framework	The Expert	Function in this Research
PBL Syntax	Arends (2012)	To evaluate the chronological consistency of the teaching steps implemented by the teachers.
Intellectual Standards	Paul & Elder (2008)	To analyze the quality of students' Clarity, Accuracy, and Logic during the reading process.
Educational Change	Fullan (2015)	To identify structural and pedagogical barriers through the lenses of Resources and Clarity.
ZPD & Scaffolding	Vygotsky (1978)	To examine how teachers provide assistance when students face linguistic or cognitive hurdles.
Qualitative Analysis	Miles et al. (2018)	To provide a systematic method for condensing and transforming raw field data into meaningful themes.

3.4 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was achieved through multiple data sources. Furthermore, member checking was implemented by returning transcribed data and initial thematic findings to the nine participants for their perusal and validation. This process ensured that the findings accurately represented the teachers' actual experiences and minimized researcher bias.

3.5 Research Ethics

This study adhered to the ethical research standards of Universitas Negeri Semarang. All participants provided written informed consent prior to their involvement. To protect the participants' privacy and maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout the manuscript, and all institutional identifiers were anonymized. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 The Fragility of Technological Infrastructure

The first finding highlights a significant gap between the digital ambitions of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the material reality in Pekalongan Regency. Hardware failures and unstable connectivity frequently disrupt the initial "Orientation" phase of PBL. Teacher A, practicing in a rural school, illustrated this struggle:

"I have prepared viral news videos from YouTube to get the kids interested in analyzing real-life issues. However, once I get to class, the internet signal

is sometimes spotty, and the school projector is broken. In the end, I can only tell the story verbally. The kids become less enthusiastic because they cannot see direct visual evidence of the issues we are discussing." (Teacher A)

This technical breakdown forces a pedagogical regression, reducing a multisensory inquiry to a traditional oral narrative and diminishing student engagement from the outset.

4.1.2 Time Constraint and Rush Syntax

PBL's complexity requires extensive exploration time, yet rigid school schedules often truncate the process. Observations showed that group discussions were frequently interrupted to "catch up" with the next period. Teacher D noted:

"PBL requires a lot of discussion time, but English class time is minimal. Often, before we even get to the group discussion stage, the bell rings. As a result, I often rush the presentation and evaluation stages or even skip them altogether. So, the students do not have time to reflect on their thinking processes properly." (Teacher D)

4.1.3 Linguistic and Pedagogical Tension in PBL Facilitation

This study identified a critical intersection between students' limited English proficiency and teachers' ability to facilitate PBL. While PBL requires deep text analysis, students' limited vocabulary often confines them to literal translation, forcing teachers to shift from "cognitive coaches" to "content translators." Field notes indicate that the deconstruction process often halts because students cannot comprehend basic instructions in the target language. Teacher G explained this dilemma.

"Sometimes I feel overwhelmed. On the one hand, I really want to implement PBL to help students become critical thinkers, but on the other hand, the kids do not even know the meaning of basic words. It is like we have a lot of homework to do, running around, but limited facilities tie down our feet, and the students' abilities and willingness are still very low." (Teacher G)

The deconstruction process often halts because students cannot comprehend basic instructions in the target language. Teacher G explained this dilemma. These instructional limitations prevent the independent investigation phase from taking place. Students remain heavily dependent on the teacher for basic linguistic decoding rather than for critical inquiry.

4.1.4 Professional Readiness and Systemic Fragility

Administrative burdens often overshadow the readiness to implement PBL. While some teachers expressed confidence, many relied on generic modules provided by the Subject Teachers' Consultation (MGMP) rather than designing context-specific lesson plans. Field observations revealed conceptual confusion between PBL and Project-Based Learning (PjBL), suggesting that internal readiness remains at a surface level, hindered by a lack of autonomous reflection.

To synthesize the preceding qualitative findings into a structured overview, Table 2. provides a pedagogical audit that contrasts the theoretical phases of PBL syntax with the empirical realities and implementation gaps observed across the sampled schools in Pekalongan Regency

Table 2

Pedagogical Audit: Theoretical Expectations vs. Empirical Reality

PBL Syntax Phase	Expected Outcome (Arends, 2012)	Empirical Reality in Pekalongan	Identified Implementation Gap
Phase 1: Orientation to the Problem	Presenting authentic, clear problems to trigger inquiry.	Problems are narrated orally due to digital divide (broken projectors/unstable signal).	Conceptual Blurriness: Inquiry is reduced to traditional storytelling.
Phase 2: Organizing Students	Defining learning tasks and collaborative roles.	Grouping is formal but lacks structured roles; dominance of bright students remains.	Collaborative Stagnation: Physical grouping without cognitive synergy.
Phase 3: Assisting Investigation	Encouraging students to gather info and seek solutions.	Teachers act as translators due to students' low vocabulary mastery.	Linguistic Blockade: 8.30% score gap highlights failure in independent inquiry.
Phase 4: Developing Artifacts	Producing reports, models, or presentations of solutions.	Process is often rushed or skipped due to 78% documentation absence (no RPP).	Structural Rush: Time constraints lead to a ceremonial presentation.
Phase 5: Evaluating the Process	Reflecting on inquiry and critical thinking skills.	Minimal reflection; learning stops once the answer is found.	"False Clarity": Absence of deep metacognitive evaluation.

As summarized in Table 2, the implementation of PBL in Pekalongan displays a systemic misalignment across all phases, primarily driven by linguistic barriers and a lack of structural documentation

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 The "Implementation Dip" and Systemic Fragility

The significant "implementation gap" identified in Pekalongan Regency reflects what Fullan (2015) describes as the "implementation dip"—a sharp decline in performance and confidence when practitioners encounter an unsupportive environment while adopting new models. This study finds that constraints on resources, such as broken projectors and unstable internet, are not merely technical inconveniences but systemic barriers that collapse the "Problem Orientation" phase of PBL. When Teacher A is forced to narrate a video she cannot play, the essence of authentic inquiry is lost, as students are deprived of the visual evidence needed to trigger critical curiosity. As noted by Almanthari et al. (2020),

without adequate resource support, pedagogical change remains an empty narrative inside a lesson plan, creating a wide gap between what is planned and what is physically feasible (Junaidi & Syahrani, 2023).

Furthermore, this systemic fragility demonstrates that the success of educational innovation cannot be achieved through top-down mandates alone. In the regional context of Pekalongan, the "digital divide" serves as a physical anchor that holds back teachers' innovative spirit. The findings suggest that when the systemic infrastructure fails to respond positively to the curriculum's demands, teachers are pushed into a state of professional exhaustion. This aligns with Mailizar et al. (2020), who argue that forcing a high-level inquiry model into resource-poor environments without a contextualized support ecosystem leads to an educationally ceremonial implementation. Ultimately, this analysis emphasizes that the success of PBL in developing students' critical thinking skills should not be heaped solely on teachers but must be acknowledged as a systemic responsibility to provide a functional platform for innovation (Yana et al., 2022).

4.2.2 Conceptual Ambiguity as the Driver of "False Clarity"

Beyond its practical limitations, this study highlights a severe lack of conceptual clarity, leading to what Fullan (2015) calls "false clarity." This phenomenon refers to teachers believing they have implemented innovation by fulfilling formal requirements, such as student group work, when in reality, student cognitive engagement is superficial. The primary cause of this lack of clarity is the 78% document gap—meaning most participants lacked documented "responsible problem-solving plans" (RPPs). Due to the lack of structured "guidance" (Arends, 2012), teachers lacked the necessary direction to guide students through complex problem-solving phases. Consequently, classroom activities recorded in field notes often lacked the research depth required by the Merdeka curriculum and replaced genuine cognitive challenges with traditional group activities (Yana et al., 2022).

This conceptual ambiguity directly impacts students' cognitive levels. According to Paul and Elder (2008), critical thinking is based on the application of universal standards such as clarity, accuracy, and logic. However, the 10.33% difference among students in this study regarding the "clarity standard" suggests that teachers' conceptual ambiguity can lead to deficiencies in students' cognitive orientation. For example, if teachers cannot clearly define the "reasons" and "methods" of problem-based learning (PBL) problems, students are unable to provide nuanced or logically rigorous interpretations of the text. The resulting 8.30% performance gap provides empirical evidence of this lack of teaching integrity. To achieve true clarity, a professional culture of continuing education needs to be further developed, such as through clinical supervision within the MGMP framework, combining idealized theory with the realities of local teaching.

4.2.3 Linguistic Scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development

The linguistic barriers identified in this study demonstrate that the success of PBL in an EFL context is inseparable from students' linguistic readiness. Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), effective learning occurs when tasks are set at a level slightly above students' independent level but achievable with support. However, the findings reveal a significant mismatch where many students in Pekalongan are pushed into a "Zone of Frustration." Being asked to analyze complex textual problems without mastery of

basic vocabulary places the cognitive demands of PBL beyond their reach. In this scenario, the PBL model—meant to stimulate critical thinking—instead risks demotivating students unless accompanied by intensive, language-aware support strategies.

This mismatch forces a pedagogical regression, in which the teacher's role shifts from a "cognitive coach" to a "linguistic translator." As Teacher G explained, "the teacher must be the language bridge", implying that without direct translation help, the investigation phase of PBL would fail to occur entirely. This confirms the argument by Fitriani et al. (2020) that in EFL contexts, linguistic scaffolding is not a supplementary aid but an absolute necessity. Without systematic support—such as visual glossaries or translanguaging strategies—PBL inquiry becomes mere guesswork. Therefore, classroom interactions often remain one-way, with students' dependence on teachers remaining high, hindering the "self-directed learning" goal of the Kurikulum Merdeka. By integrating verbal and structural scaffolding, educators can ensure that language barriers do not stifle students' intellectual development in regional areas.

This linguistic "blockade" means that, in many Pekalongan classrooms, critical thinking is not absent; rather, it is "locked" behind a language barrier. When students provide short, superficial answers, it is often misread as a lack of analytical skill, when in fact, it is a lack of expressive tools. By forcing students to stay within the "Zone of Frustration," we are effectively asking them to run a marathon while they are still learning to walk. As this study suggests, true critical literacy in EFL reading requires a "bilingual bridge" in which students are allowed to conceptualize in their first language before articulating in English, preserving their cognitive integrity as they build their linguistic competence.

4.2.4 Socio-Technical Challenges and the Shadow of Ceremonial Reform

The socio-technical challenges in Pekalongan create a "double workload" for teachers, who must act as both pedagogical innovators and improvisers amid failing infrastructure. Fullan (2015) expresses concern that top-down reforms often fail to consider local capacity to absorb change. In the field, teachers face immense social pressure to demonstrate digital innovation for administrative audits, even when basic tools like electricity or internet access are unreliable. This inconsistency leads to professional burnout, in which teachers prioritize the "appearance" of modernity over the "substance" of deep thought. This situation suggests that educational reform in Indonesia often focuses on ceremonial aspects, where adopting a new model is valued more than the actual cognitive gains achieved in the classroom (Saputra et al., 2019).

These challenges impact teachers' professional autonomy and their ability to adapt the curriculum. These severe systemic and pedagogical constraints prevent teachers from moving from traditional instruction to the challenging terrain of critical pedagogy. To achieve sustainable change, the education reform in suburban and rural areas must include a support-based ecosystem that goes beyond teacher training. This includes ensuring stable infrastructure and providing adaptive teaching materials that respect local constraints. Only when teachers feel empowered and supported can the PBL model move from being an administrative burden to a genuine tool for intellectual transformation (Fullan, 2015; Nursyahidah et al., 2021).

Ultimately, the "Freedom to Learn" remains an ironic slogan for teachers who feel "tied" by administrative rigidities and technical failures. The socio-technical divide in

Pekalongan creates a class of "pedagogical improvisers" who constantly fight persistent logistical issues rather than facilitate critical inquiry. If the government continues to value the "facade" of innovation over the "integrity" of implementation, regional schools will continue to produce "False Clarity" rather than critical thinkers. True reform requires a shift in gaze from the national dashboard to the rural classroom floor, where the actual battle for critical literacy is being fought every day.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the findings demonstrate that the regional implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* framework does not automatically foster critical thinking; instead, it often results in a profound "systemic mismatch" between pedagogical ideals and classroom realities. Through Michael Fullan's lens of educational change, this study highlights that innovation cannot thrive without the critical intersection of Resources and Clarity. The chronic deprivation of resources—ranging from broken projectors to unstable internet—acts as a primary catalyst for the "implementation dip," forcing teachers to abandon high-level inquiry in favor of traditional, survival-based instruction. This study extends Fullan's (2015) theory of educational change by illustrating how linguistic proficiency and resource scarcity serve as mediating factors that widen the implementation gap in resource-limited EFL contexts, transforming a progressive model into a ceremonial administrative exercise.

The research also uncovers significant internal barriers related to "False Clarity" and teacher readiness. The 78% documentation gap in lesson planning suggests that for many practitioners, the reform remains at a superficial level, where structural compliance masks a lack of conceptual depth. Furthermore, the linguistic barriers identified among students create a "cognitive bottleneck" that prevents the attainment of higher-order standards, such as Clarity, Accuracy, and Logic (Paul & Elder, 2008). In these settings, teachers are forced to relinquish their roles as cognitive coaches to become linguistic bridges, ensuring basic comprehension at the expense of critical deconstruction. By bridging micro-level teacher narratives with macro-level systemic analysis, this research contributes to the literature by demonstrating that student cognitive growth is tightly linked to instructional integrity—a link often overlooked in top-down curriculum mandates.

These findings carry significant pedagogical and policy implications. To move beyond "ceremonial" change, the government must prioritize equitable infrastructure investment in suburban and rural areas to ensure that digital-based inquiry is not an urban privilege but a universal standard. Additionally, teacher professional development should shift from abstract theoretical dissemination toward contextualized clinical coaching. This approach should empower teachers with specific strategies to integrate linguistic scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) within the PBL framework, ensuring that language limitations do not become a dead end for critical thinking. Ultimately, this study advocates for a "balanced change" approach that grants teachers professional autonomy to adapt PBL syntax to their classroom's socio-technical realities without the fear of administrative sanction.

This study has several limitations. These include its limited geographical scope in Pekalongan Regency and its reliance on pedagogical audits rather than long-term video data. These boundaries suggest that while the findings are contextual, they provide a mirror for similar regional settings in Indonesia. Therefore, future research should employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs. Such studies could examine how continuous scaffolding and

policy reforms influence teachers' expertise in resource-limited contexts. Establishing critical literacy in Indonesian classrooms requires more than instructional manuals. It necessitates a synergy between ambitious policy goals and tangible, systemic support.

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TAYLOR SWIFT'S COUNTER-NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN RECLAIMING FEMALE AGENCY IN *THE LIFE OF A SHOWGIRL*

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Abstract

This study is among the first to analyze agency through clause-level transitivity in Swift's lyrics. This study applies a feminist stylistic framework, supported by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), to analyze lyrics from her 12th album, *The Life of a Showgirl*, as a counter-narrative resisting patriarchal master plots. The analysis comprised three stages: clause segmentation and coding, discovery of linguistic patterns via quantitative and qualitative methods, and interpretation of these patterns to elucidate themes of agency and identity. The findings demonstrate that agency is constructed through a strategic foregrounding of the Actor in material processes, reframing identity in articulated cognition through mental processes, and introspecting the external constraints through mental processes. These techniques are central to the making of counter narrative and underscore Swift's innovative reassertion of discursive authority. The developed self-narrative is contesting gendered power dynamics and affirming epistemic independence. Findings advance feminist stylistics by showing how linguistic form becomes a locus of resistance.

Keywords: *agency; counter-narratives; feminist stylistics; systemic functional linguistics; Taylor Swift*

1. Introduction

Female artists are constantly under societal constraints in a male-dominated pop industry. Taylor Swift responds to this issue through her song lyrics. However, studying her career, most investigations focus on her global impact on politics and economics that shape the media landscape (Dahlberg, DeWind, Geerling, Green, & Mateer, 2024; McCann, Faichney, Trelease, & Whatman, 2025). For language scholars, examinations of her lyrics focus on the characters, the point of view, and the uses of poetic devices (Bagasbas, Cuadro, & Luares, 2025; Jimmi & Hafizah, 2025; Max, 2022a, 2025; Santika & Syafryadin, 2023). Attempts to dissect the clause level to uncover experiential meaning have only shown the theme building of her album (Max, 2022b; Max, Vivian, Putra, & Kuncara, 2023). Therefore, the syntactic choices at the clause level to understand agency in Swift's lyrics remain underexplored.

To investigate how a female songwriter posits agency in song lyrics, this study uses a feminist stylistic approach through counter self-narratives. The research question is "How does the distribution and strategic use of transitivity processes in *TLoaS* construct the agency

throughout the album's themes?" Thus, this study contributes to feminist stylistics by offering a replicable, clause-level linguistic analysis of agency construction in popular music lyrics, an area that remains underexplored in existing scholarship.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Song Lyrics as Cultural Texts

Song lyrics reflect the values, struggles, and triumphs of the eras in which they were created (Schreiber, 2020). Corpus-linguistic studies have shown that lyrical trends can either reflect or differ from the language used by society as a whole (Cheung & Feng, 2021). As a creative arena, song lyric is also a site of variation and innovation because nonstandard grammatical forms can become unstigmatized and even enregistered as features of a specific genre (Poliakova, 2023). Further, protest songs in Central America serve as powerful tools for mobilizing collective action against repressive and economic threats, resonating with marginalized communities and inspiring social movements (Almeida & Márquez, 2023). Song lyrics give space for mutual influences, cultural significance, and arenas that shape human creativity and empathy through lyrics making (Wang, 2024).

Song lyrics are recognized not merely as accompaniments to melody but as multilayered cultural texts that link the artist's assertion and the listener's experience. However, song lyrics lend a tight space for construing experiences due to the modern recording format. This space demands a meticulous strategy for meaning-making. Therefore, song lyrics are well suited for a transitivity analysis because it foregrounds linguistic through process types, participants, and circumstances. Transitivity looks for who does what, who feels or perceives, who says or performs, or how states are ascribed through the choice of processes, revealing how song lyrics construct or contest agency.

2.2 Feminist Stylistics and Counter-Narratives of Agency

Feminist Stylistics has evolved into a prominent field. It investigates how language both reflects and sustains gendered power structures while concurrently enabling agency through counter-narratives. The field originated from feminist literary criticism in the late twentieth century and is evolving into stylistics to furnish methodologies for examining the micro-level of language use in conjunction with the main cultural critique (Mills, 1995). Feminist stylistics scrutinizes lexis, grammar, and discourse structures to elucidate the positioning of women under patriarchal hierarchies (Montoro, 2023).

Debates around agency in feminist theory begin with the fundamental question of how individuals act within, against, and through social structures. It is because women cannot solely be regarded as passive victims of the framework, as they are actively opposing and adapting. The concept of agency has to do with the capacity of a subject to act, choose, and influence their environment within the constraints of social structures (Crossley, 2021). Language structurally delineates genders, situates subjects within power systems, and facilitates resistance and subversion (Srivastava, 2022). Nonetheless, feminist theory posits a tension between 'structure' (institutions, norms, etc.) and 'agency' (individual decision) (Lee, 2023). Structure may manifest as memory embodied in human action, with the agent perpetuating the structure. Additionally, it provides varied starting points, particularly for women, to respond to oppression, which is perpetuated by the structure that sustains power inequality (Clavijo & Perray-Redslob, 2024). Feminist stylistics has been researched by systematically linking linguistic form with ideological function, illustrating how stylistic

choices can either reinforce or contest cultural norms. This dual focus allows feminist stylistics to highlight the exclusion of women's voices while also showing how they can assert their agency through counter-narratives (Hatavara, 2025).

Feminist narratives express agency through both topic elements and language structures (Tian & Ge, 2025). Here, counter self-narration arises as a stylistic approach by which women inventively reclaim discursive power, fight dominant representations, and assert agency by altering the linguistic frames that have previously constrained them, challenging cultural imperialism (Fabry, 2025). While Mills's narrative resistance treated creativity as a rhetorical resource as a form of public counter-discourse, Fabry's concept sees creativity as central to restoring epistemic agency and autonomy that reconfigures individual life within a socio-cultural niche. It also shows how an ideological absorption or victim-blaming frame might make the effects less effective (Fabry, 2025).

2.3 Transitivity of Agency through SFL

This study implements a feminist stylistic approach to systematically analyze the album's lyrics, where quantitative and qualitative aspects are used for treating linguistic choices as deliberate tools that shape narrative, theme, and interpretation (Lugea & Walker, 2023). Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), primarily developed by M.A.K. Halliday support this purpose because it grounds all interpretations in verifiable textual evidence (Fernandez-Quintanilla & Stradling, 2023). SFL sees language as a way for people to make sense of the world, not just a set of abstract rules (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Hart, 2014). It provides a methodology for connecting linguistic choices to the contexts in which they operate (Gebhard, Accurso, & Harris, 2019). In SFL, ideational metafunction is done by categorizing clauses into different transitivity process types, such as Material (doing), Mental (sensing), and Relational (being). Meanwhile, SFL also deals with interpersonal metafunction that offers the sight to how social roles are enacted and textual metafunction to describe the aspect coherence and cohesiveness of a text. Despite what is unrevealed by the ideational metafunction, the transitivity system offers a precise and powerful tool for deconstructing how a text represents the world, assigns agency to its participants, and constructs a particular version of reality (Schneider, 2023).

Table 1

Sample of *Transitivity Processes Analysis and Agency in Lyric Excerpt*

Song Title: The Life of a Showgirl			
I	paid	my dues	with every bruise
Actor	Material Process	Goal	Circ: Means
Speaker agentive claim as active bearer of cost and effort framed through embodied sacrifice.			

SFL reveals how agency is distributed across gender lines (Hunt, 2024). The framework integrally centers questions of agency by forcing an examination of who is doing what to whom, who is thinking or feeling, and what is simply being defined. SFL examines agency as a grammatical and semantic phenomenon rather than an abstract notion, utilizing transitivity (Montoro, 2023). This analysis illustrates the distribution of power, responsibility, and voice among text participants. Material, mental, relational, and other processes

demonstrate who acts and is affected (Calubayan & Raymundo, 2022). SFL also analyzes agency visibility and erasure, discovering inclusion and exclusion patterns based on names and omissions (Jeffries, 2023) and demonstrates unequal distributions of gender agency, reinforcing stereotypes, albeit feminist literature can challenge them (Angel, Bathran, & Goswami, 2026). Agency in SFL is the center of ideological struggle, determining how reality and power relations are linguistically formed as both grammatical instrument and social practice.

3. Research Method

The data source for this study comprised the complete official lyrics from the 12 tracks of the *TLoaS* album acquired from the Genius website and the Spotify App. Analyzing the whole album instead of just a few songs showed a commitment to approaching it as a single semiotic work.

First, lyrics were segmented into clauses and coded for process types, including the non-finite clauses, ellipsis, or embedded clauses, and also metaphorical expressions to ensure consistency. Coding reliability for the process types was ensured through independent checks. Stage two was the pattern discovery. For instance, the number of times each type of process occurred, including the participants and circumstances. Stage three was for interpretation to explain how agency, perception, and identity were built across the lyrics.

In this instance, a feminist style approach was employed to emphasize how linguistic choices either disperse or hide agency, illustrating how women's voices navigate institutional limits through counter self-narratives. This procedure provided evidence-based interpretation so that all thematic conclusions were bound in a systematic and replicable analysis of the lyrical text.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Process Types and Thematic Construction

The transitivity analysis of Taylor Swift's twelfth studio album, *TLoaS*, reveals a distinct linguistic assembly that both aligns with and swerves from the established stylistic patterns of her previous eleven albums. The results indicate a clear dominance of Material processes (37.7%), followed by a near-even split between Relational (23.6%) and Mental (23.3%) processes. This distribution is the grammatical fuel for the album's primary themes of action-oriented romance, identity construction, and introspective desire. Table 2 shows the distribution of the transitivity process in the song lyrics, and it will provide further explanation of the relation of the linguistic features to the theme building of each song.

Table 2

Transitivity Processes of Taylor Swift's 12th Album

Song Title	Process Type						Total Clauses
	Material (MtP)	Mental (MnP)	Relational (RP)	Behavioural (BP)	Verbal (VP)	Existential (EP)	
1. The Fate of Ophelia	15	4	7	1	3	0	30
2. Elizabeth Taylor	6	6	11	2	5	1	31

3. Opalite	8	6	7	1	2	0	24
4. Father Figure	11	5	4	0	0	0	20
5. Eldest Daughter	6	2	6	2	1	1	18
6. Ruin the Friendship	14	4	8	1	3	3	33
7. Actually Romantic	8	4	6	0	1	0	19
8. Wi\$h Li\$t	11	18	5	0	1	0	35
9. Wood	13	4	4	0	1	0	22
10. Cancelled!	8	8	5	0	1	1	23
11. Honey	10	3	5	2	9	1	30
12. The Life of a Showgirl	5	7	4	0	4	0	20
Total	115	71	72	9	31	7	305

MtP is dominant in “Fate of Ophelia” to emphasize that love is a series of actions rather than just being someone’s fate. Being the first song on the album and first single, this track is a goal statement. It uses Shakespeare’s tragedy Ophelia to represent loneliness and public life’s hardships. The transitivity pattern shows that agency is a changing dynamic in which the addressee is always the Actor in material clauses (honing, coming, wrapping, pulling), while the narrator switches between Senser (“Now I can see it all”), Actor (“I might’ve lingered in purgatory”), and Sayer (“I swore my loyalty to me, myself, and I”). Overall, the song dramatizes a contested redistribution of agency that shows how vulnerable the narrator is and how powerful the addressee is in deciding loyalty, fate, and survival. Thus, the song establishes the album’s central narrative, saying that love is a powerful force to change one’s fate.

Transitivity in “Elizabeth Taylor” constructs agency as a negotiation between glamour and vulnerability. RP appears dominant, and it shows how the spectators address female stardom (“You’re only as hot as your last hit”). However, the narrator frequently embodies the roles of Senser (“And I think you know why”) or Carrier (“I’m bad news”), reflecting internal states, while the addressee is emphasized as Actor in material and behavioral clauses (calling, blooming, looking, leaving). This goes along with the idea of comparing two lives where Swift creates an imaginary talk to Taylor as a friend who could have the possibility to advise about surviving public scrutiny that appears “in the papers, on the screen, and in their minds.” Consequently, the song produces the suspension of agency between the external forces of fame and the intimate power of relationships, underscoring the tension between public identity and private dependence.

“Opalite” uses cosmic images to talk about fate, focusing on the change from an “onyx night” to an “opalite sky.” This transition means going from the pain of being alone and the impossibility of experiencing love in a difficult situation. MtP foreground to show resilience via physical effort, such as “dancing through the lightning strikes”, “making your own sunshine”, and “This life will beat you up”. The patterns support the idea of resilience, destiny, and change (“But failure brings you freedom”). Agency is granted to the narrator as

she shifts from receiver ("my mama told me") to sayer ("And that's when I told you") as a result of the endurance earned.

"Father Figure" constructs agency as a power struggle. Swift uses George Michael's 1987 hit song as a base. The message of loyalty imbued in the original song is reframed into an accusation of treachery caused by a manipulative 'father figure' who acts as a mentor at first but is exploitative in the end. The speaker is the agent that turn the situation ("You made a deal with this devil, Turns out my dick's bigger"). MtP domination ("turned your rags into gold," "pulled the wrong trigger") portrays the speaker as a powerful actor who provides, controls, and eventually threatens. MnP reveals motivations and judgments ("I saw potential") and recklessness ("Mistake my kindness for weakness and find your card canceled"). RP asserts power and ownership ("I'll be your father figure," "this empire belongs to me"), and VP is used to frame warnings and terms of that type of relationship ("Said," "asked for"). Agency is contested between paternal authority and rebellious defiance, highlighting themes of control, protection, and betrayal.

"Eldest Daughter" constructs agency as a negotiation between inherited vulnerability and self-assertion. It defines the stereotype of premature responsibility attached to the role of the oldest daughter, being weighed by society's expectations. Eldest daughters are positioned as Tokens in relational clauses that mark them as "first lambs to the slaughter". Here, RP is dominantly used for describing the given identity of the firstborn and also rejecting the involuntary persona ("I'm not the baddest and "this isn't savage"). Meanwhile, MtP describes the coping actions ("dressed up as wolves") and the partner's protective role ("never going to let you down"). The song stages agency as a transition from imposed victimhood to selected resilience, emphasizing the active redefinition of identity and loyalty in opposition to generational expectations.

"Ruin the Friendship" talks about a missed opportunity, as repeatedly stated in the line "Should've kissed you." Agency is depicted as a tension between hesitation and desire where the narrator is often emphasized as an Actor in material clauses (kissing, leaving, flying home, whispering), while also appearing as a Senser in mental processes (seeing, knowing, regretting). Circumstances and existential clauses place these actions in vivid contexts ("Glistening grass from September rain"), thereby performing agency as conflicted between active impulses and reflective restraint. The lyrics underscores the struggle between friendship, longing, and the potential for regret ("My advice always ruins the friendship").

The addressee in "Actually Romantic" is emphasized as the Senser and Actor in mental and material clauses (thinking, spending time, putting in effort) as in "Wrote me a song," "High-fived my ex". The song sharpens such effort ("No man has ever loved me like you do."). BP's simile of "chihuahua barking" marks the addressee's verbal attacks ("call me 'Boring Barbie'"). Being observant of others' actions, the narrator shifts between Senser ("I know you think", "Feels like you're flirting with me") and Actor ("I don't provoke it"). RP ascribes the situation as "nasty" and "God's my witness" but also reframes the ruinous deed into ironic states ("It's actually romantic", "It's honestly lovely"). The narrator's undertaking to the situation is "Really got to hand it to you, to you". Thus, the song presents agency's capability to shift external provocations into relational investments.

The transitivity patterns in "Wi\$h Li\$t" put the narrator as detached across social aspiration, personal desire, and external intervention. MnP places "they" as the Senser,

especially for verbs that express overriding desire like want, hope, and dreaming of ‘Yacht life’, ‘complex female character’, and ‘Oscar on their bathroom floor’. The narrator contrasts them with her own very personal (“I just want you”) and naive hopes (“I made wishes on all of the stars”) for a quiet existence and a family of commoners (“Got me dreaming about a driveway with a basketball hoop”). It serves as the emotional centerpiece of the album's love story, presenting a candid and heartfelt vision of a future beyond the trappings of celebrity. Then, MtP grounds the desire in tangible domestic actions to “have a couple kids,” and of a future where she can “boss up” in her career and “settle down” in her personal life. In addition, VP fills the expression of powerful departure from the outside world (“We tell the world to leave us”). The song highlights that agency persists even amid the tension between collective fantasies and intimate relational fulfillment. It reveals how individuals assert desire and identity within competing social and personal pressures.

The transitivity in “Wood” constructs agency standing as both self-asserted and environmentally mediated. It emphasizes how intimacy and fate intertwine through action, belief, and circumstance. The narrator and addressee are foregrounded as Actors in material clauses (dancing, knocking on wood, making luck), while natural and relational elements like curses, love, and redwood trees take on agentive roles in relational and causative processes. Focusing on the real world, the lyric highlights a safe and private relationship with action-oriented words. The lyrics talk about a relationship that feels so safe that it goes against superstition (“I ain't got to knock on wood”). MnP shows up rarely, meaning that people finally understand that they do not need luck from outside sources (“it's understood”). At the beginning, RP majorly appears to create the first universe of bad, superstitious states (“I was distraught”). VP, then, frames the narrative shift from superstition to confidence (“I'll admit”) and BP describes past superstitious habits (“wishing on a falling star”) and omens (“the black cat laughed”). In addition, VP fills the expression of powerful departure from the outside world (“We tell the world to leave us”).

“CANCELLED!” scaffolds agency as contested between oppressive collective power and the narrator's embrace of scandalous solidarity. The dominance of MtP borders cancellation as actions done to a person (“picked out your grave,” “stood by me”), so it construes cancel culture as an active, physical battle. Meanwhile, the narrator's defiant response is likewise action-based, offering solidarity (“Come with me,” “they'll run”). The lyrics create an “underworld” for the publicly shamed, where infamy forges bonds expressed through RP (“They're the ones with matching scars,” “cloaked in scandal”). VP validates the outcasts (“I salute you”), while sharp lines critique double standards for women (“Did you girl-boss too close to the sun?”).

“Honey” shapes agency as shifting from external control to relational empowerment by highlighting how affectionate naming reclaims identity against social hostility. Others are foregrounded as Sayers and Behavers in verbal and behavioural clauses that critique or police the narrator. VP is used to say that the endearments are said and weaponized (“called me ‘Sweetheart,’” “was tellin’ me to back off”). Then, RP states that “It was passive-aggressive,” while BP conveys emotional fallout as a result of the hidden intention (“I cried the whole way home”). In contrast to past verbal cruelty with present intimacy, MtP grounds the theme in tangible acts (“touched my face,” “kicking in doors,” “graffiti my whole damn life”), showing how the uttered word can also provide a safe physical reality when used by a

loved one. MnP highlights the partner's sincerity ("cause you meant it"). The narrator reclaims the words once used against her to into acts of confidence-building.

Lastly, "The Life of a Showgirl" lyric summarizes the reflection and thematic capstone of the whole album. It underlines how the showgirl asserts resilience and identity against mortality, judgment, and spectacle. MtP narrates the other showgirl's performance ("She's dancing"), to exploitation ("They ripped me off"), to triumph ("I'm making money"). But, dominated by MnP, the song focuses on self-awareness and acceptance ("I know the life of a showgirl," "I love you"). MnP also charts evolution from ignorance ("You don't know") to knowledge ("Now I know"). RP is used to define identity at each stage ("She was a menace," "I'm immortal now"). VP then affirms the transformation and encapsulates this ethos by saying, "So I say thank you for the lovely bouquet / I'm married to the hustle." The lyric puts agency as reclaimed through self-definition and verbal affirmation.

4.2 Swift's Reclamation of Female Agency

The most important thing that *TLoaS* found is that Material processes are the most common, making up 115 of the 305 clauses that were found. So, as the first linguistic strategy, Agency is thus gained through material processes. The album's story also progresses because of the processes of "doing" and "happening," which turn experiences into real events. This high frequency puts *TLoaS* in line with Swift's established style, which is seen in *Midnights*, where Material processes were also dominant (Max et al., 2023), as well as in songs like *King of My Heart* and *London Boy* (Nurwidya, 2024). In songs like "Father Figure" and "CANCELLED!," business disagreements and social conflicts are seen as violent actions (e.g., "turned your rags into gold," "pulled the wrong trigger"), which shows how Material processes shape the album's view of conflict as a visible fight. People assume the tracks as a metaphor for her legal battle with Scooter Braun over the rights to her albums (Judkins, 2025). Swift rerecorded and released some of her previous albums under the label 'Taylor's Version' to save her art. In "The Fate of Ophelia," Material processes depict romance as a physical rescue. It also resonates with "Wood" being with direct references to Travis Kelce, now Swift's fiancé, as the line "New Heights of manhood" is a pun on the name of his podcast. The "Redwood tree" lyric is a nod to an inside joke about the couple's notable bodily height, which an acquaintance described as being like standing in the Redwood Forest. Both of these songs show that a relationship can only work when affection is manifested in events and actions. The transitivity provides an intervention that contrasts with the "disnarration" and introspective "non-events" present in the studies of Swift's previous albums named *folklore*, *Evermore*, and *The Tortured Poets Department* (Harrison & Ringrow, 2022; Max, 2025).

Relational processes serve to classify and identify, and thereby construct Swift's persona by filling the 23.6% of all other process types in *TLoaS*. While Material processes drive the narrative progression through action, Relational clauses fasten identity. Swift used the process to define the states of being in relation to fame and legacy. The line "All my white diamonds and lovers are forever," inventively links the two through symbols of luxury and legacy. White Diamonds is a perfume from 1991, iconic of Elizabeth Taylor (Derval, 2024). "Been number one, but I never had two" is the affecting part of the song, for it implies that success has not made it easy for the individual to be happy under circumstance of being "in the papers, on the screen, and in their minds". These thematic motifs of public

scrutiny also appeared in *Reputation* (Nisbett & Dunn, 2019), but TLoaS uses Relational processes mostly to articulate the tension between public and private selves. This strategy of agency reveals a layered construction. When doing and happening dramatize conflict and transformation, and internal cognition sustains desire and reflection, Relational clauses function to stabilize persona, ensuring that Swift's narrative voice remains both embodied and self-defining. It is a creative linguistic choice that confronts "master plots" and sustains one's epistemic agency (Fabry, 2025).

Third, introspection is fabricated through mental processes, for human agency possesses the capacity to digest the exterior world with cognitive strengths and form desires. Mental processes (23.3%) give Swift's writing the "diary-like" quality as they balance the external Material actions with internal desire and cognition. This strategy has been found throughout Swift's discography to be an act of confession (Blansjaar & Downs, 2023). In *Wish List*, verbs that express desire, like "want" and "hope," are much more common than other kinds. The song sets an internal world that is different from the external trappings of fame. The occurrence of cognition-based clauses (e.g., "I know what I want") exemplifies the continuity of the personalized style identified in the analyses of her work from the debut to the album *Midnights* (Kendong, Daud, & Joharry, 2023). MnP makes the speaker sound distant and knowledgeable about others' actions ("I know you think", "I heard you call me 'Boring Barbie'"). Swift's strategy of agency uses processes of desire and cognition to articulate inner absorption for the staged of doing and happening from the external conflicts and relationships. Charli XCX's song, "Sympathy is a Knife", is echoed in the song entitled *Actually Romantic* (Sharf, 2025), connecting the music to real people and events as it deals with her past relationship with a male singer, Matty Healy. It connects the music to real people and events. This creates a balance between perceptible action and introspective reflection that defines her creative strategy to gain counter-narrative. Thus, it reflects the singer's private responds to the public constraint.

In addition, Swift's lyrics are replete with intertextual references to the literary canon, from Shakespeare to Fitzgerald, showing a reflective and sustained engagement with literary history (Reid & MacKee, 2024). She has affected her listeners' collective consciousness and consistently challenged industry norms so that Taylor Swift is not merely a pop star. She is a cultural force whose lyrical output provides an exceptionally rich and relevant corpus for scholarly investigation (Klimchynskaya, 2024). Though the repeated framing of the female narrator as rescued through active deeds resonates with cultural tropes of female vulnerability and male heroism, Swift's consistent positioning of herself as the Actor in this scene. And through the lens of a showgirl, she reframes female agency in the public sphere. By grammatically reclaiming agency, she challenges traditional gender scripts and reasserts her celebrity persona as one who acts rather than merely a receiver of actions. Taylor Swift shows a creative and imaginative as the act of resistance. While some criticism label her as 'play victim' (Hirsch, 2022), she constantly speaks through song lyrics to actualize and affirm a strong sense of agency and autonomy instead of addressing them directly or through media commentary. This case happens particularly when members of structurally oppressive groups are among the addressees (Fabry, 2025). However, these findings are limited to one album and may not generalize across her broader corpus.

5. Conclusion

Approached with feminist stylistics, Taylor Swift reins in her creative power to expose and challenge those very structures, positioning creativity as the precise means through which she remains both relevant and resilient. First, she puts material processes at the center of her work to show that she is an active agent and takes back control of the story from conventional ideas of female passivity. Second, she balances relational and cognitive processes to build a complex identity that shows how other people see her and how she thinks about herself. Third, she redefines conflict as active resistance to confront patriarchal systems. Thus, this study advances feminist stylistics by integrating SFL analysis to show how agency is linguistically constructed.

Limited to the reliance on SFL's ideational metafunction, this article leaves interpersonal and textual metafunctions unexplored. It opens further analysis on how Swift organizes her narratives rhetorically in this album. The discussion for future research can situate the findings above alongside or against Swift's current discography and public persona. The analysis is limited to one album and requires expansion to other artists for more female songwriters. It's worth considering seeing how gendered agency interacts with class, race, and celebrity culture. For now, this study notes that lyrics serve as powerful counter-narratives, reclaiming agency in male-dominated cultural industries.

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CONTRASTIVE MEANINGS OF THE ADJECTIVE "COLD" IN JAPANESE AND JAVANESE

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Abstract

This study offers a comparative semantic examination of the Japanese cold-related adjectives *samui* and *tsumetai* with their Javanese equivalents *adhem*, *atis*, and *anyep*. The study used a qualitative descriptive method within a contrastive analytic framework to investigate the parallels and differences in meaning, usage, and semantic expansion between the two languages. The data indicate that *samui* pertains to an unpleasant and frequently intolerable body sensation induced by low temperatures, but *tsumetai* signifies the physical coldness of inanimate objects like water or air and might figuratively extend to characterize an individual's demeanor or disposition. In Javanese, *adhem* represents a cool temperature in the air or food and beverages, *atis* represents a cold sensation linked to air and precipitation, and *anyep* pertains to a wider semantic domain that includes cold sensations experienced through things and figuratively conveys a bland or insipid flavor. Conversely, *samui* semantically coincides with *atis*, whereas *tsumetai* aligns with *adhem* and *anyep*. The research indicates that metaphorical expansions of cold to characterize personality exist in Japanese but not in Javanese, while the link between coldness and insipid flavor is exclusive to Javanese. These findings emphasize cross-linguistic variations in the semantic conception of temperature-related adjectives and enhance contrastive linguistics and semantic research.

Keywords: *adjective; cold meaning; Japanese; Javanese; temperature*

1. Introduction

The study of meaning is known as semantics, and it encompasses grammatical, lexical, and contextual aspects that are essential to all aspects of language, including literature, language instruction, and language learning. For the purpose of linguistic studies, comprehending the meaning of a word requires not only the definitions found in dictionaries but also the connections that exist between words and the situations in which they are employed. In particular, lexical semantics investigates the meanings that are inherently associated with words as well as the semantic connections that exist between them, such as synonymy and antonymy (Assunção & Araújo, 2017; Stringer, 2019). According to this point of view, the meaning of lexical information cannot be divorced from the manner in which languages organize and classify human experience.

Grammatical meaning concerns how languages encode diverse semantic concepts through their grammatical frameworks. This includes various linguistic components and processes, such as affixes, word order, auxiliary verbs, and syntactic structures, which together facilitate the expression of both grammatical and formal meanings, in addition to lexical meanings (Sharipova, Muhammadiyeva, & Mohigul, 2020). Contextual semantics enhance the extraction of relationships between entities in text. Models that integrate contextual information can enhance performance in tasks such as relation prediction and entity extraction (Jia, Yin, Wang, & Lin, 2022). The combination of lexical, grammatical, and contextual meanings offers a thorough framework for the analysis of word meanings across languages.

A prominent lexical domain in semantic study is temperature. Temperature notions are universally seen; nevertheless, they are not universally classified or verbalized. Terms related to temperature frequently display language-specific semantic variations and extensions, rendering them a valuable subject for cross-linguistic examination. In the Japanese language, the adjective "cold" is classified as an i-adjective, also known as *keiyōshi*. It is typically represented through the use of *samui* (寒い) and *tsumetai* (冷たい). According to *the Dictionary of Basic Japanese Usage for Foreigners* (Bunkacho, 1995), the meaning of the word *samui* (寒い) conveys a feeling of coldness on the body and a low temperature. *Tsumetai* has two meanings: it can refer to an object (water, body, air) at low temperature, or to something related to people's feelings. Learners of the Japanese language frequently have challenges when it comes to the use of these adjectives since their application is contingent on the circumstances and context in which they are used.

For Javanese speakers, comprehending Japanese chilly adjectives necessitates a comparison with corresponding terms in Javanese. In Javanese, the notion of cold is conveyed by various adjectives, including *adhem*, *anyep*, and *atis*. According to Suwadji dkk (1995), *Adhem* means cold, cool, and not hot. *Adhem* has several words, namely, *adhem*, *anyep*, and *atis*. There is a further refinement of the expression of coolness through the encoding of sensory and situational details by *anyep* and *atis*. This demonstrates that Javanese uses a more differentiated lexical system for conveying coldness, which does not immediately correlate with the Japanese system. This is demonstrated by the differences between the two languages.

Learners may experience difficulties due to the semantic nuances of *samui* and *tsumetai* if the conceptual differences between these adjectives are not understood in a clear and concise manner. Japanese language students at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, the majority of whom are native Javanese speakers, are particularly affected by this issue because of its relevance to their language learning. Therefore, a contrastive understanding of chilly adjectives in Japanese and Javanese can help to enhance comprehension and reduce semantic interference in the process of learning a second language. This is because it provides clearer conceptual mappings between the two languages.

Prior research has analyzed temperature statements from diverse language viewpoints. Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2022) analyzes temperature adjectives ('hot', 'cold', etc) in Slavic languages within a broader typological framework. The comparison encompasses both the systems in their entirety and the forms integral to them. The primary inquiries pertain to the degree of (dis)similarity in the temperature systems of closely related languages, as well as the aspects that are stable versus those that are mutable in the temperature terminology of these languages. (Silva & Oliveira, 2024) discuss the adjective for temperature in

European and Portuguese. Temperature adjectives can convey not only literal meanings but also metaphorical interpretations in context. Some adjectives, such as *quente* (hot) and *frio* (cold), have metaphorical uses that vary depending on context, according to a study of European Portuguese.

Treis & Doyiso (2019) compare the grammar of temperature expressions in Kambaata to that of related Highland East Cushitic languages of Ethiopia and focus on the basic and extended meanings of temperature lexemes as well as the grammar of temperature expressions. Kambaata has a system that uses two temperature values, opposed to one another, namely cold and warm/hot. Escobar et al. (2021) investigate the associations between temperature concepts and emotional adjectives at both explicit and implicit levels. Furthermore, the term cold was linked to negative valence and low-arousal emotions. These findings substantiate the presence of temperature-emotion correlations at both explicit and implicit levels across various languages.

More especially, Wang Haihong et al (2024) investigated the semantic extensions of *tsumetai*. They found that they can be correlated with the domains of color, emotion, manner, relationship, and atmosphere within the temperature domain. Their research suggests a semantic network that illustrates the connections between the conventional meaning of *tsumetai* and its extended senses. This study makes a significant contribution to the field of Japanese language training as well as lexicography to provide vital insights. On the other hand, the majority of these research concentrate on temperature systems that are contained inside a single language or on typological comparisons that do not include Javanese speakers.

Comparative semantic analysis of cold adjectives in Japanese and Javanese is the emphasis of this work, which, in contrast to past research, seeks to discover parallels and contrasts in the meanings and usage of cold adjectives in both languages. With the purpose of filling a gap in contrastive temperature-term research and contributing to both lexical semantics and second language acquisition, this study aims to investigate the semantic domains and lexical boundaries of *samui*, *tsumetai*, *adhem*, *anyep*, and *atis*. This is especially important in the context of Japanese language learning for Javanese-speaking learners.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Lexical Semantics, Semantic Fields, and Linguistic Relativity

Semantic is the study of meaning. Studying the meaning of a word involves considering it from grammatical, lexical, and contextual perspectives. Contextual Meaning pertains to the variation in significance of a word or phrase contingent upon the surrounding context of its usage (Green, 2019). Lexical meaning refers to the intrinsic meaning of a word, encompassing its definitions and its associations with other words, such as synonyms and antonyms. Lexical semantics examines the interrelations among words and the complexity and multidimensionality of their meanings (Stringer, 2019). Grammatical meaning in semantics is a complicated interaction between the structural arrangement of language and the meanings it conveys (Shaposhnikova, 2022; McNally & Kennedy, 2023). As a result of the interaction between these three aspects, meaning is perceived differently in actual language use.

The study of the meaning of sentences and how words are combined to form meaningful sentences is referred to as sentence semantics (Hallman, 2017). Their context and application frequently shape the significance of linguistic units. This encompasses the

examination of how context influences meaning interpretation and the utilization of semantic features in practical applications, including product design and communication (Baduge, Ponnimbaduge Perera, & Jayakody, 2024).

The dispute between semantic universalism and linguistic relativism is intimately tied to semantic research from the point of view of languages that are not the same. Languages vary in the ways in which they classify and lexicalize experiences, despite the fact that certain sensations, such as temperature, color, and kinship, are common to all people everywhere. According to studies on semantic fields, meaning is conceptualized as being structured into domains consisting of related lexical objects. This interpretation is consistent with that definition. The temperature is an example of such a semantic field, which is characterized by the linguistic partitioning of universal physical sensations in ways that are distinctive to a given language. This conceptual conflict serves as a basis for investigating the ways in which various languages organize the meaning of adjectives that are associated with temperature, particularly those that are used to indicate coldness.

2.2 Temperature and Cold as a Semantic Domain

As a component of fundamental lexical domains that shed light on the manner in which languages record sensory experience, temperature expressions have been the subject of extensive research. Through research conducted in a variety of languages, it has been discovered that temperature adjectives frequently encompass not only literal physical sensations but also metaphorical connotations that are associated with feelings, evaluations, and social interactions. For instance, research conducted on Slavic languages demonstrates that temperature systems range from one related language to another in terms of lexical differentiation and semantic stability (Koptjevskaja-Tamm, 2022). Research on European Portuguese also reveals that temperature adjectives, such as hot and cold, can express metaphorical meanings contingent upon context (Silva & Oliveira, 2024).

The findings of additional typological and anthropological investigations provide further evidence that languages differ in the manner in which they partition the temperature arena. (Treis & Doyiso, 2019) demonstrate that Kambaata utilizes a binary temperature system contrasting “cold” with “warm/hot”, whereas (Escobar et al., 2021) uncover regular correlations between temperature concepts and emotional valence across many languages. These data indicate that temperature, while rooted in universal human experience, serves as a highly fruitful area for semantic expansion and cultural diversity. Thus, adjectives signifying “cold” serve as a suitable basis for examining semantic categorization and cross-linguistic comparison.

2.3 Adjectives Cold in Japanese

The word “cold” in Japanese is included in the adjective *i* (*ikeyoushi*). *Ikeyoushi* or the adjective *i* belongs to the Japanese word class (*hinshi*). According to (Soepardjo, 2012), the word class is divided into two forms: the free form (*jiritsugo*) and the bound form (*fuzokugo*). The free form consists of the word class verb (*doushi*), i-adjective (*keiyoushi*), na-adjective (*keiyodoushi*), noun (*meishi*), adverb (*fukushi*), participle (*reitaishi*), conjunction (*setsuzokushi*), interjection (*kandoshi*). The word class i-adjective (*keiyoushi*) is a word that expresses the nature or condition of a thing or thing that can serve as a predicate and undergo changes. The adjective is divided into the attributive i-adjective (*zokusei keiyoushi*) and the emotive i-adjective (*kanjo keiyoushi*). Examples of attributive adjectives (i-ajektiva)

include *tsumetai* (cold), *okii* (large), *akarui* (bright), *yasashii* (friendly), and others. At the same time, examples of emotive i-jectives are *hazukashii* (shame), *kurushii* (difficult), *natsukashii* (longing), and others. Based on this theory, cold words are included in the class of attributive i-adjectives (*zokusei keiyoushi*).

In the Japanese language, the sense of cold is predominantly conveyed through the use of the adjectives *samui* (寒い) and *tsumetai* (冷たい). According to The Dictionary of Basic Japanese Usage for Foreigners (Bunkacho, 1995), the term *samui* refers to a low ambient temperature and describes a cold sensation that is experienced by the body. *Samui* is often related with the weather or environmental conditions. *Tsumetai*, on the other hand, is a term that describes the coolness of things that are physically present, such as water, air, or the human body. It is important to note that *tsumetai* also demonstrates semantic extension into the realm of interpersonal connections and emotional attitudes. In this context, it is used to express emotional detachment or a lack of warmth in interpersonal relationships.

The semantic differentiation between *samui* and *tsumetai* is acknowledged in Japanese language education; however, recent studies indicate that the metaphorical extensions of *tsumetai* constitute a complex semantic network rather than a straightforward literal–metaphorical contradiction (Wang Haihong et al., 2024). These findings suggest that Japanese cold adjectives encompass various semantic areas, rendering them more difficult for second language learners.

2.4 Adjective Cold in Javanese

According to Suwadji et al. (1995), the word *adhem* does not only have a semantic association with temperature, but it also has a semantic association with flavor. *Adhem* is a condition that is cool or cold. Javanese, in contrast to Japanese, makes use of a number of distinct adjectives to convey the feeling of coolness. These adjectives include *adhem*, *anyep*, and *atis*, each of which encodes a different sensory and situational complication.

The term *adhem* is often used to describe a chilly temperature in the air or in food and drink, and it has a meaning that is not evaluative in nature. The term *anyep* refers to a chilly sensation that can be experienced when one comes into contact with items or the body. It can also be used metaphorically to describe a flavor that is insipid or bland. *Atis*, on the other hand, is connected to chilly air or coldness that is brought on by precipitation and the conditions of the weather. As a result of these distinctions, Javanese demonstrates a lexical system that is more finely differentiated for conveying coldness. This system integrates physical feeling with sensory judgment, notably in the area of taste.

Using the semantic structure of Javanese chilly adjectives as an example, we can see how cultural and environmental influences influence the classification of words in the language. The extension of temperature concepts into the realm of taste, for instance, reveals patterns of semantic mapping that are particular to the language and are distinct from those that are found in Japanese.

2.5 Contrastive Analysis and Research Gap

Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis is a theory that was developed by Lado in the 1950s. It proposes that the similarities between a learner's first language (L1) and the target language (L2) make learning easier, while the disparities between the two languages provide

difficulties. The foundation for conducting systematic comparisons of phonological, syntactic, and semantic features across languages was created by this idea (Uysal & Alhasnawi, 2012). The process of comparing and contrasting lexical items across multiple languages is known as Contrastive Analysis (CA) in the field of lexical semantics. The goal of this analysis is to determine the similarities and differences between the meanings, usage, and contextual applications of these word combinations. This approach is especially helpful in the fields of translation studies, language instruction, and the creation of lexicons that are available in several languages (Abdulmanova, Vyunova, & Lekomtseva, 2025). Contrastive Analysis in lexical semantics serves as an essential instrument for comprehending the subtleties of lexical items across languages, enhancing translation quality, and creating multilingual resources. It utilizes several methodologies including componential analysis, semantic feature mapping, and corpus-based research to accomplish these objectives (Kalyuga & Yunusova, 2025).

In the realm of temperature semantics, CA facilitates a comprehensive comparison of how several languages delineate the same semantic domain. Although prior research has analyzed temperature adjectives and cold expressions in Japanese and Javanese separately, a notable deficiency exists in contrastive studies that methodically delineate the semantic domains and lexical non-equivalence of cold adjectives between these two non-cognate languages. No previous research has performed a comprehensive contrastive examination of *samui* and *tsumetai* concerning *adhem*, *anyep*, and *atis*. This study fills the gap by employing a contrastive semantic methodology to accurately map chilly adjectives in Japanese and Javanese, thus enhancing the fields of lexical semantics, contrastive linguistics, and second language learning.

3. Research Method

This research utilizes a qualitative descriptive research design inside a Contrastive Analysis (CA) framework. To investigate complex phenomena in their natural environments, qualitative research methods are indispensable. These methods offer a wealth of in-depth insights that are often inaccessible through quantitative research methods alone (Chasokela, 2024; Vetrivel et al., 2025). The research purpose is not to assess frequency or statistical connections; rather, it is to describe and compare the semantic domains of cold-related adjectives in Japanese and Javanese. This design was chosen since the research objective is to characterize and compare these domains. A qualitative descriptive technique makes it possible to understand meaning in natural language use in a methodical and precise manner, whereas contrastive analysis offers a structured framework for determining semantic equivalence and non-equivalence between different languages.

The data include linguistic information, namely adjectives associated to cold in Japanese (*samui*, *tsumetai*) and Javanese (*adhem*, *atis*, and *anyep*), as well as the context in which these adjectives are used. The contexts consist of sentences and definitions from the dictionary that illustrate both the fundamental meanings and the metaphorical expansions of the words. The data for this study were collected from 20 Japanese sentences containing the word "cold" on the websites Weblio (<https://ejje.weblio.jp/>) and *yourei.jp*. In addition, Javanese data were collected from 20 sentences that contain *adhem*, *anyep*, and *atis* on *jayabya.wordpress.com*.

Data were gathered using documentation methods, which are conventional in semantic research. Sentences were chosen according to the subsequent criteria:

1. including one of the specified adjectives,

2. serving as a descriptive adjective pertaining to temperature, physical experience, emotional condition, or metaphorical significance,
3. exemplifying straightforward and natural language usage. Redundant or unclear information was omitted.

As a result of the low amount of public semantic evidence, the semantic interpretation of Javanese data was further validated by consulting with native Javanese speakers and various linguistic sources.

A framework known as Contrastive Analysis was utilized for the data analysis, which was carried out in four stages:

1. Each adjective was examined on its own to determine the semantic domain into which it belongs and the context in which it is used.
2. The meanings of both languages were aligned and classified into thematic categories (for example, atmospheric cold, object temperature, body feeling, and metaphorical usage).
3. Comparative analysis was performed on the aligned data in order to determine whether or not there was full equivalence, partial equivalence, or non-equivalence.
4. The findings of the comparison were synthesised into a semantic mapping that depicts the contrastive links that exist between the lexical components.

Source triangulation, which included lexicographic and contextual usage data, as well as expert validation, were utilized to assure the reliability of the information.

4. Results and Discussion

In the following section, a comparative semantic analysis of Japanese and Javanese adjectives that represent the idea of cold is presented. The investigation progresses beyond the description of individual languages to the comparison of languages from different cultures, bringing to light patterns of semantic partitioning, metaphorical expansion, and lexical non-equivalence.

4.1 Meaning of the Adjective Cold in Japanese

Through the utilization of two adjectives, namely *samui* (寒い) and *tsumetai* (冷たい), the Japanese language predominantly expresses the meaning domain of coldness. There are significant differences between the two in terms of the domain scope, experiential focus, and metaphorical extension, despite the fact that both signify low temperature.

4.1.1 *Samui* (寒い): Atmospheric and Bodily Sensation Domain

The adjective *samui* primarily encodes cold as an ambient or atmospheric condition that affects the human body indirectly. It is used when cold is perceived holistically, involving environmental temperature and bodily sensation rather than direct tactile contact.

Data 1

妻にどうかしたのかと聞くと、どうもしたのじゃない、寒い体と伝う。

Tsuma ni doukashita no ka to kiku to, doumoshita no ja nai, samui karada to tsutau.

When I asked my wife what was wrong, she said her body felt **cold**.

Data 2

もう暗く、風が強くて寒い日だった。

*Mou kuarku, kaze ga tsuyokute **samui** hi datta..*

It was already dark, and the wind was blowing hard, making it a cold day.

Data 3

今日は朝から雨が降っていて、少し寒いです。

*Kyou wa asa kara ame ga futte ite, Sukoshi **Samui** Desu.*

It has been raining since morning, so it is **cold**.

Examples Data 1–3 illustrate that *samui* denotes cold air, meteorological circumstances, or physical discomfort arising from environmental exposure. In many instances, the emphasis is not on a particular object but on the ambient area that elicits a frigid sensation. For example, persistent rain or high winds generate ambient conditions that induce body chill.

The concept of *samui* extends beyond the realm of neutral description and into the realm of the experiential realm of intolerance and discomfort.

Data 4

十年前の一月半ばのある寒い日の夕方、私は行ったことがある。

*Juu nen mae no ichi gatsu nakaba no aru **samui** hi no yuugata, watashi wa itta koto ga aru.*

On the night that **cold** in the middle of the month ten years ago, I once went here.

Data 5

木は、こうして毎日、長い寒い冬の間、寂しいのを我慢していました。

*Moku wa, koushite mainichi, nagai **samui** fuyu no aida, sabishii no o gaman shite imashita.*

Thursdays and every day like this, during the **cold**, long ones, I endure loneliness.

Data 6

ここも家も寒いのにには変わらないのです、あそこは屋根があるだけ。

Koko moi e mo samui no ni wa kawarinainodesu, asoko wa yane ga aru dake.

Even though it is still cold here and at home, there is only a roof.

Data 7

この寒いのにぼんやりしていねえで、早く家でかえって温まる方がいいぜ。

*Kono **samui** noni bonyarishite ineede, hayaku ie de kaette atatamaru hou ga ii ze.*

This cold weather makes daydreaming preferable, and it is better to go home quickly to warm up.

Data 8

寒い風に当たるとひびが切れる

***Samui** kaze ni ataru to hibi ga kireru.*

Cold wind makes the skin crack (peel).

Data 9

彼女は外が寒い時手袋をする

*Kanojo wa soto **no samui** toki tebukuro or suru.*

He wears gloves when outside **cold**

Data 10

この現象はもっと広い意味で、寒いくには非常に重要な問題である。

Kono genzou wa motto hiroi imi de, samui kuni de wa hijou ni juyou na mondai de aru.

In this context, the country's **cold** is a significant issue.

Data 4–10 indicate that *samui* often appears in contexts associated with endurance, hardship, or physical constraints, such as severe winters, chapped skin, or the necessity for protective attire. This phrase highlights subjective susceptibility to cold rather than solely objective temperature.

As a result, *samui* is a semantic space that combines namely, the coldness of the wind, sensations of the body that are brought on by the surrounding environment, and a feeling of discomfort or intolerance that is experienced.

4.1.2 *Tsumetai* (冷たい): Object, Tactile, and Metaphorical Domain

In contrast, *tsumetai* encodes cold as a directly perceivable property of objects.

Data 11

山から来る冷たい青水に顔をあらった。

Yama kara kuru tsumetai aomizu ni kao o aratta.

I wash my face with cold, blue water from the mountains.

Data 12

冷たいビールが飲みたいなあ！

Tsumetai bi-ru ga nomitaina !

I want to drink a beer that **cold**!

Data 13

兄妹はそうして冷たい体になってもお互いにしっかりと抱きあっていました。

Keimai wa soushite tsumetai karada ni natte mo oalele ni shikka to daki atte imashita.

Brothers and sisters hugging each other when their bodies are **cold**

Data 14

死んだように青白い[冷たい].

Sinda youni aojiroi tsumetai

Cold, pale as **death**.

Data 15

店の女性は冷たいおしぼりを持ってきてくれた。

Mise no josei wa tsumetai oshibori o motte kite kureta.

The woman in the store brought me a towel **cold**.

Data 16

カレーの食後に出す冷たいデザート（385 円）を開発した。

Kare- no shokugo ni dasu tsumetai deza-to (385 en) o kaihatu shita.

Developing desserts **cold**. It costs 385 yen to serve after eating curry.

Data 11–16 demonstrate that *tsumetai* is utilized in situations in which cold is perceived through direct physical contact with tangible substances such as water, food, towels, or the human body as an object. Here, cold is localized, tactile, and object-centered. The body itself may function as an object (*tsumetai karada*), particularly in contexts involving physical states such as illness or death.

Data 17

人を冷たい目でじっと見る。

Hito o tsumetai me de jitto miru

Giving someone a **cold look**

Data 18

彼は冷たい態度のため多くの敵をつくった。

Kare wa tsumetai taido no tame ooku no teki o tsukutta.

He made many enemies because of his attitude. **Chill.**

Data 19

彼は冷たい心の持ち主にちがいない。

Kare wa tsumetai kokoro no mochinushi ni chigainai.

He must have a **cold heart**.

Tsumetai also demonstrates a metaphorical expansion into the socio-emotional sphere, which is an important aspect to consider. *Tsumetai* is a term that can be used to denote emotional detachment, unpleasant attitudes, or a lack of empathy, as demonstrated in Data 17–19. Using this metaphorical usage, emotional distance is conceptualized as thermal coldness, which is a mapping that is not present in *samui*.

In summary, *tsumetai* comprises four The temperature of the object, cool to the touch, the body's coldness leading to objectification, and a facet of one's personality or demeanor marked by emotional detachment.

4.2 Semantic Description of Javanese Cold Adjectives

Through the use of three adjectives—*adhem*, *anyep*, and *atis*—Javanese indicates a more nuanced lexical segmentation of the chilly domain. The sensory experience and cultural interpretation of each phrase each contribute to the formation of a unique semantic niche for that term.

4.2.1 *Adhem*: Broad and Neutral Cold

Data 20

Yen wayah sore kutha magelang hawane **adhem**

In the afternoon, Magelang is cold.

Data 21

Yen wis **adhem** banyune, diwadhahi ing botol sing wis dikumbah resik (steril)

*If it is **cold** water, put it in a bottle that has been washed (sterile)*

Data 22

Jangane lodeh wis **adhem**

*The lodeh soup is already **cold**.*

The adjective *adhem* expresses cold as a general and often neutral or pleasant condition. As shown in Data 20–22, it applies to atmospheric conditions as well as food and drink. Unlike *samui*, *adhem* does not inherently imply discomfort or intolerance. This term frequently conveys comfort or normalcy, particularly in relation to mild weather or cooled food. Its semantic scope is broad but evaluatively neutral.

4.2.2 *Anyep*: Object, Bodily, and Taste Domain

Data 23

Sing disiriki ngombe lan mangan panganan panas utawa **anyep** (es)
*Avoid drinking and eating hot food or **cold** (ice)*

Data 24

Pomo ngombe banyu **anyep**
Pomo drinks cold water

Data 25

Wong kang semaput iku umume awake **anyep**
*The person who fainted generally felt his body **cold**.*

Anyep mainly denotes coldness that is directly perceivable by tactile sensation, akin to *tsumetai*. Data 23–25 indicate that it pertains to water, ice, and body chill, particularly under compromised physical conditions.

Data 26

Opo olehmu masak ora tok wenahi bumbu, rasane kok **anyep** kaya ngene.
*Do you not spice up your cuisine? How does it taste **bland** like this?*

Data 27

Sayure **anyep** kurang uyah.
*The soup is **cold**. Less salt*

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that *anyep* is the only word that can be used to describe blandness or a lack of flavor in the gustatory domain Data 26–27. In this extension, the absence of taste is conceptualized as a sort of sensory coldness, which is a semantic mapping that is not found in Japanese cold adjectives.

4.2.3 *Atis*: Meteorological and Uncomfortable Cold

Data 28

Aku bisa mati **katisen** yen ora nemu papan kanggo ngeyub sasuwene mangsa rendheng
*I Could Die **Cold** If you do not find a board to take shelter for a long time during the rainy season.*

Data 29

Hawane **atis** marga udane ora terang-terang
*The air is **cold** because the rain did not stop.*

Data 30

Ing daerah kaliurang hawane **atis**.

In the Kaliurang area, it is cold.

The adjective *atis* conveys a sense of cold that is typically linked with highland regions, wind, and rain, and it is frequently associated with a negative sensory value. *Atis* is commonly associated with endurance and physical threat, particularly intense or excruciating cold, according to the data 28–30.

In contrast to *adhem*, *atis* places a very high emphasis on discomfort and the severity of the environment.

4.3 Contrastive Analysis and Lexical Non-Equivalence

According to the findings of the contrastive analysis, the semantic domain of cold is partitioned differently between the Japanese and Javanese languages. In order to span a semantic range that is comparable to that of Javanese, we need three primary adjectives (*adhem*, *anyep*, and *atis*), although Japanese only uses two primary adjectives (*samui* and *tsumetai*).

Tabel 1

Comparative Semantic Mapping of Japanese and Javanese Cold Adjectives

Semantic Domain	Samui	Tsumetai	Adhem	Anyep	Atis
Atmospheric cold	✓	✓	✓	X	✓
Object/tactile cold	X	✓	✓	✓	X
Bodily sensation	✓	✓	X	✓	X
Uncomfortable/extreme cold	✓	X	X	X	✓
Taste (blandness)	X	X	X	✓	X
Personality/attitude	X	✓	X	X	X

This mapping finds several significant facts, namely the partial equivalence between *tsumetai* and *anyep* in the object/tactile domain. Inequality arises in metaphorical extensions: Japanese conveys emotional coldness (*tsumetai*), but Javanese expresses a sense of weariness (*anyep*). The Japanese language condenses the experience variations expressed in Javanese into a limited number of lexemes, suggesting a more nuanced lexical differentiation in Javanese shaped by environmental and cultural influences.

A modest interpretation of linguistic relativity is supported by these data, which imply that language-specific lexical partitioning influences the way in which speakers understand sensory experience. From a pedagogical point of view, areas of non-equivalence are possible sources of negative transfer in the process of acquiring a second language. This is especially true for Javanese students of Japanese who are choosing between *samui* and *tsumetai*.

5. Conclusion

According to the findings of this study, the semantic field of cold in Japanese and Javanese is distinguished by lexical non-equivalence and systematic partial equivalence. In Japanese, the domain is primarily divided into two categories: atmospheric/bodily cold (*samui*) and object/tactile cold with metaphorical extension (*tsumetai*). On the other hand,

Javanese distributes the same semantic space across three lexemes: *adhem*, *anyep*, and *atis*. This includes distinctions for rain-induced or unbearable cold (*atis*) and gustatory blandness (*anyep*). On the other hand, the concept of cold is only extended into the realm of personality (*tsumetai*) in those who speak Japanese. Based on these findings, it is clear that the two languages divide a fundamental sensory experience by means of distinct semantic boundaries, rather than by means of a one-to-one correspondence.

This study theoretically contributes to Typological Linguistics by demonstrating how non-cognate languages encode temperature via unique lexical categorization, hence supporting a moderate interpretation of linguistic relativity. The highlighted areas of partial equivalence may serve as possible sources of cross-linguistic interference for Javanese learners of Japanese, especially in the distinction between *samui* and *tsumetai* and in the interpretation of metaphorical usage. These findings underscore the necessity for educational resources that properly delineate the boundaries of temperature descriptors.

The scope of this study is restricted to descriptive semantic analysis based on cases that have been documented. In the future, research should include corpus-based analysis and learner performance studies in order to statistically validate usage patterns and investigate genuine negative transfer in scenarios including the learning of a second language.

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READERLY INNOCENCE, MORAL SHOCK, AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY: A READER-RESPONSE ANALYSIS OF PENELOPE ROWE'S *THE INNOCENTS*

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Abstract

This study is among the first to examine moral shock and narrative indeterminacy in Penelope Rowe's *The Innocents* through reader-response criticism. While scholarship on ethically disturbing fiction often emphasizes thematic or ideological critique, less attention has been paid to how readerly affect evolves during the act of reading. Addressing this gap, the article employs a qualitative reader-response-oriented close textual analysis to investigate how sympathy, moral destabilization, and narrative indeterminacy structure interpretation. Rather than presenting empirical reader data, the analysis focuses on implied reader positions embedded in the text. The findings identify three interrelated mechanisms. First, innocence is constructed affectively through narrative alignment with the child protagonist. Second, moral shock destabilizes trust in institutional authority by exposing interpretive rigidity. Third, the open ending withholds psychological closure and transfers ethical responsibility to the reader. These responses are not incidental reactions but structured aesthetic strategies that generate the story's ethical force. By demonstrating how affect, indeterminacy, and reader positioning operate together, this article advances reader-response criticism and literary ethics, showing how discomfort and uncertainty function as mechanisms of ethical meaning-making in morally unsettling short fiction.

Keywords: *ethical reading; innocence; institutional authority; moral shock; narrative indeterminacy; reader-response criticism*

1. Introduction

Literary texts that unsettle readers ethically and emotionally often resist stable interpretation, requiring approaches that account for the reader's active role in meaning construction. Short fiction that depicts childhood, institutional authority, and moral judgment is particularly prone to such instability, as it invites readers to negotiate discomfort, sympathy, and moral uncertainty during reading. Penelope Rowe's short story *The Innocents* presents one such case. First published in an anthology of Australian short fiction, the story portrays a child placed under religious authority and subjected to rigid moral interpretation, resulting in a deeply disturbing reading experience (Rowe, 2000). Rather than offering narrative resolution or explicit authorial judgment, the text foregrounds ambiguity, silence, and an abrupt ending that compels reflection beyond the final page.

To date, *The Innocents* has received limited sustained scholarly attention. Existing discussions tend to emphasize institutional authority and childhood vulnerability or approach the story through ideological critique. However, little research has examined how the narrative structures readerly affect as a mechanism of meaning production. In particular, the evolving interplay of sympathy, moral shock, and ethical uncertainty during the reading process remains underexplored. This study addresses that gap by foregrounding reader response as the primary site of interpretation and by analyzing how the story positions readers through affective alignment, moral destabilization, and narrative indeterminacy.

Traditional text-centered approaches that prioritize thematic closure or authorial intention are limited in addressing texts like *The Innocents*, where meaning emerges not only from represented events but from readers' responses to what is withheld—psychological aftermath, moral clarification, and narrative justice. Interpretation therefore becomes inseparable from readerly experience, making reader-response criticism a particularly appropriate framework.

Reader-response theory conceptualizes literary meaning as an event produced through interaction between text and reader. Rosenblatt (1995) describes this process as transactional, while Fish (1980) emphasizes interpretive activity shaped by communal frameworks. Together, these perspectives shift critical attention from thematic extraction to the experiential and ethical dynamics of reading.

This study investigates how *The Innocents* (1) constructs readerly sympathy through affective alignment with the child protagonist, (2) generates moral shock that destabilizes trust in institutional authority, and (3) employs narrative indeterminacy to transfer ethical responsibility to the reader. Rather than treating interpretation as the extraction of thematic conclusions, the analysis examines how meaning emerges through evolving reader responses across the narrative.

By foregrounding reader positioning as a structured outcome of narrative design, this study contributes to reader-response criticism and literary ethics, demonstrating that discomfort and uncertainty function as mechanisms of ethical engagement rather than incidental reactions. In doing so, it affirms that literary meaning is not a static property of the text but an event enacted through reader participation, interpretive revision, and ethical reflection.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Reader-Response Criticism and the Centrality of the Reader

Reader-response criticism emerged as a reaction against text-centered approaches that locate literary meaning exclusively within the formal properties of the text. Rather than conceiving meaning as a fixed entity awaiting discovery, reader-response theorists emphasize reading as an active interpretive process in which meaning is produced through the interaction between text and reader (Suleiman & Crosman, 1980).

Stanley Fish argues that meaning is not embedded in textual structures but generated through interpretive acts shaped by shared reading strategies within interpretive communities (Fish, 1980). From this perspective, reading is an event, and interpretation unfolds temporally as readers revise judgments in response to shifting expectations. Fish's theory of affective stylistics highlights how emotional and ethical responses—such as shock, sympathy, or discomfort—are integral to meaning-making rather than subjective byproducts.

Similarly, Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory conceptualizes literary meaning as emerging from a reciprocal relationship between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1995). Her distinction between efferent and aesthetic reading clarifies how literary works invite readers to attend not merely to information but to lived-through experience, including emotional disturbance and ethical reflection.

While Fish foregrounds the communal dimensions of interpretation and Rosenblatt emphasizes the transactional encounter between reader and text, both reject the notion of textual autonomy and instead situate meaning within structured reader participation. Together, their perspectives establish a foundation for analyzing how narratives guide emotional alignment and ethical judgment as part of the reading process itself.

Within this reader-centered framework, affective engagement has been further theorized through the concept of narrative empathy, understood as the reader's emotional and ethical alignment with characters (Keen, 2006). Recent work by Fernandez-Quintanilla (2025) and Fernandez-Quintanilla and Stradling (2023) demonstrates that such empathy can be traced to identifiable linguistic and stylistic features, including focalization and narrative restraint. These studies reinforce reader-response claims by showing that affective engagement is not impressionistic but structured through textual design.

2.2 Reception Aesthetics and the Dynamics of Expectation

While Fish and Rosenblatt focus on interpretive activity during reading, Hans Robert Jauss situates reader response within broader historical and cultural frameworks. His concept of the "horizon of expectations" describes the set of norms and assumptions readers bring to a text (Jauss, 1982). When a narrative disrupts these expectations, it produces what Jauss terms "aesthetic distance," prompting readers to reassess prior assumptions.

This process is especially significant in narratives that depict sensitive issues such as innocence, authority, and moral judgment. Readers may initially respond with certainty, only to revise their interpretations as narrative implications unfold. Jauss's model thus explains how interpretive stability can give way to ethical reconsideration.

Whereas Fish emphasizes interpretive communities and Rosenblatt highlights transactional engagement, Jauss extends reader-response theory by accounting for the historical variability of reception and the destabilization of moral expectations. Together with Iser's theory of textual gaps and "blanks" (Iser, 1974, 1978), these perspectives clarify how indeterminacy functions not as ambiguity for its own sake but as a mechanism that compels reader participation.

Fernandez-Quintanilla's (2025) model complements reception aesthetics by tracing how shifts in reader response can be identified through linguistic and narrative evidence. This convergence between theoretical and empirical approaches strengthens the claim that readerly affect and moral shock can be analyzed as structured outcomes of narrative design rather than as subjective reactions.

2.3 Theoretical Convergence and Analytical Implications

Although these theorists differ in emphasis—Fish privileging interpretive communities, Rosenblatt foregrounding transactional experience, Iser focusing on textual gaps, and Jauss highlighting historical horizons—they converge in rejecting fixed textual meaning and affirming the centrality of structured reader participation. Taken together, their

frameworks provide a comprehensive model for examining how sympathy, moral shock, and narrative indeterminacy operate as mechanisms of reader positioning.

2.4 Positioning the Present Study

Although reader-response criticism has been extensively theorized, its application to short fiction that foregrounds childhood, institutional authority, and moral ambiguity remains limited. Existing studies often prioritize thematic or ideological analysis while paying insufficient attention to how readers' responses evolve across readings. Consequently, the affective dimension of interpretation—particularly sympathy, moral shock, and unresolved ethical concern—has not been adequately explored.

Drawing on Rosenblatt (1995), Fish (1980), Iser (1974, 1978), Jauss (1982), and contemporary research on narrative empathy, the present study positions reader response as the primary site of meaning-making. By integrating transactional theory, affective stylistics, reception aesthetics, and gap theory, this study analyzes how readerly sympathy, moral shock, and indeterminacy function together as structured mechanisms of ethical engagement.

In doing so, the study contributes to reader-response criticism by showing how indeterminacy, reception, and audience positioning transform readers from passive observers into ethically implicated participants in the act of reading.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative close textual analysis informed by reader-response criticism to examine how meaning emerges through readers' emotional and ethical engagement with *The Innocents*. Rather than seeking a fixed thematic conclusion, the analysis focused on how the narrative structures readerly responses, including sympathy, moral shock, and sustained ethical uncertainty.

Reader-response criticism conceptualizes reading as an interpretive event in which meaning is produced through interaction between text and reader rather than extracted from textual content alone (Fish, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1995). This study does not examine empirical reader responses but analyzes implied reader positions structured by the text, drawing on Iser's concept of the implied reader and Fish's theory of interpretive activity. Reader response is therefore treated as a theoretically grounded construct inferred from textual strategies rather than from collected reader data. This orientation enables examination of how narrative techniques invite and regulate affective and ethical engagement as structured mechanisms of meaning-making.

3.2 Data Source

The primary data consisted of Penelope Rowe's short story *The Innocents*, first published in *The Penguin Century of Australian Stories* (Rowe, 2000). The story was selected because of its ethically disturbing subject matter, restrained narrative voice, and deliberate lack of closure—features that invite strong reader involvement and interpretive instability.

The unit of analysis comprised selected narrative moments, descriptive details, silences, and structural features that position readers affectively and ethically. Particular attention was given to depictions of institutional authority, representations of childhood innocence, and the story's abrupt ending, as these function as key sites of reader positioning.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis draws on key concepts from reader-response and reception theory. Rosenblatt's (1995) transactional theory provides the foundation for understanding meaning as emerging through interaction between textual cues and reader engagement. Fish's (1980) notion of interpretive activity informs the examination of how readers' judgments evolve as expectations are confirmed or disrupted.

Iser's (1974, 1978) theory of aesthetic response guides the analysis of textual gaps and indeterminacy, particularly his concept of "blanks" that activate reader participation. Jauss' (1982) concept of the horizon of expectations contextualizes how readers' initial assumptions may be destabilized through aesthetic distance. Together, these frameworks enable reader positioning to be analyzed as a structured outcome of narrative design rather than as a purely subjective reaction.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis followed an iterative interpretive process. First, the text was segmented into narrative units likely to structure reader response, including scenes of institutional judgment, representations of bodily innocence, and moments of narrative withholding. These units were categorized according to the type of response they invite, such as sympathy, moral shock, or ethical uncertainty.

Second, the analysis examined how reader expectations are constructed and disrupted across the narrative, identifying points at which interpretive stability collapses and requires reassessment. Third, the absence of narrative closure was analyzed as a deliberate reader-positioning strategy that transfers ethical responsibility beyond the text. Finally, these analytical stages were synthesized into thematic findings demonstrating how meaning emerges through evolving reader engagement rather than through explicit narrative resolution.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Rigor

Analytical rigor was maintained through systematic alignment between textual evidence and established reader-response concepts. Interpretive claims were grounded in identifiable narrative features and consistently cross-checked against the theoretical frameworks guiding the study. Reliability was strengthened through repeated close readings and the consistent application of stable analytical categories—sympathy, moral shock, and indeterminacy—across all stages of interpretation.

By clearly defining reader response as a theoretical construct and maintaining coherence between textual evidence and conceptual analysis, the study ensures methodological transparency and consistency.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Readerly Sympathy and the Construction of Innocence

One of the most immediate reader responses elicited by *The Innocents* is sympathy toward Isobel. From the opening pages, the narrative constructs her world as orderly, gentle, and emotionally secure, encouraging readers to perceive her as innocent. The narration emphasizes her smallness, routine, and attachment to simple comforts, particularly her stuffed bunny. Isobel's room is described as containing "a small desk and chair," "a bed with a pink bedspread," and "a little furry bunny that her mother had given her on her third birthday" (p. 669). These details function not merely as background description but as

affective cues that position readers within a protective interpretive stance before any moral conflict is introduced.

From a reader-response perspective, such narrative details construct an implied reader predisposed to protective sympathy. By foregrounding domestic intimacy and emotional safety, the text structures reader alignment prior to the emergence of moral tension. Sympathy here operates as a guided interpretive effect rather than a spontaneous emotional reaction, illustrating how narrative design regulates readerly affect.

Readerly sympathy is reinforced through the depiction of Isobel's daily life in the convent as calm and structured. The narrative notes that "this was Isobel's little world and she was very happy in it" (p. 671). The simplicity of this statement invites readers to accept her contentment as genuine. At this stage, the reader's horizon of expectations (Jauss, 1982) aligns with the assumption that the convent is a site of care and safety, establishing interpretive stability that will later be destabilized. Jauss's framework clarifies how this initial stability forms the baseline against which subsequent moral disruption acquires its force.

The portrayal of Isobel's bodily experience further complicates reader response. Her private self-soothing behavior is described in sensory, non-sexualized language: she "lies quite still, enjoying the snug safe feeling it gives her," before "a little wave of heat falls over her and she falls onto her back, crying out with pleasure" (p. 672). The narration refuses to frame this experience as sexual or transgressive, presenting it instead as an unnamed bodily sensation beyond Isobel's understanding.

This narrative restraint is crucial. Readers experience discomfort without being provided with an explicit interpretive label, a strategy that activates what Iser (1978) describes as textual gaps. By withholding adult terminology or moral commentary, the narrative creates a gap between the reader's interpretive awareness and the child's limited understanding, compelling readers to negotiate meaning rather than receive it. These gaps intensify the reader's participatory role in constructing innocence as experiential rather than doctrinal.

In Rosenblatt's (1995) transactional terms, innocence emerges through the reader's lived-through engagement with narrative cues rather than through institutional definition. Ethical alignment with Isobel therefore arises from structured indeterminacy rather than explicit moral instruction. The text does not assert innocence; it positions readers to experience it.

4.2 Moral Shock and the Collapse of Trust in Authority

While the early sections of the story cultivate readerly trust in the convent and its religious authority, this trust is gradually destabilized through escalating acts of interpretive rigidity. The narrative does not merely depict institutional authority; it orchestrates a progressive disruption of reader alignment, producing moral shock as a structured interpretive effect.

The turning point occurs when Reverend Mother witnesses Isobel's private behavior. Her response—"Give me that at once," snapped Reverend Mother... and she snatched Isobel's beloved Bunny from her and left the room" (p. 673)—is marked by immediate moral judgment rather than inquiry or compassion. The abrupt command and violent removal of the object associated with Isobel's comfort produce a sharp emotional jolt, collapsing the reader's previously stabilized trust in authority.

This scene marks a reversal of the affective alignment established earlier: the institution once perceived as protective becomes the agent of coercion. The confiscation of

the Bunny exposes the fragility of earlier interpretive assumptions, compelling readers to reassess institutional authority not as benevolent but as doctrinally rigid. Moral shock here functions as a narrative mechanism that forces interpretive revision rather than passive response.

Phelan's (2011) rhetorical theory of narrative ethics clarifies this shift by emphasizing that ethical judgment arises not only from represented actions but from the ways narratives guide readers' evaluative positioning. In *The Innocents*, the Reverend Mother's intervention operates as an ethically charged communicative act that invites readers to judge both the action and the moral framework authorizing it. The narrative thus structures moral shock by exposing the disjunction between institutional certainty and experiential innocence.

The appeal to *VITALOGY: An Encyclopaedia of Health* further intensifies this collapse of trust. By replacing engagement with Isobel's lived experience with doctrinal citation, the narrative foregrounds the substitution of abstract authority for ethical attentiveness. This shift from experiential observation to textual authority reinforces the rigidity of the convent's interpretive framework and heightens reader estrangement. Readers confront the realization that harm emerges not from ignorance but from certainty.

Moral shock reaches its peak when Isobel is restrained at night: Mother Infirmarian "bound tightly with long strips of cotton cloth" her hands (p. 676). Presented without sensationalism, this act compels readers to reassess earlier judgments of the nuns as merely naive. In Jaus's (1982) terms, this moment produces aesthetic distance by rupturing the horizon of expectations initially associated with moral guardianship. What once appeared protective now appears punitive, intensifying ethical estrangement.

The narrative thus reveals how harm can arise from benevolent intent when interpretation becomes rigid and self-confirming. Fish's (1980) notion of interpretive communities clarifies this process: the nuns operate within a closed interpretive system that excludes alternative understandings of childhood and bodily experience. Readers, positioned outside this interpretive community, experience moral shock through recognition of its internal coherence and ethical consequences. The story therefore structures resistance not through overt condemnation but through the reader's progressive recognition of institutional certainty as a source of harm.

4.3 Open Ending, Psychological Scar, and Reader Responsibility

While the previous subsection demonstrated how institutional authority enforces innocence through disciplinary mechanisms, the narrative's most decisive intervention occurs at its conclusion. The story does not merely depict psychological damage; it withholds resolution. By refusing narrative closure, the text shifts attention from the event of punishment to its unresolved consequences, transforming the reader from observer into interpreter of aftermath. It is in this open ending that the story's reader-response dynamics become most explicit.

The narrative concludes abruptly. After Isobel's punishment, the final sentence declares: "So, nearly five-year-old Isobel and Reverend Mother lost their innocence at the same time" (p. 677). The story ends at the moment of moral collapse without recovery, reconciliation, or projection into the future. This denial of narrative completion intensifies ethical uncertainty rather than resolving it.

Narrative indeterminacy compels readers to imagine Isobel's psychological future beyond the textual boundary. The narrator records that "dark lines appeared under her eyes, she developed an astigmatism, and she began to stutter so badly that some of the nuns

thought she might be brain-damaged" (p. 677). These understated somatic and speech-related symptoms signal trauma while avoiding explicit psychological exposition. By withholding diagnostic language, the narrative resists interpretive containment and instead invites readers to infer the depth and duration of harm.

Such minimalism aligns with contemporary scholarship on literary trauma. Khan and Wakeel (2025) observe that narratives representing psychological harm often rely on bodily or behavioral indicators—altered appearance, speech disruption, or silence—to imply enduring damage. In *The Innocents*, Isobel's physical deterioration and stutter function in precisely this way. Trauma is not explained; it is suggested, requiring readers to complete the psychological trajectory that the text leaves open.

From a reader-response perspective, the open ending constitutes a significant textual gap in Iser's (1978) formulation. By withholding causal explanation and future resolution, the narrative activates imaginative participation and ethical projection. The gap operates both structurally and morally: readers must assess the long-term consequences of institutional violence without narrative reassurance. Meaning is therefore not delivered but enacted through engagement.

Suleiman and Crosman's (1980) notion of audience implication clarifies this transfer of responsibility. The denial of closure displaces interpretive labor onto the reader, who must confront the moral implications of authority's actions. Rosenblatt's (1995) concept of the aesthetic stance further explains why emotional engagement persists beyond the final line: reading becomes reflective evaluation rather than narrative consumption.

The equivalence drawn between Isobel and the Reverend Mother intensifies this effect. The claim that both "lost their innocence" destabilizes conventional moral binaries. Innocence is no longer aligned with age or authority but becomes a fragile ethical condition that can be forfeited through both suffering and coercion. This ironic symmetry unsettles the reader's moral hierarchy and complicates simplistic judgments of victim and perpetrator.

In Jauss's (1982) terms, the ending disrupts the horizon of expectation that typically anticipates justice or restoration. Instead of closure, the narrative leaves a psychological scar. By suspending resolution, the text converts aesthetic distance into ethical responsibility: interpretation remains unfinished, and moral evaluation becomes the reader's task.

Taken together, the open ending functions as a deliberate reader-response strategy that extends the story's ethical force beyond its final sentence. Indeterminacy is not a narrative deficiency but a structural device that ensures sustained reader involvement, reinforcing the central claim that meaning in *The Innocents* emerges through the active negotiation of moral ambiguity.

4.4 Summary of Findings

Across the three thematic strands identified in this study, *The Innocents* generates meaning through structured reader engagement rather than through plot resolution alone. The progression from affective alignment to moral destabilization and finally to narrative indeterminacy reveals a deliberate escalation in reader positioning. The affective construction of sympathy establishes innocence as an experiential category; moral shock destabilizes institutional authority; and the open ending relocates ethical judgment to the reader.

Taken together, these stages demonstrate how narrative form systematically guides emotional alignment, disrupts interpretive stability, and ultimately transfers ethical

responsibility beyond the text. Meaning therefore arises through the reader's emotional, moral, and interpretive participation rather than through explicit authorial instruction.

In synthesizing transactional theory (Rosenblatt), affective stylistics (Fish), textual gap theory (Iser), and reception aesthetics (Jauss), the analysis confirms that indeterminacy and moral shock function as structured mechanisms of ethical engagement. The story thus exemplifies central premises of reader-response and audience-oriented criticism while also resonating with contemporary research on narrative empathy, which emphasizes the role of indeterminacy in sustaining ethical involvement beyond the text (Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2020).

4.5 Limitations of the Study

While this analysis focuses on a single short story and theoretical reader positioning, future research may expand this framework through comparative or empirical reader-response studies across cultural contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that *The Innocents* generates meaning primarily through readers' affective and ethical engagement rather than through explicit narrative explanation or moral instruction. Employing reader-response criticism as its analytical framework, the analysis has shown that interpretation unfolds through readerly sympathy, moral shock, and sustained indeterminacy. Taken together, these stages reveal a deliberate progression from affective alignment to ethical destabilization and ultimately to interpretive responsibility. These responses function not as incidental reactions but as structured mechanisms through which the text produces its ethical force.

The findings indicate that innocence in the story is constituted affectively rather than institutionally. Through narrative restraint and focalization, readers are positioned to experience Isobel's innocence, while institutional authority imposes a rigid interpretive framework that contradicts that experience. This disjunction between experiential recognition and doctrinal certainty generates the story's central ethical tension. Rather than portraying authority as overtly malicious, the narrative exposes how moral certainty, when insulated from alternative perspectives, can enable harm while preserving the appearance of virtue.

The analysis further demonstrates that moral shock operates as a mechanism of interpretive revision. As readerly trust in the convent collapses, the narrative foregrounds the dangers of interpretive rigidity and the ethical consequences of institutional logic. Meaning therefore emerges not solely from represented events but from readers' evolving evaluation of authority and its internal coherence.

The story's open ending consolidates this dynamic. By withholding psychological resolution, the narrative transfers responsibility from the text to the reader, compelling imaginative projection beyond the final page. Indeterminacy thus functions not as ambiguity for its own sake but as a structural strategy that sustains ethical engagement.

Theoretically, this study advances reader-response criticism by synthesizing transactional theory, affective stylistics, reception aesthetics, and textual gap theory to demonstrate how sympathy, moral shock, and indeterminacy operate together as mechanisms of ethical positioning. It further contributes to literary ethics by showing how narrative form can expose the fragility of moral authority without relying on overt ideological commentary.

This study is limited to a single short story and relies on theoretical reader positioning rather than empirical reception data. Future research may extend this framework through comparative analyses of similarly unsettling narratives or through empirical reader-response studies that examine how cultural contexts shape ethical interpretation.

Ultimately, the enduring force of *The Innocents* lies in its capacity to unsettle readers and transform interpretation into ethical reflection. Ethically disturbing fiction does not merely represent moral conflict; it repositions readers as active participants in the production of ethical meaning.

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VOWEL MINIMAL PAIRS IN XITSONGA: PHONOLOGICAL CONTRASTS AND LEXICAL CATEGORISATION WITHIN A STRUCTURALIST FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Research on Xitsonga has not sufficiently examined the role of vowel minimal pairs in distinguishing lexical and grammatical categories, particularly between nouns and verbs. This study investigates how vowel contrasts function phonemically to encode meaning and categorisation in Xitsonga. A data of 25 vowel minimal pairs was collected from dictionaries and scholarly sources, and analysed using morphophonological and thematic approaches within a Structuralist Phonological Theory framework. The findings reveal that vowel contrasts play a systematic role in lexical differentiation, occurring across initial, medial, and final positions, as well as cross-category contrasts between nouns and verbs. Initial vowel contrasts differentiate verbs, medial contrasts exist in both nouns and verbs, and final vowel contrasts occur in nouns. Cross-category contrasts further underscore the role of vowels in marking lexical category distinctions, revealing systematic positional regularities within the language's phonological system. These patterns demonstrate that vowel quality functions as a structural marker of meaning and lexical categorisation in Xitsonga. This study contributes to Xitsonga phonology by providing a systematic account of vowel minimal pairs and their grammatical significance. It also offers empirical support for structuralist principles by showing how phonemic opposition operates in Xitsonga, with implications for phonological theory, language documentation, and pedagogy.

Keywords: *lexical categories; phonological contrast; structuralist theory; vowel minimal pairs; Xitsonga phonology*

1. Introduction

Minimal pairs are central to phonological analysis because they provide direct evidence for phonemic contrast within a language. Despite their importance, vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga remain underexplored, particularly with respect to how vowel contrasts contribute to lexical meaning and grammatical categorisation. This gap limits our understanding of Xitsonga phonology and constrains broader comparative and descriptive work on Bantu languages.

Minimal pairs are commonly defined as pairs of words that differ by only one sound segment and exhibit a difference in meaning (Ahmad, Bello, & Stephen, 2023). In phonological research, they are used to identify contrastive units and to demonstrate how

sound differences function meaningfully within a linguistic system (Afifah & Lubis, 2023). While previous studies have shown that minimal pairs can involve both segmental and suprasegmental features, including tone, the present study focuses on segmental vowel contrasts, as these play a crucial role in distinguishing lexical items and grammatical categories across languages (Vainio, Järvikivi, Aalto, & Suni, 2010; Jones, Van der Merwe, Van der Linde, & le Roux, 2018).

Vowel minimal pairs are word pairs that differ in meaning due to a change in a single vowel while the surrounding segmental structure remains constant are significant in illustrating the contrastive function of vowels (Lubis, Batubara, & Fathani, 2023). Such contrasts are known to influence lexical differentiation and morphological patterning in many languages (Bassetti, Sokolović-Perović, Mairano, & Cerni, 2018). Vowel minimal pairs may occur in initial, medial, or final word positions, underscoring the pivotal role they play in creating phonological distinctions and enriching the vocabulary of a language (Sanjaya, 2020). However, research on vowel minimal pairs has been uneven across languages, with minority languages such as Xitsonga receiving less attention.

Xitsonga employs a five-vowel system: /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, and /u/ (Mabaso, 2017; Vratsanos & Kadenge, 2017). These vowels are classified according to their height (high, mid, low), backness (front, central, back), and roundedness (rounded or unrounded) (Shabangu, 2016). While earlier studies, such as Mlambo (2025a, 2005b), have examined consonantal and tonal minimal pairs in Xitsonga, systematic investigations into vowel-based minimal pairs and their role in distinguishing nouns and verbs are limited. As a result, there is insufficient understanding of how vowel contrasts contribute to lexical classification and grammatical distinctions in the language. This lack of focused analysis poses challenges for linguistic description, language pedagogy, and the preservation and documentation of Xitsonga.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga, focusing on their function in nouns and verbs. The study aims to (i) identify and categorise vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga, and (ii) analyse their role in lexical classification and semantic differentiation. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What vowel minimal pair patterns occur in Xitsonga nouns and verbs?
2. How do these vowel contrasts function to mark grammatical distinctions and semantic differentiation?

By providing a systematic analysis of vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga, this study contributes to Xitsonga phonology by demonstrating how vowel contrasts shape lexical and grammatical categorisation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Structuralist Phonological Theory as Theoretical Foundation

This study is situated within Structuralist Phonological Theory (SPT), which conceptualises language as a system of interrelated elements whose meanings arise from oppositional relationships rather than isolated sounds (Salmons & Honeybone, 2015; Juanda, 2024). Within this framework, phonemes are defined by their contrastive function, and minimal pairs constitute the primary empirical evidence for establishing phonemic distinctions (Joseph, 2022). This theory provides a robust analytical framework for examining minimal pairs, as it enables the systematic identification of contrastive vowel phonemes and their role in distinguishing lexical meaning and grammatical categories.

SPT is particularly relevant to the present study because it provides a principled method for analysing vowel minimal pairs as oppositional units that distinguish meaning and grammatical categories in Xitsonga. By focusing on distribution, contrast, and binary opposition, the theory enables the identification of vowel contrasts that signal lexical and grammatical differences between nouns and verbs. Rather than offering a purely phonetic account, SPT allows for a system-oriented description of how vowel contrasts function within the broader phonological structure of Xitsonga.

2.2 Minimal Pairs in Phonological Analysis

Across languages, minimal pairs have long been employed to establish phonemic inventories and to demonstrate how small segmental differences encode meaning. Studies in both tonal and non-tonal languages confirm that minimal pairs are central to understanding how phonological systems organise contrast. While some research extends minimal pair analysis to suprasegmental features such as tone, segmental contrasts such as consonants and vowels, remain a core focus in phonological theory due to their role in lexical and meaning differentiation.

Research in Bantu languages supports this perspective. Ndinga-Koumba-Binza and Roux (2009), working on Civili, demonstrated that vowel contrasts must be empirically validated, as perceptual salience varies across vowel qualities. Their findings highlight that phonological contrast cannot be assumed solely on theoretical grounds, a principle that directly informs the present investigation of vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga. Ndinga-Koumba-Binza and Roux (2009) underscore the importance of grounding phonological descriptions in actual contrastive usage, especially in under-resourced languages.

Comparatively, research in non-Bantu languages illustrates the broader analytical value of minimal pairs. Kovačević, Milosavljević and Simonović (2024) showed that minimal contrasts in Serbo-Croatian verbs are realised through theme vowels, reflecting an underlying morphosyntactic distinction rather than purely phonetic variation. This demonstrates that minimal pair methodology can illuminate lexical categorisation and grammatical structure, which is a key concern of the current study on Xitsonga nouns and verbs. Kovačević et al. (2024) indicated that minimal pairs function not only as phonological diagnostics, but as gateways into understanding deeper grammatical organisation. This insight motivates the application of minimal pair analysis to vowel contrasts in Xitsonga.

2.3 Minimal Pairs in Perception and Pedagogy

Minimal pairs have also been widely applied in perceptual and pedagogical contexts, particularly in second-language acquisition research. Studies such as Tuan (2010), and Dewi and Astriyanti (2021) demonstrated that minimal pair training improves learners' ability to understand and produce difficult phonemic contrasts, especially vowels absent from their first languages. These findings reinforce the idea that phonemic contrasts must be clearly identifiable and functionally robust within a language system. While these studies focused on language learning rather than description, they offer an important implication for Xitsonga as unclear or undocumented vowel contrasts can hinder effective teaching, learning, and standardisation.

Similarly, Balčytė and Skerstonaitė (2024) showed that even when learners improve segmental placement, subtle vowel distinctions may remain resistant without targeted feedback. This highlights the need for precise phonological descriptions of vowel contrasts, particularly in minority languages where pedagogical resources are limited.

Although these pedagogical studies consulted are not directly concerned with Xitsonga teaching and learning, they underscore the broader significance of systematically identifying and analysing vowel minimal pairs in this language which is a central goal to the present study.

2.4 Minimal Pairs in Xitsonga

Within African linguistics, minimal pair analysis has been instrumental in documenting phonological systems, though attention has been uneven across languages. In Xitsonga, existing research has focused primarily on consonantal and tonal minimal pairs. Mlambo (2025a) demonstrated that consonant minimal pairs in Xitsonga play a crucial role in lexical meaning, noun class assignment, and grammatical interpretation, aligning closely with structuralist principles of opposition and distribution. Similarly, Mlambo (2025b) provided compelling evidence that tone functions as a phonemic and grammatical marker in Xitsonga, distinguishing lexical meanings and grammatical categories across parts of speech, such as nouns and verbs. Collectively, these studies validated that minimal pairs are central to Xitsonga's phonological and grammatical organisation. Nevertheless, vowel minimal pairs have not received systematic attention, especially regarding their role in distinguishing nouns from verbs. This represents a significant gap in the phonological description of Xitsonga.

2.5 Research Gap

Despite extensive research on consonantal and tonal minimal pairs in Xitsonga (Mlambo, 2025a; 2005b) and studies of vowel contrasts in other Bantu languages (Ndinga-Koumba-Binza & Roux, 2009), no study has systematically examined vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga across word classes. This reveals that the role of vowel contrasts in lexical categorisation and grammatical differentiation between nouns and verbs remains unexplored. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by providing a focused structuralist analysis of vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga.

3. Research Method

A descriptive qualitative research design was adopted to examine vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga nouns and verbs. Data were collected through purposive sampling of secondary sources, including Xitsonga dictionaries, grammar books, and scholarly articles. These sources were selected because they provide systematically documented lexical items across word classes, enabling the identification of contrastive vowel patterns without the need for field elicitation. From these sources, a dataset comprising 50 lexical items, organised into 25 vowel minimal pairs, was selected for analysis. The dataset was limited to nouns and verbs that differed solely in vowel quality while retaining comparable segmental environments. The collected data were analysed using a combination of morphophonological and thematic analysis. Morphophonological analysis was applied first to examine how vowel contrasts function phonologically within identical segmental structures and how these contrasts contribute to word formation and lexical meaning. Thematic analysis was then used to identify recurring patterns across the minimal pairs, allowing the study to categorise systematic vowel distinctions within nouns and verbs. These analytical approaches were suitable for highlighting the role of vowel variation in meaning differentiation and lexical categorisation in Xitsonga, providing a structured understanding of vowel minimal pairs within the language's phonological system.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the results based on five identified themes: initial contrasts of verbs, medial contrasts of nouns, medial contrasts of verbs, final contrasts of nouns, and cross-category contrasts. These themes highlight the phonemic function of vowels in Xitsonga.

4.1 Initial Contrasts of Verbs

In this study, initial vowel contrasts in verbs are observed in minimal pairs where a change in the first vowel differentiates meaning, while all other segments and morphemes remain identical. This contrast highlights the functional role of initial vowels in signalling semantic distinctions and demonstrating how vowel quality operates as a phonemic marker within the verbal system of a languages (Sanjaya, 2020). Examples of such initial vowel minimal pairs are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Xitsonga initial contrasts of verbs

Verb 1	Verb 2	Contrast
ava	ova	/a/ vs /o/
alela	olela	/a/ vs /o/
okelana	akelana	/o/ vs /a/
ovela	uvela	/o/ vs /u/
endliwa	ondliwa	/e/ vs /o/

Initial vowel contrasts in verbs in this study reveal how minimal phonemic changes systematically shape meaning and grammatical function in Xitsonga, as shown in Table 1. For example, pairs such as *ava* (divide or separate) versus *ova* (bend), and *ovela* (bend to bring near) versus *uvela* (to be spiteful), illustrate that a single vowel substitution can differentiate both semantic content and verbal function. Reciprocal and applicative forms, as in *okelana* (to fetch fire for each other) versus *akelana* (build near one another), or *alela* (withhold or forbid) versus *olela* (pick up, collect), show how initial vowel changes mark shifts between physical, emotional, and cooperative actions. Similarly, passive forms such as *endliwa* (formation of something) and *ondliwa* (maintained or nurtured) highlight contrasts in processual meaning, resulting from initial vowel alternations. Such patterns underscore the functional significance of vowel height and backness in encoding semantic distinctions and align with SPT, where phonemes derive their value relationally within a system of oppositions (Joseph, 2015; Mlambo, 2025a). These findings not only document previously underexplored vowel contrasts in Xitsonga verbs but also provide empirical evidence supporting structuralist principles in a minority language. Moreover, they offer practical implications for language teaching and phonological awareness, reinforcing the need to consider initial vowel distinctions in literacy, pronunciation instruction, and lexical categorisation.

4.2 Medial Contrasts of Nouns

Medial vowel contrasts in nouns are identified in minimal pairs where a single vowel change in the middle of the word differentiates meaning while all other segments remain unchanged. These contrasts serve as systematic phonemic markers, signalling lexical

distinctions and contributing to the organisation of the nominal lexicon in Xitsonga. Examples of such medial vowel minimal pairs are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Xitsonga contrasts of nouns

Noun 1	Noun 2	Contrast
baji	beji	/a/ vs /e/
musi	masi	/u/ vs /a/
mhula	mhila	/u/ vs /i/
ndlela	ndlala	/e/ vs /a/
xisati	xisuti	/a/ vs /u/

Table 2 presents medial contrasts of Xitsonga nouns, demonstrating how vowel quality functions as a key phonemic marker in lexical meaning differentiation. For instance, *baji* (jacket) and *beji* (badge, insignia) differ only in the medial vowels /a/ and /e/, yet this contrast results in distinct semantic outcomes. Similar patterns occur in *musi* (smoke, pestle) versus *masi* (milk), where the shift from /u/ to /a/ highlights the functional role of vowel height and backness in distinguishing unrelated lexical categories. Likewise, in *mhula* (wax) and *mhila* (medicinal bulb) the contrast is /u/ and /i/, underscoring how medial vowel opposition signals clear semantic boundaries. The contrast in *ndlela* (path) and *ndlala* (hunger) further illustrates that even subtle differences in vowel quality are sufficient to create distinct meanings. A comparable observation emerges in *xisati* (female) versus *xisuti* (waist, loins), where variation between /a/ and /u/ reinforces the systematic nature of vowel contrasts in Xitsonga noun. Such patterns reveal that medial vowel contrasts are not merely phonetic variations but serve as structural mechanisms through which Xitsonga encodes lexical distinctions. In line with SPT, these findings support the view that phonemes gain linguistic value through opposition within the sound system, rather than in isolation (Stoltz, 2021). Importantly, this phenomenon is consistent with evidence from other Bantu languages, where vowel alternations similarly function as phonemic cues for meaning differentiation, suggesting that Xitsonga shares broader typological patterns within the language family. Beyond these examples provided, this analysis contributes to Xitsonga phonology and expands the knowledge of vowel-based minimal pairs in noun systems. It also offers empirical support for structuralist linguistic theory in a lesser-studied African language.

4.3 Medial Contrasts of Verbs

Medial vowel contrasts in verbs are realised through minimal pairs in which a single vowel alternation in the medial position differentiates verbal meanings. The findings show that such medial vowel variation functions as a systematic phonological device for distinguishing actions or processes, rather than as incidental phonetic fluctuation (Renwick, 2024). These contrasts underscore the role of vowel quality in encoding lexical distinctions within the verbal system of Xitsonga and contribute to a clearer understanding of its internal sound patterns. Examples of medial vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga verbs are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Medial contrasts of verbs in Xitsonga

Verb 1	Verb 2	Contrast
tata	tota	/a/ vs /o/
pfala	pfula	/a/ vs /u/
hlola	hlula	/o/ vs /u/
khinya	khanya	/i/ vs /a/
ambela	ambala	/e/ vs /a/

Table 3 illustrates the functional significance of medial vowel contrasts in Xitsonga verbs, showing that vowel quality operates as a structural marker for distinguishing verbal meaning. For example, *tata* (fill) and *tota* (smear, coat) differ only in the medial vowels' /a/ and /o/, yet the contrast separates two related action types: containment versus surface application. Similarly, the alternation between /a/ and /u/ in *pfala* (close) and *pfula* (open) encodes an antonymic opposition, suggesting that vowel height and backness can systematically signal contrasting semantic domains. A comparable pattern is found in *hlola* (presage) versus *hlula* (overcome), where the shift from /o/ to /u/ marks movement from abstract prediction to dominance or achievement, reinforcing the role of vowel features in differentiating lexical meanings. The contrast between *khinya* (fold cloth) and *khanya* (glint) further highlights how vowel frontness versus openness distinguishes between a manual, technical process and a perceptual or visual phenomenon. Likewise, *ambela* (narrate) and *ambala* (wear) show that the vowels /e/ and /a/ are oppositions that separate communicative acts from physical actions, underscoring the systematic mapping between vowel contrasts and semantic classes. Such patterns emphasise that medial vowel alternations in Xitsonga verbs are not incidental phonetic variations but phonemic oppositions that structure lexical meaning. In line with Saussurean structural phonology, these findings support the view that vowel phonemes gain value through contrast within the sound system. Importantly, this analysis contributes to the documentation of Xitsonga verb phonology by demonstrating how subtle vowel shifts encode major semantic differences in verbs.

4.4 Final Contrasts of Nouns

Final vowel contrasts in nouns refer to minimal pairs in which a change in the final vowel of words differentiates lexical meaning. Final-position vowel alternations function as contrastive phonological cues that distinguish one nominal item from another, rather than reflecting incidental phonetic variation (Astorkiza, 2007; Sanjaya, 2020). These contrasts demonstrate that final vowels in Xitsonga nouns carry a systematic semantic load and contribute to the organisation of the nominal lexicon. As shown in Table 4, such final vowel minimal pairs provide empirical evidence for the role of vowel quality in establishing phonemic contrasts within the language.

Table 4

Xitsonga final contrasts of nouns

Noun 1	Noun 2	Contrast
odi	oda	/i/ vs /a/
mbangi	mbangu	/i/ vs /u/
matilo	matila	/o/ vs /a/
vukule	vukulu	/e/ vs /u/
khandlelo	khandlela	/o/ vs /a/

Table 4 presents Xitsonga noun minimal pairs in which contrasts in the final vowel serve as phonemic cues for lexical differentiation. For example, *odi* (ode poem) and *oda* (order) differ only in the final vowels /i/ and /a/, yet the opposition produces distinct semantic interpretations. Similar vowel-based contrasts occur in *mbangi* (dagga) versus *mbangu* (environment), where the shift from a front vowel /i/ to a back vowel /u/ separates a concrete substance from an abstract spatial concept. The contrast between *matilo* (firmament) and *matila* (astringency) further shows how final vowel variation marks a shift between conceptual domains, from cosmological reference to sensory experience. Likewise, *vukule* (distance) and *vukulu* (size, volume) demonstrate that a minimal change from /e/ to /u/ can distinguish between spatial extension and physical magnitude. The pair *khandlelo* (anvil) and *khandlela* (candle) similarly illustrates how final vowel contrasts differentiate unrelated objects within the noun system. These minimal pairings reveal that final vowel quality in Xitsonga is not merely a phonetic detail but functions structurally to encode lexical contrasts. In line with SPT, these findings also support the view that vowel phonemes gain linguistic value through systematic opposition within the sound system.

4.5 Cross-category Contrasts

Cross-category vowel contrasts refer to minimal pairs in which a single vowel alternation differentiates a noun from a verb. These contrasts primarily occur in medial or final positions, and do not only signal semantic variation but also mark shifts in grammatical categories. Vowel quality functions as a morphophonological cue that distinguishes nominal reference from verbal predication, thereby encoding both meaning and category membership. As illustrated in Table 5, such cross-category minimal pairs demonstrate that vowel contrasts in Xitsonga operate at the interface of phonology and grammar rather than serving a purely phonetic role.

Table 5

Cross-category contrasts nouns and verbs in Xitsonga

Noun	Verb	Contrast
bolo	bola	/o/ vs /a/
tswila	tswala	/i/ vs /a/
tamba	temba	/a/ vs /e/
hundzuko	hundzuka	/o/ vs /a/
phyamusa	phyamisa	/u/ vs /i/

Table 5 shows cross-category vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga which reveal how minimal vowel alternations systematically encode shifts in both lexical meaning and grammatical category. For examples, contrasts such as *bolo* (ball) versus *bola* (decay) show

that a change in the final vowel from /o/ to /a/ differentiate a noun from a process-denoting verb. Similarly, medial vowel alternations in pairs like *tswila* (wild medlar tree) versus *tswala* (to bear/give birth), and *tamba* (rock) versus *temba* (to confirm), mark transitions from static, inanimate referents to dynamic or abstract verbal actions. In these cases, vowel height and backness function as structural cues distinguishing semantic domains and lexical categories.

Final vowel contrasts further highlight the cross-category pattern of vowel minimal pairs. In *hundzuko* (metamorphosis) versus *hundzuka* (to change), the alternation between /o/ and /a/ differentiates a nominalised event from an ongoing verbal process. Likewise, medial vowel differences in *phyamusa* (newborn child) and *phyamisa* (spoilage of food) signal distinct grammatical and semantic roles, reinforcing the observation that vowel quality plays a decisive role in cross-category differentiation. These findings provide empirical support for SPT, which holds that phonemic value arises from oppositional relationships within the linguistic system (Danesi, 2009; Joseph, 2015, 2022). By documenting how vowel contrasts mediate noun–verb alternations, this study contributes to Xitsonga phonology by illuminating an under-researched mechanism of grammatical distinction in this language. Beyond theoretical relevance, the results have practical implications for pedagogy and language learning, highlighting the importance of vowel awareness for accurate lexical interpretation and grammatical competence.

Across initial, medial, and final positions, vowel contrasts consistently mark lexical and grammatical distinctions. This demonstrates the central role of vowel phonemes in Xitsonga's phonological system and supports the structuralist view of meaning through opposition. Beyond describing individual minimal pairs, this study shows that vowel contrastivity in Xitsonga plays a structural role in grammatical categorisation, aligning with observations from other Southern Bantu languages such as Setswana (Jones et al., 2018) and with broader patterns reported for contrast-based systems in tonal and non-tonal Bantu languages. This observation also reinforces the structuralist account in which meaning emerges from patterned relational contrasts within the entire system of the language.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the phonemic role of vowel contrasts in Xitsonga by identifying and analysing minimal pairs in nouns and verbs across initial, medial, and final positions, as well as cross-category contrasts between nouns and verbs. The findings demonstrate that a single vowel change can systematically alter lexical meaning and grammatical function, confirming that vowels in Xitsonga operate as contrastive, and structural markers within the language. Initial vowel contrasts were most prominent in verbs, medial contrasts occurred in both nouns and verbs, and final contrasts were observed in nouns, while cross-category contrasts highlighted the role of vowels in distinguishing lexical categories.

Theoretically, these results provide empirical support for SPT, reinforcing Saussure's principle that phonemes derive their value from oppositional relationships rather than inherent meaning. Vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga exemplify how relational contrasts shape lexical and grammatical distinctions, demonstrating the functional and systematic nature of the language's phonological system. Practically, this study contributes to the documentation and preservation of Xitsonga phonology, offering insights relevant to language pedagogy and linguistic resource development. By mapping vowel contrasts in nouns and verbs, the study

provided a foundation for learners, educators, and researchers to understand subtle phonemic distinctions that are critical for accurate comprehension and communication.

A key limitation of this study is its reliance on secondary data sources, such as dictionaries and published materials, without direct elicitation or perceptual testing. Future research should incorporate spoken corpora, acoustic analyses, and perceptual experiments to verify the functional load of vowel contrasts in natural speech and explore their role in language acquisition. Comparative studies with other Bantu languages could further situate Xitsonga within the broader typology of vowel systems. In summary, this research fills a critical gap in African phonological studies by systematically documenting vowel minimal pairs in Xitsonga, advancing theoretical understanding of phonemic opposition.

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A LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS IN EAST BANDUNG

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Abstract

This study investigates verbal and visual semiotics in the linguistic landscape of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in East Bandung, Indonesia, examining how public signs are used to construct and project institutional identity. Using qualitative semiotic analysis of photographs and textual data, this study examines how verbal and visual signs construct meaning in the school environment. The research draws on data collected through participatory observation, photographic documentation, and interviews in four case-study institutions: Al-Mu'awanah, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, Al-Mahad Al-Lughawi, and Al-Ihsan. The signs, including signboards, banners, and logos, were analyzed using Landry and Bourhis's linguistic landscape framework and Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic model. The analysis reveals three dominant semiotic functions: reinforcement of religious identity, regulation of institutional authority, and integration of visual and verbal codes in daily school life. Each *pesantren* strategically cultivates a distinct identity through its linguistic landscape, ranging from a balance between tradition and modernity to "progressive traditionalism" that blends classical religious aesthetics with modern corporate branding. This study is among the first to examine the linguistic landscape of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, showing how semiotic practices in these religious educational spaces reflect broader cultural and institutional dynamics. The findings contribute to semiotic and linguistic landscape scholarship by demonstrating how verbal and visual signs in religious institutions construct identity and authority. This study underscores the importance of analyzing linguistic landscapes in religious educational settings to understand how semiotics mediates identity, authority, and cultural continuity.

Keywords: *East Bandung; Islamic boarding school; linguistic landscape; semiotics; visual semiotics*

1. Introduction

Linguistic landscape (LL) is an interdisciplinary field that examines language use in public spaces through written, visual, and multimodal signs (Muthia'ah et al., 2018). In this perspective, the term sign refers to "a fundamental element in semiotics, representing

something else within a semiotic field” (Sari et al., 2024). LL analysis thus serves as a powerful lens to understand how our social worlds, whether material or online, are constructed in and through language (Costley et al., 2023). Although LL has been studied in various Indonesian contexts, including Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), research specifically focusing on *pesantren* in the East Bandung region remains scarce. This gap is important because *pesantren* are Islamic educational institutions with unique linguistic characteristics that reflect the identity and values they uphold through public signage and visual communication.

In Indonesia, LL studies have increasingly highlighted how language in public spaces constructs social meanings, including in religious and educational settings such as *pesantren*. As Sujito (2016) notes, textual “signs” in dramatic scripts can also construct landscapes and guide meaning, showing that semiotic practices extend beyond purely physical environments. However, this study focuses specifically on *pesantren* environments in East Bandung, where the linguistic landscape includes institutional names, verbal signage within the *pesantren* environment, language used in physical spaces, and language found in visual and graphic communication.

In the context of linguistic landscape studies in *pesantren* located in the East Bandung region, this research aims to identify and analyze the use of language in the public spaces of *pesantren*, as well as to understand the symbolic meanings embedded within it. This study focuses on several key aspects:

1. Identify the names of the *pesantren* and analyze their symbolic meanings.
2. Observe verbal signs within the *pesantren* environment, including placards, banners, directional boards, and other types of information.
3. Analyze the use of language in the physical spaces of the *pesantren*, particularly in the choice of vocabulary used for naming facilities.
4. Evaluate the language used in visual and graphic communication, such as graphic design and textual content found in promotional materials (Hidayah & Fitri, 2023).

This research holds both theoretical and practical significance in the study of linguistic landscapes, particularly within the context of *pesantren* in the East Bandung region. Theoretically, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language is used in the public spaces of *pesantren* as a marker of cultural identity and the values being promoted. This aligns with the findings of Yusuf (2022), who indicates that *pesantren* use language as a tool for conveying information and constructing identity. Practically, the findings of this study can be utilized by *pesantren* administrators to understand how language use within their environment influences identity and communication (Yusuf, 2022). For example, by identifying the types and functions of existing verbal signs, administrators can design more effective communication strategies for both students and visitors. In addition, this research may serve as a reference for further linguistic landscape studies in the context of *pesantren* education in Indonesia, particularly in understanding the dynamics of language use within *pesantren* settings.

In *pesantren* environments, the language used in various visual media such as name boards, banners, and directional signs is not neutral. Research by Yusuf (2022) reveals that the use of language in these elements is consciously constructed to shape and affirm the religious identity of the *pesantren*, while simultaneously conveying ideological values to both students and the broader community. In this context, language functions not only as a tool

of communication but also as a symbolic instrument that reinforces the institution's image. Meanwhile, Al-Naimat & Alomoush (2018) highlight the importance of visual aspects such as design, color, and the arrangement of elements in linguistic signs, emphasizing that the physical and material form of a sign plays a significant role in shaping how ideological messages are conveyed and perceived. Therefore, this study views language in the *pesantren* space not merely as a sequence of text, but as part of a social and visual practice that carries deep and complex layers of meaning.

Building on Yusuf's (2022) claim that *pesantren* language reinforces identity and Al-Naimat & Alomoush (2018) emphasis on visual design in linguistic signs, this study examines how verbal and visual semiotics interact in East Bandung *pesantren*. Accordingly, it asks: How do verbal and visual semiotics in the linguistic landscape of East Bandung *pesantren* construct identity, authority, and cultural meaning?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Review of Theories

This analysis draws on two main theoretical foundations: the linguistic landscape theory of Landry & Bourhis (1997) and the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce (Liszka, 1996). In this approach, each linguistic sign in public spaces is understood as serving two principal functions: "Two basic functions of the linguistic landscape are an informational function and a symbolic function" (Rohmah & Wijayanti, 2023). The informational function relates to how signs offer practical guidance for readers, for instance through directions, regulations, or institutional names. The symbolic function, by contrast, concerns how signs express cultural identity, language hierarchies, and the ideological values of the community that produces them. These perspectives help explain how *pesantren* signage at once provides information and communicates institutional identity.

Landry and Bourhis focus on what signs do in social space, whereas Peirce's semiotic theory is more concerned with how signs come to mean. Peirce describes semiosis, or the process of meaning-making, as a dynamic relation between three elements: firstness (initial impression, feeling, or possibility), secondness (factual existence or concrete experience), and thirdness (the representation that links impression and fact into a relatively stable interpretation) (Camargo & Gudwin, 2022). Put simply, Peirce's semiotic triad outlines how a sign moves from being a visual or verbal stimulus to becoming a shared representation. In a *pesantren* setting, this perspective helps make sense of how colors, calligraphic styles, logos, and multilingual inscriptions develop from first impressions into institutional symbols that embody particular religious and ideological orientations.

Based on this conceptual framework, this study is guided by four key assumptions:

1. *Pesantren* names reflect institutional ideology.
2. Verbal signs convey information and affirm identity.
3. Facility naming encodes cultural and ideological meanings.
4. Visual and promotional language constructs institutional image.

Taken more broadly, the language policies and everyday language practices in *pesantren* can be read as part of wider sociopolitical and linguistic dynamics in the surrounding society (Suuriniemi & Satokangas, 2023). This view places *pesantren* within Indonesia's broader context, where religious identity intersects with national language policy

and with global debates on modernity and Islamic education (Suuriniemi & Satokangas, 2023). Looking at the linguistic landscape of *pesantren* therefore offers useful insight into how language functions both as a symbolic resource and as a communicative tool in shaping institutional identity. This study aims to deepen understanding of language use in religious educational settings by examining the interplay between verbal and visual signs in the public spaces of selected *pesantren* in East Bandung.

2.2 Review of Previous Studies

Building on these theoretical foundations, previous studies have shown how *pesantren* and other Islamic educational institutions construct their linguistic landscapes in practice. A number of studies report that *pesantren* commonly use Arabic, Indonesian, and English in the signs displayed throughout their environments. For example, Yusuf et al. (2022), in their research at *Pesantren Nurul Falah* and *Bahrul Ulum*, identify monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual signs that perform both informational and symbolic functions. In a similar study, (Firdausiyah, 2019), working at *Pesantren Putri Mambaus Sholihin* in Gresik, finds that the use of English, Arabic, and Indonesian in signage serves informative and symbolic purposes and supports the institution's role as a "Language Boarding School". While Yusuf et al. (2022) highlight the overall presence of multilingual signage in *pesantren*, (Firdausiyah, 2019) draws particular attention to English as a marker of modernity and global orientation. Together, these findings point to how *pesantren* linguistic landscapes negotiate between traditional religious identity and pressures of globalization.

A broader study of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia also suggests that the linguistic landscape can become a site of language policy and symbolic contestation. A case study at the Darussalam Gontor education complex, for instance, shows that English and Arabic dominate the school's linguistic landscape (school-scape), while the national language (Bahasa Indonesia) and the regional language (Javanese) appear in subordinate positions (Rohmah et al., 2024). This policy tends to place Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese below Arabic and English and, in doing so, reinforces the *pesantren's* international and religious image (Rohmah et al., 2024). Although Gontor clearly prioritizes Arabic and English to project a global Islamic identity, *pesantren* in East Bandung may manage their linguistic landscapes in different ways, for example by combining international languages with stronger expressions of local or national identity.

More generally, studies of religious spaces, including *pesantren*, indicate that linguistic landscapes in these settings often combine sacred and more worldly functions. The dominant use of Arabic typically indexes Islamic religious identity and sacred discourse, while English is frequently associated with modernity, globalization, and technological advancement. Research on the linguistic landscape of places of worship in Indonesia has also found that, despite the presence of various languages including local languages, English, Mandarin, and others. Bahasa Indonesia often remains an important marker of national identity in these spaces (Ardhian et al., 2021). In *pesantren*, this mix means that Arabic often signals sacred identity, English points to modern aspirations, and Indonesian ties the institution to national belonging; together, these codes position *pesantren* as both religious and globally oriented institutions.

Despite these contributions, there is still limited research that examines how verbal and visual semiotics work together in the linguistic landscapes of *pesantren* in East Bandung, and how these semiotic resources relate to institutional identity, authority, and cultural

meaning. This gap is what the present study addresses by analyzing the semiotic functions of linguistic landscapes in selected *pesantren* in East Bandung.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employs a descriptive qualitative case study approach, with participatory observation as the primary data collection technique. This approach was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of language use and symbolism in *pesantren* located in the East Bandung area. A descriptive qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore the social, cultural, and linguistic contexts within the *pesantren* environment and to examine how these elements interact in the construction of meaning (Creswell, 2007). In line with this, participatory observation was carried out over a period of approximately three months, during which the researcher attended daily activities in the *pesantren*, observed signage use in various spaces, and documented verbal and visual signs in situ. During observation, particular attention was paid to signs located at gates, dormitory corridors, and main prayer halls.

Additional data collection methods include photographic documentation and interviews with *pesantren* administrators and selected students as informants. Photographic documentation was used to systematically capture signboards, banners, logos, and other visual materials that form the linguistic landscape of each *pesantren*. Interviews were conducted with four administrators and eight students using semi-structured questions focusing on language use, symbolic meanings attributed to signs, and institutional considerations behind signage design and placement. The combination of participatory observation, photographic documentation, and interviews is consistent with the descriptive qualitative case study design and is highly relevant to the research objective, which seeks to examine the contextual and symbolic elements of the linguistic landscape.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data sources in this study are divided into two categories: primary data and secondary data. Primary data consisted of field observations of the *pesantren* environment, photographs of linguistic signs, and interviews with administrators and students (Musthafa & Hermawan, 2018). Secondary data were used to complement and support the primary data and were obtained through the review of various references, including journal articles, textbooks, previous studies, and other literature relevant to the research topic (Musthafa & Hermawan, 2018).

In this study, the primary data were obtained from four *pesantren*: Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Mu'awanah, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, Al-Ma'had Al-Lughawi, and Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Ihsan. These *pesantren* were selected because of their distinctive characteristics in language use in both physical signage and visual communication. More specifically, they were chosen to represent diverse institutional types in the East Bandung region, ranging from more traditional *pesantren* to modern and language-focused institutions, and to capture different ways in which each institution manages language as part of its identity and religious learning process.

For data analysis, all visual and textual data from observations, photographs, and interview transcripts were organized and coded. The coding process followed semiotic categories that distinguish between verbal, visual, and symbolic elements in the linguistic landscape. These coded data were then analyzed using Landry & Bourhis (1997) distinction between informational and symbolic functions of the linguistic landscape and Peirce's semiotic triad of firstness, secondness, and thirdness (Camargo & Gudwin, 2022). This analytical procedure made it possible to examine how particular signs, such as institutional names, room labels, and promotional banners operate simultaneously as informative texts and as symbols that carry ideological and cultural meanings in the *pesantren* context.

Ethical considerations were also taken into account throughout the research process. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and participants provided informed consent before taking part in interviews. Where necessary, the names of individual participants were anonymized, and sensitive information was treated with confidentiality, although institutional names are used to maintain the contextual specificity of the case studies.

Overall, this methodological design ensures that the study is able to address its objectives by analyzing how verbal and visual semiotics in the linguistic landscape of *pesantren* in East Bandung construct identity, authority, and symbolic meanings within religious educational settings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Case Study 1: Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Mu'awanah



At the level of firstness, the visual design of Al-Mu'awanah immediately presents a coherent palette and composition. In the first visual, blue, white, and gold dominate the signboard, while the institution's name, Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Mu'awanah, which is derived from Arabic, is displayed using minimalist fonts in Indonesian and Sundanese. The fonts used include LED style, Arial, and Digital 7, and the Arabic text is written in Thuluth and Kufi calligraphy. The overall layout is symmetrical and incorporates three languages that is Indonesian, Arabic, and Sundanese offering a clear impression of multilingualism and visual order. In the second visual, the dominant colors shift to black and gold; the Indonesian text appears in a minimalist style using the Traditional Arabic font, while the Arabic script is rendered in Diwani Jali calligraphy. In the third visual, the logo is primarily green, with additional blue and white elements, and features the Kaaba, four occurrences of the Arabic definite article (ال/الا), two kujang (a traditional Sundanese blade), and a star above the Kaaba. Together, these elements create an immediate sense of religious symbolism and local cultural identity.

From the perspective of secondness, these visual choices operate as concrete, material signs that carry socially recognizable meanings. Blue is often associated with calmness, peace, and trust (Su et al., 2019), making it suitable for religious or spiritual contexts where stability and serenity are emphasized. White represents purity and holiness (Bzour, 2015), while gold suggests grandeur and dignity (Okazawa et al., 2011). Black adds connotations of strength and stability, and green is widely linked to Islam, fertility, and peace (Mutmainnah, 2017). As (Su et al., 2019) note, blue is associated with tranquility, which supports the *pesantren*'s emphasis on peace and order, while (Quddus, 2020) also connects blue with stability. Similarly, white is commonly read as a sign of purity and cleanliness in Islamic culture (Muthia'ah et al., 2018). The name "Al-Mu'awanah" meaning help or assistance, reinforces the institutional message of supporting students in their religious learning. The choice of minimalist fonts for Indonesian and Sundanese, such as LED style, Arial, and Digital 7, reflects a modern and practical approach to communication; these fonts emphasize simplicity and readability (Russell-Minda et al., 2007). In contrast, Thuluth and Kufi calligraphy for the Arabic text introduce a strong traditional and religious nuance in line with classical Islamic calligraphic practice (Al-Mughrabi, 2023).

Language choice and script further structure the *pesantren*'s linguistic landscape. The simultaneous use of Indonesian, Arabic, and Sundanese shows an effort to engage multiple segments of the community with Indonesian functions as the national and explanatory language, Arabic as the language of religious authority, and Sundanese as a marker of local identity. In another display, the Indonesian text uses the Traditional Arabic font, producing a minimalist yet formal visual impression (Ramadan, 2011), and the Arabic script is rendered in Diwani Jali calligraphy, which is known for its artistic and decorative qualities (Pujiati, 2016). Room names such as Sunan Bonang and Sunan Ampel evoke important historical figures in the spread of Islam in Java, linking the *pesantren* to a broader Islamic heritage. The use of Indonesian for room names enhances accessibility and clarity, while Arabic naming adds a sacred tone that connects the space to Islamic traditions and values (Suriani et al., 2022). The kujang symbol signifies Sundanese cultural heritage (Kurniawan, 2014), and the star above the Kaaba can be read as representing aspiration and noble goals upheld by the institution.

At the level of thirdness, these colors, scripts, and symbols come together to form a coherent institutional narrative. The palette of blue, white, gold, black, and green is not merely decorative, but conveys values of peace, spirituality, purity, and stability within a religious environment. In the *pesantren* context, these colors bridge visual perception and ideological understanding, pointing to religious teachings, inner purity, and a harmonious way of life. The name Al-Mu'awanah, chosen to signify "assistance", aligns with the institution's vision to support students who are still struggling to understand religious teachings, particularly matters of faith and the concept of divine oneness. The combination of gold and black creates a strong visual emphasis: gold evokes luxury and grandeur, while black symbolizes strength and stability, together suggesting a firm institutional foundation both visually and symbolically. The symmetrical arrangement of visual elements signals a pursuit of harmony and balance between worldly and spiritual concerns and reflects the ideal of doing good toward fellow human beings and toward God.

The multilingual signage embodies the *pesantren's* foundation in Islamic scholarship. Arabic is used for religious content, Indonesian serves as the explanatory medium, and Sundanese underscores the *pesantren's* local identity in the Sundanese-speaking region of Bandung. The variety of fonts illustrates an ideological stance that embraces technological advancement while maintaining respect for religious tradition and identity. The Traditional Arabic font links aesthetic beauty with cultural values, creating a visual balance between simplicity and elegance. It functions not only as a typographic choice but also as a medium for conveying politeness, order, and reverence for tradition, without neglecting a modern and graceful appearance. Diwani Jali script adds artistic expression and creativity to the written text; beyond its communicative role, this calligraphy serves as a symbol of art that enhances meaning, offers strong visual appeal, and reflects the high aesthetic value of Arabic writing traditions.

Naming practices and logo design complete this semiotic configuration. The use of historic names within the *pesantren* does not merely indicate physical locations but also honors the significant roles of these figures in the spread of Islam in Java, reinforcing the connection between space and the *pesantren's* cultural and religious heritage. The use of Indonesian for room names facilitates accessibility for a broad audience, while Arabic names introduce a religious and sacred dimension, deepening the balance between communicative clarity and reverence for spiritual heritage. The inclusion of the Kaaba in the Al-Mu'awanah logo signifies that the *pesantren* aligns itself with the Kaaba as the spiritual direction, underscoring its commitment to the central axis of Islamic worship (Mutmainnah, 2017). The presence of four lam alif inscriptions (لا) in the logo represents the *pesantren's* core motto, which guides students through four formulations, "La ilaha illallah la maujuda illallah" (there is no god but Allah, there is no existence but Allah), "La ilaha illallah la ma'buda illallah" (there is no god but Allah, there is none to be worshiped but Allah), "La ilaha illallah la mathluba illallah" (there is no god but Allah, there is no one to be sought but Allah), and "La ilaha illallah la maqsuda illallah" (there is no god but Allah, there is no ultimate aim but Allah). The kujang symbol signals that the *pesantren* is situated in a Sundanese cultural setting, specifically in Bandung, West Java, while the star expresses the institution's highest aspiration: attaining knowledge of and closeness to Allah, the Almighty.

Taken together, these elements show that Al-Mu'awanah constructs its identity as a traditional Islamic institution that at the same time incorporates elements of modernity. This is visible in the use of religious color schemes, three languages (Indonesian, Arabic, and Sundanese), and a combination of modern fonts and classical calligraphy. Its ideological orientation emphasizes the oneness of God, the inclusion of both local and global cultures, a balance between worldly and spiritual life, and religious nationalism. These values are condensed in the logo, which features the Kaaba, four instances of the lam alif, the kujang, and a star. Overall, the linguistic landscape of this *pesantren* functions both as an informational medium and as an ideological tool that affirms a vision of Islamic monotheism that is progressive while remaining rooted in tradition and local cultural values.

4.2 Case Study 2: Ma'had Al-Jami'ah

Ma'had Al-Jami'ah, which literally means "University *Pesantren*", presents a consistent visual identity that reflects its character as a modern Islamic higher education

institution with a clear academic orientation and a strong connection to the university environment. Unlike Al-Mu'awanah, which maintains a strong traditional salaf atmosphere, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah foregrounds a professional, intellectual image and an openness to the global sphere.



The banner for new student admissions is one of the main media through which the institution constructs its public image. At the level of firstness, its neat and modern layout, dominated by bright green and white, immediately conveys a fresh and formal impression, similar to a contemporary corporate or university setting. High-quality photographs of smiling students and administrators contribute to a sense of friendliness, enthusiasm, and trustworthiness, while digital elements such as a QR code and social media icons add a modern touch, facilitate access, and highlight the institution's technological competence. Rather than functioning as mere decoration, the banner operates as a semiotic tool of institutional branding: it visually articulates Ma'had Al-Jami'ah as a *pesantren* that is fully integrated into the academic culture of a university campus.

From the perspective of secondness, these signs operate as concrete material elements that organise everyday life in Ma'had Al-Jami'ah. The new-student admission banner, mounted at a main entrance, not only presents information but also physically directs visitors toward the pesantren as an academic gateway. Inside the building, numerous visual signs serve ongoing educational and character-building purposes. Small banners displaying wise sayings are designed with a clean and uniform appearance, making them easy to read and reinforcing an atmosphere of order and calm. The poster titled “Idioms or Ushlub” adopts a more dynamic design, with appealing graphics and small icons such as stars or lightbulbs that add a creative and friendly tone for learners. The bulletin or announcement board functions as a space for student self-expression, filled with colour, creative paper shapes, and handwritten notes that signal enthusiasm, creativity, energy, and shared ownership. Even simple regulatory signs, such as a sign indicating where to place footwear, are clearly and intuitively designed, using universal pictograms and contrasting colours to project a sense of order and standards aligned with international expectations. Taken together, these elements show that banners, posters, and bulletin boards are not incidental, but work collectively as semiotic resources that shape how the *pesantren* presents itself as a disciplined, active, and intellectually engaged community.

In this context, the notion of a “wall curriculum” is helpful. Here, the “wall curriculum” refers to the use of permanent visual signs such as banners with wise sayings, posters, and regulatory notices as continuous pedagogical tools that embed moral, disciplinary, and educational values into the physical environment. The walls of Ma'had Al-Jami'ah thus operate as an extended classroom: students do not only learn from formal

lectures, but also from the constant visual reminders that surround them in corridors, study areas, and communal spaces.

From the perspective of thirdness, the visual and textual elements of Ma'had Al-Jami'ah are interpreted through the lens of modern education and strategic institutional branding. The name "Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Sunan Gunung Djati" serves as a symbol that explicitly aligns the *pesantren* with a formal and prestigious state university, signalling that it is not merely a traditional *pesantren* but an integrated Islamic higher education institution. The hybrid term "mahasantri", combining mahasiswa (university student) and santri (religious student), encapsulates the dual identity being cultivated: individuals who are intellectually capable like university students while remaining devout and rooted in Islamic values like traditional santri.

The list of "Flagship Programs" such as "Intensive Courses: Arabic, English, Classical Islamic Texts" and "Public Lectures on Religious Moderation" symbolises a curriculum designed to balance Islamic intellectual tradition (through kitab kuning), global competencies (through foreign language mastery), and contemporary Islamic understanding (through the promotion of moderation). The banners that display wise sayings in Arabic, accompanied by Indonesian translations placed directly below, reflect an educational approach that aims to instil ethics and moral values in a form that is both accessible and applicable to everyday life. Likewise, the "Idioms" poster, which presents Arabic and English expressions alongside their Indonesian equivalents, functions as a sign of the institution's commitment to practical and communicative language instruction, moving beyond rote grammar memorisation toward authentic and functional language use.

One of the most prominent symbolic features is the consistent use of three languages: Arabic, English, and Indonesian. This trilingual approach signals an intentionally inclusive and internationally oriented learning environment. Indonesian affirms national identity and ensures accessibility, Arabic anchors religious authority and classical scholarship, and English indexes modernity, global connectedness, and technological advancement. The use of these three languages is therefore aimed not only at the Indonesian-speaking community, but also anticipates possible interaction with Arabic and English speakers, while training students to operate in a multilingual context. Together, these semiotic choices reinforce the institution's aspiration to be recognised as a global educational community.

In summary, Ma'had Al-Jami'ah consistently cultivates its identity as a professional academic institution with a global outlook. Its underlying ideology centres on the formation of the "Modern Muslim Intellectual" or "Global Mahasantri": individuals who are spiritually grounded in Islam yet equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to engage with the international world. This vision is articulated through its visual landscape, including professionally designed banners, the strong emphasis on foreign language proficiency, and the *pesantren*'s explicit institutional affiliation with a state university.

4.3 Case Study 3: Al-Mahad Al-Lughawi

Al-Mahad Al-Lughawi, meaning "Language *Pesantren*", presents a highly focused semiotic landscape oriented toward one central goal: the creation of an Arabic-speaking environment (bi'ah lughawiyah). Unlike the two previously discussed *pesantren*, which negotiate broader institutional identities, its linguistic landscape is dominated by signs that

directly support language pedagogy. The semiotic arrangement clearly prioritizes function over aesthetics, reflecting a pragmatic immersion-based approach to language learning.



At the level of firstness, the main banner displays a simple and utilitarian visual quality. Printed on standard white vinyl with green and black text, it appears slightly faded and creased, suggesting prolonged use and limited resources. There are no striking design elements or photographs, creating a straightforward impression that centres on delivering information rather than projecting a commercial image. Additional signs in the form of *mufradat* (vocabulary items) posted on the walls reinforce the educational atmosphere. The *mufradat* are printed on plain HVS paper without frames or decorative elements, underscoring the priority of pedagogical function. Together, these visual features establish the mood of an active and continuous learning environment. Room signage on office doors and dormitories further affirms the *pesantren*'s linguistic and cultural focus, ranging from very simple sheets of paper for *حجرة المدبرات* (room of female coordinators) to more formal printed stickers with frames for *الإدارة* (administration) and *ابن سيده* (Ibn Sīdah).

From the perspective of secondness, these signs operate as concrete physical markers that structure everyday life. The large banner mounted in an outdoor area indexes the presence of the *Asrama Akhwat* (female dormitory) and, through its worn condition, indexes time and exposure to the elements, indicating long-term use as a location marker. The vocabulary list posted directly on the canteen wall functions as an index of contextual learning practices—students encounter food-related vocabulary in an authentic dining setting. Similarly, the poster displaying the word *البوابة* (gate) affixed to a wall serves as an index of a systematic vocabulary learning programme. The physical presence of these signs throughout the *pesantren* compels students to interact constantly with Arabic. Signs such as *الإدارة* (office) and *ابن سيده* (Ibn Sīdah) stand as factual indicators that this is a *pesantren* whose daily routines and spatial organisation are deeply embedded in language-based practices.

At the level of thirdness, the texts and their spatial distribution construct a clear institutional ideology. The name *المعهد اللغوي* (Al-Mahad Al-Lughawi) functions as a central symbol that explicitly declares the institution's specialisation in language. Its affiliation with the "Ikatan Keluarga Alumni Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Arab UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung" (Association of Alumni of the Arabic Language Education Programme at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung) symbolises academic legitimacy and a strong link to a formal scholarly community and alumni network. The inclusion of logos and social media accounts points to efforts to build a sense of community and institutional identity in the digital age, reinforcing the message: "We are a *pesantren* specialising in Arabic, supported by an academic community, and committed to a clearly defined mission."

The practice of labelling everyday objects, such as **مَقْصَفٌ** (canteen), and providing related vocabulary lists symbolises the comprehensive application of an immersion-based language learning method. Such practices represent internal norms aimed at fostering an environment in which Arabic is used continuously across daily activities. The “Al-Mufradat” poster that includes the Instagram handle (@ompb_24) indicates an attempt to integrate focused language instruction with contemporary tools for community engagement and communication. The underlying ideological message is clear: “Here, Arabic is not merely an academic subject but a living language. Every corner of this space is an opportunity for learning.” The dominant use of Arabic, even in functional spaces such as **حجرة المديرات** (female coordinators’ room), underscores a strong commitment to sustaining an Arabic linguistic environment. At the same time, the inclusion of an English translation (office) on the sign **الإدارة** (administration) signals pragmatic awareness of the need to communicate with external stakeholders. Naming a room after “Ibn Sidah”, a renowned lexicographer and Arabic linguist, functions as a powerful cultural symbol that aligns students’ identities with the intellectual legacy of Arabic studies.

In sum, the semiotic landscape of Al-Mahad Al-Lughawi consistently projects a specialised institutional identity centred on Arabic language immersion. Its core ideology is pedagogical: language immersion is treated as a way of life. The entire physical environment is turned into an active and continuous space for Arabic language learning. In contrast to *pesantren* that foreground grandeur or modernity in their visual design, Al-Mahad Al-Lughawi emphasises clarity of purpose, discipline, and depth of linguistic engagement. Its legitimacy is grounded less in visual sophistication than in clear academic affiliation and a strong reverence for the intellectual tradition of the Arabic language itself.

4.4 Case Study 4: Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Ihsan I-Mahad Al-Lughawi



The name Al-Ihsan means “excellence” or “spiritual beauty” in English and refers to the highest level of faith, in which a believer worships God as though seeing Him. This concept sets the tone for the *pesantren*’s semiotic landscape, which brings together traditional religiosity and a modern institutional identity.

At the level of firstness, the directional signboard along the road conveys a functional and slightly worn impression. Its classic green and white colour scheme suggests a long-established institution that has been present in the community for some time. In contrast, the mihrab decoration in the prayer hall radiates grandeur, sacredness, and high artistry. The combination of vibrant colours such as blue, purple, and gold, together with intricate calligraphic designs and geometric ornaments, creates an atmosphere of deep spirituality and classical beauty. Meanwhile, the *pesantren*’s logo has a distinctly modern, minimalist, and professional appearance. Its geometric design, with sharp lines and abstract forms, conveys a dynamic and contemporary image. The use of a single turquoise green tone

adds a sense of cleanliness, freshness, and corporate identity. Visually, the logo stands in striking contrast to the ornate traditional aesthetics of the mihrab.

From the standpoint of secondness, these elements function as concrete objects that organise the space and experience of the *pesantren*. The roadside sign exists as a physical marker that has long occupied public space; its slightly rusted condition indexes the passage of time and signals the *pesantren's* embeddedness in the local neighbourhood. The mihrab is a permanent and central architectural feature. Its solid structure and dominant placement within the prayer area index the centrality of worship and spirituality in daily life at Al-Ihsan. The presence of a digital clock beneath the mihrab indexes the adoption of modern technology to support traditional religious practices, such as keeping precise prayer times. The logo, reproduced on official documents and institutional materials, is a graphic design artefact produced through deliberate planning. Its repeated use is an index of a conscious branding strategy aimed at presenting Al-Ihsan as a recognisable institution in contemporary educational and social landscapes.

At the level of thirdness, the meanings of these signs come together in a layered ideological synthesis. The signboard bearing the inscription “Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Ihsan” alongside the Arabic calligraphy معهد الإحسان الإسلامي symbolises a dual identity as both a traditional Indonesian Islamic educational institution and part of a broader, translocal Islamic tradition. The mihrab functions as a universal symbol of Islamic worship. The Qur’anic verse inscribed above it (Surah Al-Baqarah: 238), which commands careful observance of prayer, reinforces the *pesantren's* ideological foundation in ritual piety and disciplined devotion. These elements affirm Al-Ihsan’s rootedness in classical religious practice.

The logo, by contrast, symbolises modernity and forward-looking institutional ambition. Its form, reminiscent of abstracted Kufic-style geometric calligraphy, reflects a radical reinterpretation of traditional Islamic visual aesthetics. It is no longer designed to be read literally, but to function as a bold and contemporary emblem. The flame crowning the design acts as a universal symbol of spirit, enlightenment, and knowledge. In combination, these features articulate a symbolic statement: “We are a traditional Islamic educational institution with deep spiritual and ritual foundations, and at the same time we are professional, innovative, and oriented toward the future.”

The analysis shows that the identity and ideology constructed by Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Ihsan can be described as a form of “Progressive Traditionalism”. The underlying message is that strong traditional roots do not hinder, but instead provide the foundation for dynamic modern expression. Al-Ihsan does not blend or dilute its identity; rather, it preserves a deeply traditional and authentic spiritual core, as reflected in the mihrab and Qur’anic inscription, while simultaneously adopting a modern corporate visual language for external branding and communication, as seen in the logo. This points to a deliberate strategy: reassuring its traditional base through familiar and sacred visual elements, while appealing to newer audiences, such as urban, middle class parents and prospective students, through a professional, clean, and progressive institutional image.

4.5 Synthesis: Overall Identity Patterns

The Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) located in the eastern region of Bandung consistently formulate identities and ideologies that combine deep Islamic traditions with selective adaptations to modernity and global dynamics. This pattern is visible in the

distribution of signage types across the four case studies: approximately 75% of the signs observed foreground traditional Islamic learning, especially through references to classical kitab (texts), religious terminology, and spiritually charged naming practices, while around 25% display stronger integration of modern visual and technological elements. These percentages are based on the relative proportion of traditional versus modern sign types identified in the data set from the four *pesantren*, rather than on a statistical survey of all institutions in the region.

The “traditional” tendency is reflected in the emphasis on spiritual values, the frequent use of Arabic in religious activities and signage, and the naming of facilities with Islamic connotations. In terms of Landry and Bourhis’s framework, many of these signs perform informational functions, regulating daily routines, indicating rooms, and directing movement, while at the same time carrying symbolic functions that affirm religious identity, institutional history, and attachment to the *pesantren* tradition. The more “modern” tendency, visible in roughly one quarter of the signage, appears in the use of contemporary fonts alongside classical calligraphy, the incorporation of digital technologies such as QR codes and social media icons, and the adoption of professional visual communication strategies. These modern signs also combine informational and symbolic roles: they provide practical information about programmes and facilities, while projecting images of professionalism, global engagement, and academic credibility.

The presence of multiple languages, Indonesian, Arabic, English, and Sundanese, across the *pesantren* reinforces this dual orientation. Indonesian maintains accessibility and national identity, Arabic anchors religious authority and classical scholarship, English signals modernity, globalization, and technological awareness, and Sundanese expresses commitment to local cultural roots. In Peircean terms, the linguistic landscapes of these *pesantren* move from firstness, initial impressions of sacredness, professionalism, or local warmth, through secondness, in which signs appear as concrete objects shaping everyday practice, to thirdness, where these repeated visual and verbal patterns crystallize into stable institutional ideologies, such as “Modern Muslim Intellectual” or “Global Mahasantri” identities. The physical environments of the *pesantren* are intentionally designed to support continuous learning, linking ethical formation with linguistic proficiency through both overt messages and more subtle visual cues.

Branding and communication aspects are also given significant attention. The linguistic landscape operates as a key medium through which each *pesantren* communicates its vision, mission, and values to students, parents, and the broader public. This can be seen in the use of professionally designed banners, modern style logos, and the strategic placement of visual signage in highly visible locations. At the same time, many *pesantren* continue to uphold and respect local cultural values, as reflected in the use of Sundanese language and regional cultural symbols alongside national and global codes. Taken together, these findings illustrate Landry and Bourhis’s dual functions of the linguistic landscape: informational signs regulate daily life and learning, while symbolic signs project ideological identity and institutional positioning. Peirce’s triadic model clarifies how *pesantren* signs move from immediate impressions to physical markers and ultimately to institutional ideologies that define what it means to be a santri in East Bandung today. In this way, the linguistic landscapes of East Bandung *pesantren* reveal how verbal and visual semiotics function as tools of identity construction, balancing tradition, modernity, and globalization.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that language use within the linguistic landscapes of *pesantren* in East Bandung serves both informative and symbolic purposes in constructing institutional identity and ideology. Across the four *pesantren* examined, linguistic signs ranging from nameplates and banners to room signage and graphic designs are strategically employed to articulate each institution's values and vision. Taken together, the four cases illustrate diverse strategies of identity construction, ranging from more traditional and immersion oriented environments to more explicitly modern and branding oriented institutions, yet all of them seek to balance Islamic tradition with contemporary educational and social demands.

The findings confirm Landry and Bourhis's distinction between the informational and symbolic functions of linguistic landscapes, showing that signs in *pesantren* simultaneously regulate daily routines and project ideological positions. They also demonstrate Peirce's triadic process of meaning making visual impressions of sacredness or professionalism (firstness) are anchored in concrete material signs such as banners, logos, and architectural features (secondness), and over time these signs crystallise into institutional ideologies and stable identity narratives (thirdness). In this way, the study shows how verbal and visual semiotics work together to shape what it means to be a santri in the context of East Bandung.

The contribution of this research lies in extending linguistic landscape and semiotic analysis to *pesantren* settings, a religious educational context that has received relatively limited attention in previous work. By examining how Arabic, Indonesian, English, and local languages are combined with specific visual designs, this study shows how religious and cultural identities are constructed, negotiated, and communicated through everyday signage in Islamic educational institutions. The analysis highlights that *pesantren* are not static traditional spaces, but actively engage with issues of modernity, globalization, and institutional branding through their verbal and visual choices.

At the same time, this study has certain limitations. The analysis is based on four *pesantren* in East Bandung and therefore does not capture the full diversity of *pesantren* across Indonesia or in other regions. Future research could expand the scope to include a larger number of institutions, conduct comparative studies across regions or countries, and integrate perspectives from students, teachers, and community members to deepen understanding of how these signs are interpreted in practice. Such work would further refine our understanding of the role of linguistic landscapes in religious education.

Ultimately, the linguistic landscapes of *pesantren* in East Bandung reveal how semiotics functions as a powerful instrument of identity, ideology, and cultural negotiation in contemporary Islamic education.

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NATIONAL SONGS AS PEDAGOGICAL DISCOURSE: AN INTERPERSONAL AND APPRAISAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Although national songs serve as powerful cultural and social tools, limited research in Indonesia has examined how their linguistic features construct interpersonal meaning within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and pedagogical discourse. This study investigates the interpersonal metafunction in Indonesian national songs and explores its pedagogical implications. Employing a qualitative discourse-analytic design, the study analyzes clauses as the unit of analysis from seven widely recognized Indonesian national songs. Drawing on Halliday's interpersonal metafunction and Martin & White's appraisal theory, the analysis systematically codes pronoun systems, mood types, modality markers, and attitudinal lexis. Analytical reliability was supported through iterative coding and cross-text comparison to ensure consistency of interpretation. The findings indicate that inclusive pronouns (*kita*, *kami*), persuasive declarative and imperative moods, and high-value evaluative lexis (e.g., *merdeka*, *jaya*) work together to construct solidarity, authority, and emotional alignment. These patterned linguistic resources position national songs as implicit pedagogical discourse that models civic identity and collective responsibility. The study demonstrates how culturally embedded texts can be strategically integrated into language pedagogy to support socio-emotional learning, cultural literacy, and civic value formation.

Keywords: *Appraisal theory; interpersonal metafunction; national songs; pedagogical discourse; socio-emotional learning.*

1. Introduction

Language functions not only as a tool for conveying information but also as a social resource for constructing relationships, attitudes, and collective identities, particularly evident in national songs. Language functions not merely as a tool for conveying information but also as a social resource through which relationships, attitudes, and collective identities are constructed. In the realm of national songs, lyrics operate as cultural and ideological texts that transmit emotional and interpersonal meanings across generations, particularly within formal and educational settings. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) conceptualizes language as a system of choices that simultaneously performs several metafunctions, including the interpersonal metafunction, which focuses on interaction, stance, and role negotiation between participants in discourse. Halliday and Matthiessen argue that language

inherently enacts social relations while expressing judgments, commitments, and evaluations, making interpersonal analysis essential for uncovering how texts position their audiences and cultivate shared perspectives (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014). Within pedagogical contexts, these linguistic features become especially influential because they contribute to how students absorb national values and social orientations through recurring exposure to institutionalized texts such as songs and ceremonial expressions.

Although many studies analyze popular or commercial music, little attention has been given to national songs as educational discourse. Contemporary linguistic scholarship has increasingly recognized song lyrics as valid and rich data for interpersonal and discourse analysis. A growing body of research demonstrates that interpersonal elements in musical texts reveal patterns of mood, modality, and attitudinal positioning that shape listeners' emotional and ideological engagement. While one research (Ningtyas et al., 2023) emphasize intimacy in modern songs, the other (Nabilah et al., 2025) illustrate evaluative stances, and the rest (Komariyah et al., 2025) confirm ideological orientation. Together, these studies show the broader relevance of interpersonal analysis in musical texts. Collectively, these studies affirm that songs are not solely artistic artifacts but also discursive spaces where interpersonal negotiation and value formation actively occur.

Nevertheless, while numerous investigations have addressed popular or commercial music, relatively little scholarly attention has been directed toward national songs as forms of pedagogical discourse that influence character development and identity construction. This imbalance reveals a research gap, as national songs are frequently performed in classrooms, ceremonies, and civic rituals, making them powerful educational instruments that transmit patriotism and civic values. Examining the interpersonal metafunctions embedded in Indonesian national songs is therefore crucial for understanding how linguistic choices foster solidarity, authority, and emotional alignment among learners. This study links interpersonal linguistic analysis with educational discourse and integrates SFL theory with educational practice to explain how national songs function as cultural heritage and structured linguistic resources within language pedagogy.

Based on the identified research gap, this study is guided by the following questions:

1. How are interpersonal meanings realized in Indonesian national song lyrics?
2. What evaluative patterns emerge through appraisal resources in the lyrics?
3. How do these linguistic patterns construct pedagogical and ideological positioning?

2. Literature Review

Language is a social semiotic resource through which individuals construct meanings, express feelings, and build relationships within particular cultural and situational contexts (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014). From this perspective, language is not merely a collection of grammatical forms but a dynamic system of choices that enables speakers and writers to position themselves, negotiate roles, and convey values in discourse. In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), these choices operate simultaneously through three metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—which allow language users to represent experience, enact social relations, and organize messages cohesively. Such a view positions language as an active meaning-making resource rather than a passive code, making SFL especially relevant for examining texts that function within institutional and educational domains. Consequently, analyzing song lyrics—particularly national songs—through an SFL framework offers a systematic way to reveal how linguistic selections construct interactional meanings,

ideological orientations, and pedagogical values embedded in culturally significant discourse. Building on the SFL framework, the next subsection outlines its core principles and empirical relevance.

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) views language as a functional and meaning-oriented system in which speakers continuously make choices to fulfill communicative purposes within social contexts. Rather than emphasizing isolated grammatical structures, SFL highlights how linguistic forms operate to realize meanings that are socially and culturally situated. This theoretical orientation enables researchers to examine texts not only as linguistic products but also as social actions that reflect intentions, relationships, and contextual influences.

Recent empirical works continue to demonstrate the applicability of SFL in diverse educational and discourse settings. Recent empirical works continue to demonstrate the applicability of SFL in academic writing (Herman et al., 2023). It is also revealed that interpersonal features in spoken educational texts is needed (Yanto et al., 2023). Then, further investigations emphasize that there was a systematic patterns of interpersonal meaning in written discourse. (Afsari et al., 2021). Collectively, these studies indicate that SFL is not only theoretically robust but also empirically adaptable across genres, including educational discourse and cultural texts. Such adaptability makes SFL particularly relevant for examining song lyrics, where linguistic selections intertwine aesthetic expression with social meaning, thereby providing a solid theoretical foundation for analyzing interpersonal metafunctions in nationally significant musical discourse. Building on this framework, the following subsection focuses specifically on the interpersonal metafunction.

2.2 Interpersonal Metafunction in Discourse

Interpersonal metafunction, realized through mood, modality, pronouns, and evaluative expressions, constructs interaction and negotiates alignment (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014). Through these interpersonal resources, discourse does not merely transmit information but also shapes attitudes, expresses commitment, and signals solidarity or distance among participants. This perspective underlines that every clause functions as an interactive act, making interpersonal analysis essential for understanding how texts build persuasion, engagement, and relational positioning across diverse communicative contexts.

Interpersonal metafunction analysis provides a systematic approach to revealing relational meanings embedded in both spoken and written discourse. The interpersonal features—including mood selection, modality patterns, and personal pronouns—play a crucial role in establishing persuasive authority and emotional connection between speakers and audiences (Dinda et al., 2022). Research indicates that discourse is strategically organized not only to deliver information but also to foster motivation, trust, and solidarity. In a different textual setting (Syafitri & Purwati, 2025) that interpersonal elements in institutional written communication, such as imperative clauses, inclusive pronouns, and positive modality, significantly contribute to constructing credibility and encouraging reader engagement. These insights suggest that interpersonal metafunction operates consistently across spoken and written genres, reinforcing its analytical strength in uncovering how linguistic choices function as relational and persuasive tools.

The previous explanation (Dinda et al., 2022; Syafitri & Purwati, 2025) indicate that interpersonal metafunction is highly adaptable and effective for examining culturally and socially meaningful texts, including song lyrics. Their perspectives reveal that linguistic selections serve as mechanisms for building rapport, projecting authority, and generating emotional resonance—characteristics that are equally prominent in national songs frequently performed in educational and ceremonial settings. Extending this perspective, the next subsection introduces appraisal theory as a complementary analytical framework.

2.3 Appraisal Theory and Language of Evaluation

Appraisal theory extends SFL by detailing how texts express evaluation through Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation (Martin & White, 2005), extends the interpersonal dimension of Systemic Functional Linguistics by providing a more detailed framework for examining how speakers and writers express evaluation, attitude, and stance in discourse. This theory emphasizes that language does not merely transmit information but also encodes emotions, judgments, and varying degrees of intensity that position audiences both emotionally and ideologically. The appraisal system is commonly organized into three interrelated domains—Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation—which together explain how texts express feelings, negotiate viewpoints, and amplify or soften meanings. Through these evaluative resources, discourse becomes a site where social values and ideological orientations are constructed and circulated, making appraisal analysis particularly relevant for texts that seek to influence collective perception.

Empirical research has demonstrated that appraisal analysis provides a systematic approach for uncovering evaluative meanings embedded in lyrical discourse. Studies show that song lyrics contain rich interpersonal signals manifested through affective expressions, judgments of behavior, and appreciations of entities that shape listeners' emotional interpretation and ideological alignment (Yuningsih, 2018). Yuningsih's findings indicate that evaluative language functions as a persuasive and expressive mechanism that strengthens the communicative impact of lyrical texts. These insights suggest that appraisal theory effectively complements interpersonal metafunction analysis by supplying more refined analytical tools for identifying how attitudes and intensities are linguistically realized. Building on these insights, the following subsection situates song lyrics as cultural discourse.

2.4 Song Lyrics as Discourse and Cultural Texts

Song lyrics can be understood not only as aesthetic or musical elements but also as forms of discourse that construct and circulate cultural meanings within society. As discourse, lyrics function as linguistic texts that encode values, ideologies, and social identities through carefully selected lexical choices, metaphors, and interpersonal expressions. They operate as cultural artifacts that reflect historical contexts, collective emotions, and shared beliefs, enabling listeners to interpret songs as representations of communal experience rather than merely entertainment. In this sense, song lyrics become semiotic spaces where language, culture, and identity intersect, making them relevant objects of analysis in both linguistic and educational research.

Scholarly discussions highlight that collective singing practices and the institutional use of songs reinforce their status as cultural discourse. Scholarly (Setianingsih et al., 2024) emphasize that the formation of regional and national song choirs in educational

communities transforms lyrics into shared symbolic texts that nurture collective identity and social cohesion. Through repetition and communal performance, lyrics gain discursive power, functioning as tools that transmit cultural narratives and ideological messages across generations.

Complementing this view, studies show that lyrical texts in folk and national songs contain embedded educational and moral values that contribute to cultural preservation and social learning (Fitri et al., 2024). It is also demonstrate moral values in folk songs, this study extends the analysis to national songs as institutionalized discourse in civic and educational contexts.

2.5 Pedagogical Discourse and Language in Education

Language pedagogy refers to the ways language is structured and employed within educational settings to transmit knowledge, shape attitudes, and construct learners' social identities (Alwi et al., 2023). Educational language is not merely instructional but also psychological and ideological in nature, functioning as a medium through which patriotism and collective values are internalized by learners. From a functional linguistic perspective, classroom language performs interpersonal and value-laden functions that influence how students interpret authority, morality, and belonging.

Further empirical studies demonstrate that national songs play a significant role in pedagogical strategies aimed at strengthening students' national identity (Ristiani et al., 2025). The intentional integration of national songs into classroom activities enhances the development of nationalistic character among elementary school learners. Their research highlights that structured singing sessions, reflective interpretation of lyrics, and teacher-guided discussions allow students to engage cognitively and affectively with the moral and cultural messages embedded in songs. Unlike prior studies that focus primarily on classroom practices, this research examines how interpersonal metafunctions in national songs linguistically construct pedagogical values. Despite these insights, little research has systematically applied SFL and appraisal theory to Indonesian national songs, leaving a gap that this study addresses.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design and Data Source

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine interpersonal meanings and evaluative language in Indonesian national song lyrics and their pedagogical implications. Qualitative inquiry is appropriate because the study analyzes textual data (song lyrics) requiring interpretive depth to uncover interpersonal and evaluative meanings. Qualitative research in applied linguistics enables contextual investigation of language phenomena by focusing on meaning construction, discourse patterns, and social interpretation (Yahya et al., 2023).

The study adopts a document analysis and discourse-oriented framework, where the primary data consist of lyrics from seven officially recognized Indonesian national songs, selected for their prominence in educational and ceremonial contexts. Data selection is conducted through purposive sampling to select songs that explicitly reference national

identity, civic values, and are commonly performed in schools and ceremonies, in line with qualitative textual research principles (Listyowati et al., 2025).

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The analytical procedure is conducted systematically and chronologically to ensure methodological rigor and transparency. Lyrics were compiled from authentic sources, segmented into clauses, and analyzed for interpersonal features (mood, modality, pronouns) and evaluative elements (attitude, engagement, graduation) using Systemic Functional Linguistics and Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005). The interpreted findings are connected to pedagogical discourse and sociocultural context. Cross-text comparison identified recurring patterns of solidarity, authority, and emotional alignment.

This structured qualitative procedure reflects discourse and narrative analytical approaches, which stress interpretive depth, theoretical alignment, and analytical transparency (Agastya et al., 2025; Erisyerico & Luardini, 2025). Ethical considerations included using publicly available lyrics, ensuring cultural respect, and acknowledging the symbolic significance of national songs. This methodological design ensures alignment with SFL and Appraisal Theory, enabling systematic analysis of interpersonal and evaluative meanings in national songs.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The analysis of seven Indonesian national song lyrics reveals that interpersonal meaning is dominantly realized through mood structures, modality choices, pronoun systems, and attitudinal lexical selections that position the speaker as a collective national voice addressing its citizens. Within the framework of SFL, these linguistic resources function as realizations of the interpersonal metafunction, which concerns how language enacts social relationships, negotiates roles, and expresses evaluation (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014). The clauses found in the lyrics are not merely informative but interactional. Lyrics construct solidarity, authority, and emotional alignment through interpersonal resources. Declarative clauses frequently operate persuasively rather than descriptively, while imperatives subtly invite collective participation. This indicates that national songs serve as dialogic discourse where the “voice of the nation” symbolically interacts with listeners to reinforce unity and ideological commitment. Similar tendencies are also observed in pragmatic and discourse-based linguistic studies that highlight the interpersonal force of expressive utterances and symbolic language in public communication (Amelia et al., 2023; Kolin & Permana, 2023; Laili et al., 2026; Syafitri et al., 2025).

To provide a clearer representation of the dataset, Table 1 presents the Indonesian national songs analyzed in this study, including selected key clauses and the English translations. This table serves as the primary corpus from which interpersonal metafunctional features—such as pronoun use, modality, and attitudinal lexis—were systematically identified and interpreted. Presenting representative excerpts maintains analytical focus while ensuring transparency of linguistic evidence.

Table 1*Corpus of Indonesian National Song Lyrics with English Translations*

No	Title	Indonesian Lyrics	English Translation
1	Indonesia Raya	Indonesia tanah airku Tanah tumpah darahku Di sanalah aku berdiri Jadi pandu ibuku Indonesia kebangsaanku Bangsa dan tanah airku Marilah kita berseru Indonesia bersatu Hiduplah tanahku Hiduplah negeriku Bangsaku, rakyatku semuanya Bangunlah jiwanya Bangunlah badannya Untuk Indonesia Raya Indonesia Raya merdeka merdeka Tanahku negeriku yang kucinta Indonesia Raya merdeka merdeka Hiduplah Indonesia Raya	Indonesia, my homeland The land where my blood was spilled There I stand To guide my motherland Indonesia, my nationality My nation and homeland Let us all proclaim Indonesia united Long live my land Long live my country My nation, my people all Awaken the soul Awaken the body For Great Indonesia Indonesia the Great, independence! My beloved land and country Indonesia the Great, independence! Long live Indonesia the Great
2	Hari Merdeka (17 Agustus 1945)	Tujuh belas Agustus tahun empat lima Itulah hari kemerdekaan kita Hari merdeka nusa dan bangsa Hari lahirnya bangsa Indonesia Merdeka! Sekali merdeka tetap merdeka Selama hayat masih dikandung badan Kita tetap setia tetap sedia Mempertahankan Indonesia	August seventeenth nineteen forty-five That is our Independence Day The day of freedom of nation and country The birth day of Indonesia Freedom! Once independent, forever independent As long as life remains in the body We stay loyal and ready To defend Indonesia
3	Bagimu Negeri	Padamu negeri kami berjanji Padamu negeri kami berbakti Padamu negeri kami mengabdikan Bagimu negeri jiwa raga kami	To you, our country, we promise To you, our country, we devote To you, our country, we serve For you, our country, our body and soul
4	Garuda Pancasila	Garuda Pancasila Akulah pendukungmu Patriot proklamasi	Garuda Pancasila I am your supporter Proclamation patriot

		Sedia berkorban untukmu Pancasila dasar Negara Rakyat adil makmur sentosa Pribadi bangsaku Ayo maju maju Ayo maju maju Ayo maju maju	Ready to sacrifice for you Pancasila, the state foundation People just and prosperous The character of my nation Let's move forward Let's move forward Let's move forward
5	Berkibarlah Benderaku	Berkibarlah benderaku Lambang suci gagah perwira Di seluruh pantai Indonesia Kau tetap pujaan bangsa Siapa berani menurunkan engkau Serentak rakyatmu membela Sang Merah Putih yang perwira Berkibarlah s'lama-lamanya	Wave, my flag Sacred symbol, brave and noble Across all Indonesian shores You remain the pride of the nation Whoever dares to lower you Your people will defend at once The heroic Red and White Wave forever
6	Tanah Airku	Tanah airku tidak kulupakan Kan terkenang selama hidupku Biar pun saya pergi jauh Tidak kan hilang dari kalbu Tanahku yang kucintai Engkau kuhargai Walaupun banyak negeri kujalani Yang masyhur permai dikata orang Tetapi kampung dan rumahku Di sanalah ku rasa senang	My homeland I will not forget It will be remembered all my life Even if I travel far away It will not fade from my heart My beloved land I honor you Though many countries I pass through Famous and beautiful they say Yet my village and my home There I feel happiest
7	Satu Nusa Satu Bangsa	Satu nusa Satu bangsa Satu bahasa kita Tanah air pasti jaya Untuk selama-lamanya Indonesia pusaka Indonesia tercinta Nusa bangsa dan Bahasa Kita bela bersama	One homeland One nation One language, ours Our country will surely triumph Forever and ever Indonesia, heritage Beloved Indonesia Homeland, nation, and language We defend together

The table shows both the original and translated lyrics, providing a clear foundation for the subsequent interpersonal metafunction analysis. It allows the identification of collective pronouns, modal verbs, evaluative lexis, and symbolic expressions that construct the relational and attitudinal aspects of these songs.

The interpersonal analysis demonstrates three dominant linguistic tendencies that directly correspond to Halliday's interpersonal metafunction. First, the prevalence of inclusive pronouns such as *kita*, *kami*, and *bangsa* constructs shared subjectivity and reduces

social distance between the lyric persona and audience. These findings exemplify Halliday's interpersonal metafunction, where pronoun choice negotiates tenor. In SFL terms, pronoun selection negotiates tenor, creating solidarity and a sense of collective identity. Second, modality expressions—including obligation and certainty markers like *harus*, *wajib*, or *akan*—encode ideological stance and moral persuasion rather than neutral description. Here, modality encodes speaker stance and commitment. These modal choices enact authority and commitment, transforming the lyrics into performative discourse that urges civic responsibility. Third, the integration of symbolic and evaluative vocabulary (e.g., *merdeka*, *jaya*, *luhur*) functions as attitudinal meaning, reinforcing emotional engagement and national pride. Evaluative lexis thus conveys attitude within the appraisal framework. Comparable findings in expressive speech-act research show that emotional utterances significantly shape audience alignment and interpersonal positioning (Laili et al., 2026).

In addition, the presence of deictic references—both temporal (*hari ini*, *selamanya*) and spatial (*tanah air*, *nusantara*)—creates discursive immediacy and situates listeners within a shared national context. From an interpersonal perspective, deixis serves as a linguistic bridge that aligns speaker and audience within the same experiential frame, strengthening identification and empathy. This phenomenon parallels lyric-based discourse analyses in which deixis establishes contextual anchoring and emotional proximity (Amelia et al., 2023). Studies on interpersonal metafunction in Indonesian public slogans further confirm that repetitive inclusive structures and declarative affirmations intensify ideological cohesion and collective agency (Syafitri et al., 2025). Moreover, symbolic representations within lyrics mirror literary discourse findings that symbols and metaphors function as carriers of personality traits and value systems, thereby deepening interpersonal resonance between text and audience (Kolin & Permana, 2023).

Overall, the results affirm that Indonesian national songs function as interpersonal discourse instruments rather than passive cultural artifacts. Through mood selection, modality, pronoun negotiation, deixis, and symbolic lexis, the lyrics actively construct social relationships, evoke emotional alignment, and articulate ideological positions. This study uniquely demonstrates how Indonesian national songs integrate interpersonal and appraisal resources to function as implicit educational discourse.

4.2 Discussion

The analysis of Indonesian national song lyrics demonstrates that these texts are multilayered interpersonal and evaluative discourses, designed to engage listeners emotionally, socially, and ideologically. According to SFL approach, the interpersonal metafunction constructs social roles, relationships, and attitudes through mood, modality, pronouns, and evaluative lexis (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014). In these songs, inclusive pronouns such as *kita*, *kami*, and *bangsa* create a collective national identity, aligning the lyric persona with the audience. Declarative clauses assert ideological authority, while imperative forms subtly invite listener participation. Rather than merely describing linguistic patterns, these findings indicate that national songs function as structured educational discourse that models civic positioning (Komariyah et al., 2025).

In the perspective of appraisal theory, language conveys affect, judgment, and appreciation, which are central to shaping interpersonal relationships and influencing audience responses (Martin & White, 2005). The national songs contain repeated evaluative expressions, such as *merdeka*, *jaya*, *luhur*, and *bangga*, evoking pride, admiration, and

emotional attachment to the nation. When combined with modal expressions (*harus, wajib, akan*) and inclusive pronouns, these evaluative choices establish both moral obligation and participatory engagement, effectively guiding listeners to internalize civic duties. In this way, national songs implicitly function as pedagogical discourse, using interpersonal and evaluative mechanisms to teach national values and social norms, rather than relying on explicit instructional methods (Hoang, 2021).

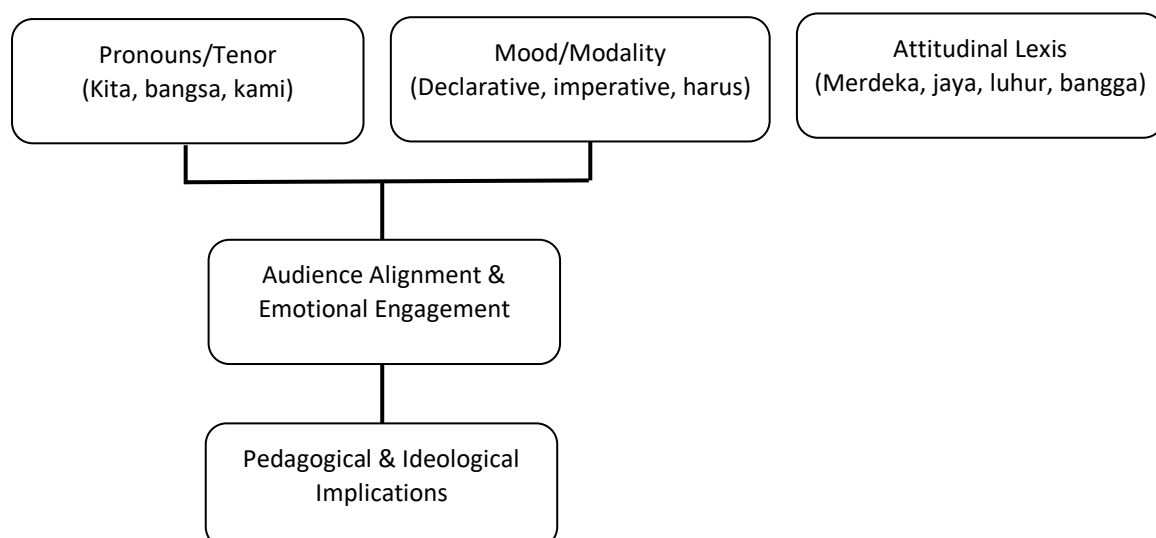
The integration of temporal and spatial deixis, such as *hari ini, selamanya*, and *tanah air*, situates listeners within a shared historical and national frame. These deictic markers function as discursive anchors that foster continuity and collective identification. This demonstrates that deixis here strengthens social anchoring and audience alignment in national song discourse (Hoang, 2021). By combining deixis, pronouns, modality, and attitudinal lexis, national songs create emotional engagement and ideological alignment, implicitly delivering lessons in patriotism, civic responsibility, and national solidarity—core objectives of pedagogical discourse.

The symbolic richness of the lyrics, such as references to *tanah airku, Sang Merah Putih*, and *ibu pertiwi*, enhances the ideological and pedagogical dimension. These symbols not only evoke affective responses but also serve as teaching tools, communicating historical, cultural, and civic knowledge. The interaction between interpersonal metafunction and appraisal lexis ensures that listeners are not merely entertained but also guided to internalize lessons about unity, patriotism, and collective responsibility. This aligns with research on expressive discourse, where grammatical and lexical choices shape audience perception and engagement (Amelia et al., 2023; Kolin & Permana, 2023; Komariyah et al., 2025).

From an educational perspective, national songs function as culturally embedded learning resources that support emotional literacy, social awareness, and national identity formation. The national song indicate that culturally embedded texts can foster socio-emotional development, and the present findings extend this by demonstrating the specific linguistic mechanisms through which national songs achieve this effect. (Hidayah et al., 2026). By engaging students in analysis and performance of these songs, educators can implicitly teach civic values and interpersonal awareness.

Diagram 1

Interpersonal & Appraisal Interaction in Indonesian National Songs



As illustrated in Diagram 1, pronouns, mood, modality, and evaluative lexis interact to align audiences and generate pedagogical impact. These interacting resources demonstrate that Indonesian national songs are not merely artistic expressions but implicit educational discourse.

- **Pronouns/Tenor:** Inclusive pronouns (*kita, bangsa, kami*) reduce social distance, construct shared identity, and establish relational alignment with the audience.
- **Mood & Modality:** Declarative and imperative forms regulate authority, participation, and social interaction.
- **Attitudinal Lexis:** Evaluative words (*merdeka, jaya, luhur, bangga*) convey emotion, admiration, and judgment.

Overall, national songs engage listeners while implicitly teaching civic values and solidarity. The integration of Halliday & Matthiessen's metafunctional framework with Martin & White's appraisal system provides a focused analytical lens for understanding how songs operate simultaneously as cultural artifacts and language pedagogy resources (Hidayah et al., 2026; Hoang, 2021; Komariyah et al., 2025). These findings collectively answer the research questions by demonstrating how interpersonal and appraisal resources in Indonesian national songs construct solidarity, evaluative positioning, and implicit pedagogical meaning.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Indonesian national songs function as multidimensional texts, simultaneously integrating cultural, emotional, and pedagogical purposes. The analysis shows that interpersonal resources—particularly pronoun choice, mood, modality, and evaluative lexis—construct solidarity and civic responsibility, revealing how national songs operate as implicit pedagogical discourse. Symbolic expressions such as *tanah airku*, *Sang Merah Putih*, and *ibu pertiwi* reinforce emotional attachment and serve as cultural teaching tools that embed civic and patriotic values in learners. By integrating Halliday's interpersonal metafunction with Martin & White's appraisal theory, this study provides a framework for analyzing how interpersonal choices and evaluative expressions intersect to construct pedagogical discourse in cultural texts. The findings highlight that national songs are not merely commemorative artifacts but linguistically organized resources that actively shape audience alignment and value formation. Future research should examine comparative contexts across cultures, classroom applications of song-based pedagogy, and longitudinal impacts on civic identity formation. Overall, Indonesian national songs are interactive, emotionally engaging, and pedagogically valuable, effectively bridging language, culture, and education.

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CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL CRITICISM THROUGH CONNOTATIVE MEANING: A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF NAWAL EL-SA'DAWI'S *AL-BANĀT TA'ĪSYŪ*

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze connotative meaning as a medium of social criticism in the short story *Al-Banāt Ta'īsyū* by Nawal El Sa'dawi. The research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a *dilālah* (semantic) approach. The study examines one Arabic short story as the main text. Data were collected through reading and note-taking techniques and analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show systematic patterns of connotative meaning that function as indirect forms of social criticism. These patterns express criticism of social decline, public suffering, and the oppression of women. In this story, connotative meaning does not only function as a stylistic element but works as a semantic strategy that describes social problems and challenges dominant social ideas in the text. The discussion also reveals several semantic patterns, such as images of social burden, sacrificial metaphors, and the dissolution of women's identity within collective struggles. The novelty of this study lies in placing connotative meaning as the main analytical perspective for understanding social criticism in modern Arabic short fiction. This research contributes to Arabic literary semantics by showing that connotative meaning can function as an important linguistic tool for expressing ideological criticism in literary texts.

Keywords: *Arabic short story; connotative meaning; qualitative descriptive research; social criticism; semantic analysis*

1. Introduction

Literature is one of the most effective media for articulating social criticism in society (Zahara & Mulyadi, 2025). Social criticism in literary works serves as a mirror that represents, exposes, and interrogates various social problems. Through such criticism, authors convey concerns regarding inequality, injustice, and broader socio-cultural phenomena that challenge social harmony (Alsyrad & Rosa, 2021). In the context of Mesir, social inequality historically emerged from entrenched class structures and economic shifts, while gendered vulnerability became more pronounced amid economic and political instability (Pirdaus & Fahmi, 2025).

Amid this environment, Nawal El-Sa'dawi developed her feminist consciousness from early experiences of gender injustice and later through her work as a physician and international activist. She consistently positioned feminism as a humanistic, anti-class, and anti-racist struggle reflected in her literary works. Her short story collection *Adab Am Qillah Adab* portrays women resisting familial and religious norms that legitimize subordination. The sixth story, *Al-Banāt Ta'īsyū*, depicts the persistent suffering of Zahra, a village girl whose life is shaped by exploitation and oppression from morning to night (Pirdaus & Fahmi, 2025).

Previous studies have explored social criticism in Arabic literature from various perspectives. However, research on Nawal El-Sa'dawi's works has primarily focused on thematic, ideological, or socio-feminist aspects without investigating how linguistic mechanisms themselves construct social criticism. Studies on implicit meaning such as irony in non-literary discourse also do not address the role of linguistic structure in shaping criticism. Meanwhile, semantic studies on Arabic literature have discussed connotative meaning mostly in poetry, leaving modern Arabic short stories underexamined, thus forming a research gap.

To strengthen this gap, this study identifies three specific absences in prior scholarship: (1) conceptually, existing studies have not framed connotative meaning as a systematic semantic strategy; (2) methodologically, previous analyses rely heavily on thematic interpretation without integrating semantic-linguistic mechanisms; and (3) theoretically, the relationship between language, connotation, and social criticism in Arabic prose remains insufficiently articulated. This gap matters because it limits understanding of how literary language actively constructs, intensifies, and negotiates critique beyond thematic content alone.

This study adopts the *dilālah* (semantic) approach, a branch of linguistics that examines how linguistic symbols acquire and generate meaning (Zaky, 2017). The focus is on connotative meaning, understood as meanings shaped by emotional, associative, or impressionistic responses of writers and readers (Nasution et al., 2024). By positioning connotative meaning not merely as stylistic ornamentation but as a structured linguistic mechanism, this study offers a sharper theoretical contribution to Arabic literary semantics.

The objectives of this research are:

1. to identify the forms of connotative meaning in *Al-Banāt Ta'īsyū*;
2. to analyze its function as a tool of social criticism; and
3. to explain the semantic strategies employed by Nawal El-Sa'dawi in articulating criticism implicitly.

Practically, this research contributes to understanding how modern Arab authors utilize connotative semantics to encode resistance through language.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Semantics

Ahmad Mukhtar Umar explains (Umar, 1998) that connotative meaning refers to the additional or secondary meaning carried by a word beyond its stable denotative (basic) meaning. This additional meaning arises from cultural, social, psychological, and experiential associations that develop within a community. Because it is shaped by changing contexts, connotative meaning is not universal and may differ across groups, societies, or historical

periods. For instance, the word woman has a fixed denotative meaning “human, female, adult” yet various communities may attach non-standard and shifting connotations such as “emotional” or “talkative.” A similar pattern appears in the word Jew, which denotatively refers to a follower of Judaism, but in certain social contexts may carry additional negative associations such as “stingy” or “deceitful.” According to Umar, connotative meaning remains open, unfixed, and does not require uniform agreement among speakers.

Chaer (according to Chaer in Ginting & Ginting, 2019) defines connotative meaning as an additional meaning that emerges from certain feelings, impressions, or evaluative attitudes associated with a word. These associations may be positive, negative, or neutral, depending on the emotional and cultural responses of language users. When a word carries no particular emotional coloring, it is considered to have a neutral connotation.

Taken together, connotative meaning can be understood as the supplementary meaning that arises from emotional, cultural, or social associations attached to a word beyond its basic denotative meaning. This type of meaning is dynamic rather than fixed, varies across communities and time periods, and reflects how human experience and social perception shape the interpretation of linguistic expressions.

2.2 Connotative Meaning

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2.3 Social Criticism

Social criticism consists of two elements, namely criticism and social. The word criticism derives from the Greek *kritein*, which means to judge, compare, and evaluate. In general, social criticism functions as a form of control in social life (Wahyuni, 2019). Literature essentially portrays real social life through the works that are created (Nisak &

Anggraini, 2020). Social criticism in literary works emerges due to the influence of environments marked by social inequality. Literary works that contain social criticism usually address unfavorable events in social life. The evaluation of good and bad behavior in society can be categorized as social criticism, as literature consistently presents both sides of social life.

Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that social criticism is a form of evaluation of various phenomena in society that functions as social control. In the context of literature, social criticism appears as the author's response to social realities characterized by inequality and problems. Through the depiction of events as well as good and bad behavior in society, literary works become a medium for conveying evaluation and reflection on existing social conditions (Andani et al., 2022).

2.4 The relationship between language and ideology

The relationship between language and ideology is evident in the way language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a tool to influence, mobilize, and even control others. Through language, individuals can lead listeners or readers to accept, justify, and even internalize the ideas being conveyed. Language also serves as a medium through which people express identity, comprehend their surroundings, make decisions, and shape the thoughts of others. Today, language has evolved into a highly effective instrument for directing and influencing large groups of people much like a remote control that can move individuals from a distance (Mubaligh, 2010).

2.5 Nawal El Sa'dawi's Intellectual Background

From an early age, Nawal El Sa'dawi witnessed gender inequality within her own family. She noticed that her male cousin received privileged treatment despite not being more accomplished than she was. When she questioned the reason for this disparity, her family claimed that it was God's will to prioritize men.

This experience shaped Nawal into a highly critical individual, especially during her studies at Al-Azhar University. There, she became active in demonstrations against British occupation and joined various student organizations, which helped her understand that social change can only be achieved through collective action. This awareness eventually led her to establish the Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA), which upheld feminist, historical, and socialist principles.

While working as a rural physician, Nawal witnessed firsthand how women were marginalized and victimized by patriarchal systems. Many women suffered from double burdens and various forms of violence committed by fathers, husbands, and other male family members. She even encountered cases of young women who resorted to extreme actions such as setting themselves on fire or throwing themselves into the Nile River to escape domestic pressure.

Her international perspective expanded further when she served as the Women's Program Adviser for the United Nations in Africa and the Middle East from 1979 to 1980. Her work-related travels to various countries, beginning in Addis Ababa, revealed that forms of oppression experienced by women abroad followed patterns strikingly similar to those she had observed in Egypt (Pirdaus & Fahmi, 2025).

2.6 Previous Studies and Conceptual Framework

Research on social criticism in Arabic and broader sociopolitical discourse has developed through thematic, pragmatic, linguistic, and rhetorical approaches. However, existing studies remain theoretically fragmented and do not sufficiently explain how connotative meaning functions as a semantic mechanism of ideological critique in modern Arabic narrative prose.

From a thematic perspective, Zubair et al. (2024) analyze forms of social injustice in *Woman at Point Zero*. Yet their analysis conceptualizes critique primarily as narrative content, providing limited insight into how lexical or connotative choices encode ideological positioning within the text.

From a rhetorical–pragmatic direction, Zahara & Mulyadi (2025) examine irony in political memes. Although they demonstrate how indirectness conveys sociopolitical dissatisfaction, their focus on categorizing types of irony does not offer a broader semantic explanation of how connotation produces ideological tension or evaluative stance.

Linguistically oriented studies such as Hasibuan et al. (2023) analyze denotative and connotative meaning in the poetry of Nizar Qabbani. While they highlight semantic layering, their analysis remains confined to poetic symbolism and does not clarify how connotative meaning operates within extended narrative structures involving plot, characterization, and developing social conflict.

Taken together, existing studies approach social criticism thematically (Zubair et al., 2024), rhetorically (Zubair & Mulyadi, 2024), or poetically (Hasibuan et al., 2023), yet they lack a unified theoretical synthesis explaining how connotative meaning functions as a structured semantic mechanism of critique in Arabic short stories. This study therefore positions connotative meaning not as stylistic ornamentation, but as a systematic semantic strategy that constructs, intensifies, and negotiates ideological critique in Nawal El-Sa'dawi's *Al-Banāt Ta'īsyu*.

Based on this gap, the present study positions connotative meaning as a conceptual bridge between semantics and social criticism. Connotative expressions are understood not merely as stylistic features but as linguistic mechanisms that carry ideological associations and evaluative meanings within literary discourse. Through these connotative constructions, authors are able to encode social critique indirectly while maintaining narrative subtlety and symbolic depth.

Therefore, this study analyzes how connotative meaning operates as a semantic strategy that constructs social criticism in Nawal El-Sa'dawi's short story *Al-Banāt Ta'īsyu*. By examining connotative expressions within the narrative, the analysis seeks to reveal how language reflects ideological positions, represents social inequality, and communicates critical perspectives toward patriarchal structures embedded in the text.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the connotative meanings in Nawal El-Sa'dawi's *Al-Banāt Ta'īsyu*. This method is appropriate for investigating implicit semantic meanings and socio-ideological criticism embedded within literary discourse, as semantik (*ilmu dilālah*) examines how signs convey meaning (Umar, 1998) and how linguistic forms relate to meanings they represent (according to Chaer in Ginting & Ginting, 2019).

The data of this study consist of lexical units words, phrases, and expressions found in the short story. Data selection employed purposive sampling based on explicit operational criteria. A lexical unit was included as data when it showed (a) deviation from its denotative meaning, (b) the presence of evaluative or emotional association, or (c) contextual indications of ideological stance or social judgment. These criteria align with the understanding that connotative meaning arises from cultural experience, social evaluation, and emotional impression (Umar, 1998), (according to Chaer in Ginting & Ginting, 2019).

Connotative meaning was identified through a semantic analytical framework. First, the denotative meaning of each lexical unit was established using Arabic dictionaries and semantic references as a baseline (Zaky, 2017). A lexical item was then classified as connotative when it demonstrated at least one of the following semantic indicators: (1) associative expansion beyond literal meaning; (2) emotional, cultural, or evaluative connotation; (3) socio-ideological resonance shaped by collective perception. Connotation was differentiated from metaphor operationally: connotation involves associative layering on a literal meaning, whereas metaphor involves a domain transfer (source → target) that replaces literal meaning through analogical mapping (Putri & Marhayati, 2025).

The analysis proceeded in several systematic steps. (1) Identification of lexical units potentially carrying connotative meaning; (2) Verification of denotative meaning using authoritative lexicons; (3) Contextual semantic shift analysis to identify expansions, emotional nuances, or socio-ideological associations; (4) Interpretation of the ideological function of each connotative expression in light of social criticism; (5) Categorization of findings into relevant types of social criticism. This multi-stage procedure ensures methodological rigor and traceability of analytical reasoning (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024).

Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, involving comparison across (a) dictionaries for denotative verification, (b) semantic theories Umar & Chaer for identifying connotative indicators, and (c) previous studies on social criticism to validate interpretive claims (Nurfajriani et al., 2024). Triangulation was applied by cross-checking each interpretive step against at least two independent theoretical or lexical sources, ensuring that findings were not dependent on subjective interpretation alone. Since the research is purely textual, no ethical clearance was required (Abdussamad, 2021).

4. Results and Discussion

Understanding meaning in language cannot be separated from the study of semantics, a branch of linguistics that examines the relationship between linguistic signs and the things they signify. In the context of literary analysis, particularly short stories, semantic understanding is key to uncovering the various layers of meaning contained within, including the connotative meanings that authors often use to convey implicit messages.

4.1 Results

The connotative meaning in this article is understood as a form of social criticism toward social decline and public suffering, as well as the oppression and sacrifice of women, which is reflected through the semantic extension of words beyond their lexical meanings.

4.1.1 Connotative Meaning as Social Criticism of Social Decline and Public Suffering

والليل ثقيل يغرق مدينة القاهرة، الغائبة في النوم كاملقهوره

"And the night is heavy, drowning the city of Cairo, absent in sleep like one who is oppressed."

This sentence shows a shift from denotative to connotative meaning. Literally, “night” refers only to a time of day, but in this context it carries additional emotional and social associations beyond its basic dictionary meaning (Umar, 1998). In connotative meaning, a word does not only refer to its core concept but also evokes certain feelings and evaluative impressions in the minds of language users (according to Chaer in Ginting & Ginting, 2019).

In this context, “the night is heavy” suggests that the night is not merely dark but burdensome, pointing to oppressive social and political conditions that weigh down the inhabitants of Cairo. The verb “drowning” indicates that the city is overwhelmed not by water but by structural pressures and inequality. This description of the city reflects how literature can evaluate and question social realities, particularly when they are marked by imbalance and injustice (Wahyuni, 2019). The image of a city sinking under a “heavy” night also shows how a literary text can portray the negative aspects of social life and encourage readers to notice conditions that often remain hidden (Nisak & Anggraini, 2020). By turning atmosphere into a sign of crisis, the sentence uses literary representation as a means of criticizing real social conditions (Andani et al., 2022).

The phrase “absent in sleep like one who is oppressed” moves further away from the literal meaning of sleep. It suggests a condition of forced social silence, where people are pushed into passivity and lose their ability to resist. This reflects how language can function as a tool to influence and control others, leading them to accept and internalize the ideas of those in power (Mubaligh, 2010). This portrayal is also closely related to Nawal El Saadawi’s intellectual background: from childhood she witnessed gender inequality in her family, later became active in student movements, and worked as a rural doctor who observed women suffering under patriarchal and social pressure (Pirdaus & Fahmi, 2025).

Through this connotative shift, the sentence becomes a form of social criticism: it shows how power and ideology create a “heavy night” that drowns the city, silencing public life and producing suffering that does not appear natural, but constructed.

والمدينة غارقة في السواد والصمت كالصمت

“And the city is submerged in darkness and silence, like death.”

Here, the meaning also shifts from a literal description to a connotative one. “Darkness” and “silence” do not only describe what can be seen or heard but also carry additional emotional and social meanings beyond their basic sense (Umar, 1998). In connotative meaning, such words evoke feelings, impressions, and evaluative attitudes attached to them by language users (according to Chaer in Ginting & Ginting, 2019).

When Nawal El Saadawi writes that the city is “submerged in darkness and silence,” she depicts a society whose public life has been pushed into stillness. This reflects the idea that literature can portray social realities and function as a form of evaluation when it reveals the negative aspects of social life (Wahyuni, 2019). The image of a city immersed in darkness suggests the decline of social energy and hope in the face of inequality and structural pressure (Nisak & Anggraini, 2020). Comparing the silence to “death” emphasizes the extent to which social communication, participation, and expression have been weakened, which becomes a central concern of literary social criticism (Andani et al., 2022).

At the same time, this darkness and silence can be interpreted as the result of ideological control: people are not simply quiet but gradually made quiet, losing the ability

to speak and act collectively, reflecting how language can guide, persuade, and control others (Mubaligh, 2010). This portrayal is also consistent with Saadawi's intellectual background, shaped by her encounters with women and communities living under strong patriarchal systems, political pressure, and repeated experiences of fear and marginalization (Pirdaus & Fahmi, 2025).

Thus, the sentence does not simply describe a dark, quiet city; it becomes a social critique of how structural power produces a "death-like" public atmosphere, where the city's silence reflects suppressed suffering rather than natural calm.

4.1.2 Connotative Meaning as Social Criticism of the Oppression and Sacrifice of Women

موتها يحمي البلد من الغرق

"Her death protects the country from drowning."

Here, a shift from denotative to connotative meaning can be observed. Literally, the phrase "her death" refers to the simple denotative meaning of the end of a woman's life. However, within the narrative context it carries broader social and ideological implications that go beyond its literal sense (Umar, 1998). Such connotative interpretation emerges because words are associated with emotional impressions, cultural perceptions, and evaluative attitudes formed within a society, which shape how readers interpret the expression (according to Chaer in Ginting & Ginting, 2019).

In the sentence "Her death protects the country from drowning," Nawal El Saadawi illustrates how a woman's body is symbolically positioned as a form of sacrifice for the survival of the nation. The expression suggests that a woman's death is not merely a personal tragedy, but is framed as something capable of saving the collective community. Through this linguistic representation, the narrative constructs an ideological expectation that women must sacrifice themselves for the sake of society in times of crisis. In this way, language functions as a medium that directs readers to accept and justify the idea of unequal sacrifice, where women are positioned as those who must give up everything while the nation is portrayed as the entity that deserves protection (Mubaligh, 2010).

The metaphor of the country "drowning" indicates a serious social and political crisis within society. This representation functions as a form of social evaluation by highlighting instability, inequality, and patriarchal power structures that shape social life (Wahyuni, 2019). Through literary representation, the narrative reflects broader social realities, portraying how structural problems within society are symbolically expressed in the story (Nisak & Anggraini, 2020). By placing the responsibility for "saving" the country on a woman's death, the text reveals an unequal distribution of moral and social burdens, where women are positioned as silent protectors of a failing system. Such portrayal demonstrates how literary works can expose injustice and encourage reflection on social conditions marked by inequality (Andani et al., 2022).

This interpretation is closely connected to Saadawi's intellectual background, which was shaped by her experiences witnessing gender inequality in her own family, her activism during her student years, and her work as a rural physician where she encountered women facing severe patriarchal pressures. Her later international experiences also revealed that similar patterns of oppression occur in many societies (Pirdaus & Fahmi, 2025). Through this connotative construction, the sentence becomes a sharp form of social criticism, exposing

how structural power positions women's suffering as the imagined foundation of national survival rather than addressing the real sources of crisis.

وذاب وجه «زهرة» في آلاف الوجوه والشوارع والعمارات والأنوار، والميادين الواسعة، والمدرسة، والجامعة، والمظاهرات ضد الحكم والاحتلال

"And Zahrah's face dissolved into thousands of faces, streets, buildings, lights, wide squares, the school, the university, and the demonstrations against the regime and the occupation."

This sentence shows a shift from denotative to connotative meaning, where "her face dissolved" no longer refers to a literal physical disappearance but instead conveys a deeper symbolic transformation (Umar, 1998). Connotative meaning emerges when words carry emotional and social associations beyond their basic meaning (according to Chaer in Ginting & Ginting, 2019).

Here, Nawal El Saadawi uses the idea of Zahrah's face "dissolving" to show how a woman's identity is sacrificed and absorbed into the struggles of society. The dissolution suggests that Zahrah's individuality melts into the collective as part of an enforced social role, where her personal identity becomes secondary to the demands of political tension, public movements, and national struggle. In this sense, she is not simply unnoticed she is symbolically offered up, her identity surrendered for the sake of the larger community.

This reflects the function of literature as social criticism by highlighting how women often become the silent backbone of social and political struggles (Wahyuni, 2019), carrying burdens created by crisis and instability within society (Nisak & Anggraini, 2020), and being positioned as contributors whose individuality is expected to dissolve for collective goals (Andani et al., 2022). The image also shows how ideology shapes women's roles by demanding their presence and sacrifice while presenting the loss of their personal identity as necessary for the survival of society (Mubaligh, 2010).

This portrayal aligns with Saadawi's intellectual background, as she repeatedly observed women who participated in political resistance, public protests, and community struggles, yet were socially expected to sacrifice themselves emotionally, physically, or symbolically for the greater cause (Pirdaus & Fahmi, 2025).

Thus, the connotative meaning functions as social criticism that reveals how women are symbolically dissolved into society, expected to give up their identity and individuality as a form of social and political sacrifice. This deeper ideological reading aligns directly with the journal's revisions, avoiding surface interpretation.

الإله مات، والبنات تعيش

"God is dead, and the girls live."

This sentence reflects a powerful shift from denotative to connotative meaning, because "God is dead" is not a literal theological statement but a symbolic declaration (Umar, 1998). The meaning grows beyond the literal through cultural, emotional, and ideological associations (according to Chaer in Ginting & Ginting, 2019).

In this context, Nawal El Saadawi invokes a historical memory deeply rooted in Egyptian culture: for centuries, girls were sacrificed to the Nile or to deities in ritual practices meant to ensure the prosperity of the land. By saying "God is dead," Sa'dāwī symbolically announces the end of this sacred-patriarchal authority that once justified literal sacrifices of

women. When this divine authority “dies,” the system that permitted such violence collapses.

However, the statement does not imply that women are no longer sacrificed. Instead, “the girls live” reveals a deeper critique: although women are no longer killed for the gods or the river, they continue to be sacrificed in modern forms through social burdens, silencing, exploitation, and patriarchal expectations. This reflects how language can reveal mechanisms of ideological control that reshape the meaning of sacrifice without actually eliminating it (Mubaligh, 2010).

Literature here functions as social criticism, revealing how societies that once practiced literal ritual sacrifice now reproduce symbolic or structural forms of sacrifice (Wahyuni, 2019). The collapse of sacred authority opens space to question how women continue to carry disproportionate burdens within society (Nisak & Anggraini, 2020), and how systems of inequality persist through new forms of domination (Andani et al., 2022).

This interpretation connects with Saadawi's intellectual background, shaped by her encounters with women who were not sacrificed to gods but nevertheless suffered under cultural, political, and patriarchal systems that demanded their obedience and silence (Pirdaus & Fahmi, 2025).

Thus, the connotative meaning shows a transformation: ancient rituals disappear, but modern societies continue to sacrifice women differently. The phrase becomes a declaration that even when sacred patriarchal power collapses (“God is dead”), women must fight to “live” beyond the newer forms of sacrifice imposed on them.

4.2 Discussion

This study demonstrates that connotative meaning in Nawal El Sa'dāwī's *Al-Banāt Ta'īsyū* operates not merely as a stylistic device but as a structured semantic mechanism for constructing indirect social criticism. Through her connotative expressions, Sa'dāwī reveals how language carries ideological force, exposing social decline, collective suffering, and the oppression of women by extending meaning beyond its lexical boundaries. These results strengthen the view that semantic analysis particularly at the connotative level helps uncover hidden systems of power embedded in literary texts. The theoretical implications of this research are found in the understanding that connotative meaning functions as an indirect mode of critique through symbolic structures, metaphoric constructions, and ideological negation. Expressions such as “a heavy night,” “a drowning city,” and “death protects the nation” reveal how Sa'dāwī encodes structural pressure, symbolic violence, and political domination within seemingly simple linguistic units. This highlights the capacity of literary language to express criticism subtly within restrictive socio-political contexts. To reinforce these theoretical contributions, this study introduces a conceptual model of indirect social criticism expressed through connotative meaning. The model consists of four interrelated components: (1) symbolic burden imagery, (2) the sacrificial metaphor, (3) collective identity dissolution, and (4) ideological negation.

Symbolic burden imagery includes depictions of darkness, heaviness, or drowning that function as signs of social decay and oppressive structures. The sacrificial metaphor frames the female body as an ideological vessel required to carry communal burdens. Collective identity dissolution appears through Zahrah's fading individuality, symbolizing a form of oppression enacted through the erasure of identity rather than physical harm. Ideological negation, reflected in statements like “God is dead,” signals the collapse of

patriarchal authority and opens conceptual space for women to emerge as autonomous subjects. Through this model, the study not only identifies the presence of social criticism but clarifies the semantic patterns that organize and reinforce it. Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. It uses only a semantic framework and analyzes a single short story; incorporating critical discourse analysis, feminist theory, or broader socio-political perspectives would enrich the findings. Nevertheless, the study affirms that connotative meaning can serve as a powerful mechanism for subtle, emotional, and expansive social criticism in modern Arabic literature.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that connotative meaning serves as a central semantic mechanism in Nawal El-Sa'dawi's *Al-Banāt Ta'īsyu*, particularly in articulating subtle yet powerful forms of social criticism. Connotation here does not merely enhance style, but structures the narrative's critical orientation by transforming ordinary expressions into symbols of social decay, structural pressure, and gendered oppression.

From a theoretical perspective (theoretical contribution), this study expands current understandings of Arabic literary semantics by demonstrating that connotative meaning is not simply associative but functions as a foundational element that shapes narrative critique in modern Arabic literature. This positions connotative meaning as an active carrier of ideological resistance rather than a secondary linguistic feature.

Methodologically (methodological innovation), the study contributes by applying a *dilālah*-based semantic framework traditionally used for lexical analysis to a narrative text. This approach uncovers layers of implicit meaning that might remain invisible in structural, thematic, or discourse-centered analyses, showing that semantic tools can effectively map hidden patterns of power and ideology in fiction.

The broader implications (broader implications) suggest that semantic approaches can significantly enrich Arabic literary criticism, especially in examining feminist narratives, political allegory, and socially charged texts. This encourages future research to use semantic methods across genres such as poetry, novels, short fiction, and even popular media discourse to deepen the study of meaning, symbolism, and ideological critique.

While meaningful, this study is limited by its narrow corpus focusing on a single short story and its reliance on a semantic lens without integrating related perspectives such as feminist theory or critical discourse analysis. Future work should broaden the dataset, conduct cross-genre comparisons, and examine reader interpretations to enhance the understanding of how connotative meaning shapes social criticism in contemporary Arabic literature.

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TEACHER COGNITION AND EARLY MULTILITERACIES PEDAGOGY IMPLEMENTATION IN EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract

This study investigates the initial implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy (MLP) in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in Indonesia. Although the increasing complexity of language learning requires innovative pedagogical approaches, many EFL classrooms continue to rely on conventional teaching practices. In addition, limited studies have explored how teachers initially understand and apply MLP proposed by the New London Group in EFL contexts. Using a single-case qualitative design, this study involved one English teacher at an Indonesian senior high school. Data were collected through pre- and post-implementation interviews, classroom observations, and lesson plan documentation. The data were analyzed thematically to examine changes in teacher cognition and instructional practices during the implementation process. The findings indicate that the teacher's understanding of pedagogy developed from a procedural focus on activities and media toward a more conceptual and pedagogically informed perspective. This shift was reflected in lesson design, questioning strategies, classroom interaction, and the teacher's role in facilitating students' meaning-making. Furthermore, the implementation process became a significant site for professional learning, fostering reflective and student-centered teaching practices. The study contributes to the growing discussion of MLP in EFL education by emphasizing the importance of supporting teachers in translating pedagogical frameworks into effective classroom practice and professional development.

Keywords: *EFL teaching; multiliteracies pedagogy; pedagogical shifting*

1. Introduction

Contemporary EFL learning requires teaching approaches that address complex student needs, extending beyond grammar and vocabulary to meaning-making across diverse contexts. EFL students are expected not only to master linguistic forms but also to interpret and produce meaning across multiple modes of communication that are socially and culturally situated (Anstey & Bull, 2018; Cope & Kalantzis, 2013; New London Group, 1996). This shift reflects a broader reorientation in EFL pedagogy toward contextualized, meaningful, and socially responsive teaching practices (Rajendram, 2020; Reyes-Torres & Raga, 2020; Sharma, 2025).

Despite these evolving demands, many EFL classrooms continue to rely on traditional practices that emphasize grammar drills and test-based assessment, often neglecting the contextual and communicative dimensions of language learning. Such approaches limit students' opportunities to engage flexibly with meaning in authentic situations and may inadequately prepare them for the critical and communicative challenges of a globalized world (Dewi et al., 2023; Sattarova, 2024; Toba & Noor, 2019). Consequently, many EFL students remain unprepared for the complexities of a globalized world that demands critical thinking, contextual understanding, and effective communication across diverse situations (Midgett et al., 2023; Özyer & Özcan, 2020; Sattarova, 2024). This highlights a mismatch between contemporary learning demands and dominant teaching practices, necessitating pedagogical innovation.

Multiliteracies Pedagogy (MLP) offers a conceptual framework to meet these demands. Unlike traditional methods, MLP integrates diverse communication forms and contexts, fostering critical and reflective engagement with meaning-making processes (Anstey & Bull, 2018; Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Dewi et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2020). Previous research has shown that MLP can increase student participation, strengthen the connection between students' social experiences and learning materials, and expand their ability to interpret and produce meaning in various communication contexts (Akhtar et al., 2023; Chin & Yap, 2024; Dalia & Jamilah, 2024; Dewi et al., 2025; Misa, 2023; Rahman et al., 2022). By encouraging student engagement in diverse communicative situations, MLP directly addresses contemporary EFL needs (Misa, 2023; Papadopoulos & Bisiri, 2024).

On the other hand, the success of MLP implementation depends heavily on teachers' prior knowledge and pedagogical skills. Teachers' beliefs and prior knowledge shape how they interpret and apply MLP principles in classroom practice (Borg, 2003; Calafato, 2024; Lőrincz, 2022; Maia, 2022; Yap, 2023). To effectively integrate MLP, teachers must critically reflect on traditional methods (Hong & Tan, 2020; Lim et al., 2022; Maia, 2022; Sujati et al., 2024). Studies indicate that teachers often have partial or limited initial understandings of MLP, which creates challenges in aligning their instructional practices with complex pedagogical principles (Lim et al., 2022; Maia, 2022; Yap, 2022, 2023). Therefore, MLP implementation is not only a teaching stage but also a site of professional learning, enabling teachers to reflect on existing practices, adapt strategies, and adopt innovative approaches to contemporary learning demands (Akhtar et al., 2023; Esperat, 2024; Hong & Tan, 2020).

Although multiliteracies pedagogy has been widely discussed in the EFL literature, most existing studies primarily focus on instructional implementation or student learning outcomes (Lim et al., 2022; Yap, 2023; Maia, 2022). For instance, studies such as those by Joyce Lim et al. (2022) and Chin Yap (2024) largely examine how multiliteracies-based instruction supports student engagement and multimodal learning. While these studies provide important insights into the pedagogical potential of multiliteracies approaches, they offer limited attention to how teachers themselves develop pedagogical understanding during the early stages of implementation.

Furthermore, most existing studies have been conducted in contexts where multiliteracies pedagogy is already relatively established, leaving limited empirical evidence from underexplored contexts such as Indonesia and the broader Southeast Asian EFL setting. As a result, the process through which teachers interpret, negotiate, and refine multiliteracies pedagogy during initial implementation remains insufficiently understood. In particular, initial implementation is rarely conceptualized explicitly as a site of professional learning, where teachers actively reconstruct their pedagogical understanding through

classroom experience (Esperat, 2024; Papadopoulos & Bisiri, 2024). This gap calls for closer investigation of how teachers negotiate MLP during its initial stages of implementation.

Addressing this gap, this study explores how an EFL teacher's understanding of MLP changes after initial implementation and how these shifts are reflected in teaching practices. This study contributes to the literature in three ways. Theoretically, it extends research on teacher cognition by conceptualizing the early implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy as a process of professional learning in which teachers negotiate and reconstruct pedagogical understanding. Empirically, it provides qualitative insights into the interaction between teacher cognition and classroom practices during the early enactment of multiliteracies pedagogy. Contextually, it contributes evidence from the Indonesian EFL context, which remains underrepresented in current multiliteracies research. Specifically, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) How does an EFL teacher's understanding of multiliteracies pedagogy change after initial implementation?
- (2) How are these pedagogical shifts reflected in the teacher's teaching practices?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Multiliteracies Pedagogy as a Pedagogical Framework

Multiliteracies Pedagogy (MLP) was developed in response to fundamental changes in communication and literacy practices in the era of globalization and digitalization. This approach marks a significant shift from the conventional language-learning paradigm, which focuses on mastery of reading and writing in standard languages, to a broader, more contextual understanding of literacy (Rajendram, 2020). Rather than limiting literacy to purely linguistic competence, multiliteracies pedagogy broadens its scope to encompass a range of skills relevant to contemporary communication practices, such as multimodal, critical, cultural, and media literacy (Esperat, 2024; Huot et al., 2025). This broadening of the concept of literacy aligns with the view that contemporary literacy practices are no longer singular or homogeneous. Instead, literacy exists in a variety of evolving texts and is embedded in diverse social, cultural, and technological contexts (Anstey & Bull, 2018; Esperat, 2024; New London Group, 1996).

Within this framework, multiliteracies pedagogy is not understood simply as an innovation in learning methods, but rather as a pedagogical framework that shapes how teachers interpret learning, language, and students' roles. As a pedagogical framework, multiliteracies pedagogy offers a learning orientation that equips students with the skills to navigate and communicate effectively in an increasingly complex, diverse, and global world (Esperat, 2024; Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Papadopoulos & Bisiri, 2024). This framework emphasizes the importance of developing multiple forms of literacy, not only traditional print literacy but also digital, visual, and other forms of literacy that emerge along with technological developments and social practices (Dewi et al., 2023; Yelland, 2018). Thus, learning is viewed as a process of integrating various semiotic resources to build a more comprehensive understanding. While MLP broadens literacy to multimodal and cultural dimensions, challenges remain in teacher preparedness and institutional support.

Furthermore, multiliteracies pedagogy emphasizes that the learning process cannot rely solely on written texts. Meaningful learning utilizes multiple modalities, such as visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial, which complement each other in the process of creating meaning (Esperat, 2024; Mills, 2011). In the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this approach supports the development of more authentic communication

skills through the use of digital media, multimodal interactions, and engagement with diverse cultural experiences (Huot et al., 2025; Yap & Gurney, 2023). Therefore, multiliteracies pedagogy is highly relevant to EFL learning. Building on the theoretical foundations of multiliteracies pedagogy, the next subsection examines teacher cognition as a key factor in implementation.

2.1.1 Origins and Core Principles of Multiliteracies Pedagogy

The New London Group (1996) introduced multiliteracies as plural and multimodal, later expanded by Cope & Kalantzis (2015) into design/redesign principles. The shift from traditional literacy to multiliteracies reflects a paradigm shift in language education. While traditional literacy positions teachers as transmitters of linguistic knowledge, multiliteracies view learning as an active, future-oriented meaning-making process (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Huot et al, 2025). Within this framework, students are positioned as active learning agents, while teachers play a role in designing pedagogical conditions that enable this meaning-making process (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; 2013). Therefore, multiliteracies pedagogy is not intended as a teaching recipe or rigid learning procedure. Instead, this approach functions as a way of thinking that shapes how teachers understand texts, learners, and the goals and processes of learning (Papadopoulos & Bisiri, 2024; Simpson & Walsh, 2010).

2.1.2 Multiliteracies Pedagogy and Pedagogical Decision-Making

Teachers act as designers of learning, making pedagogical decisions that integrate multimodal resources (Lim & Tan-Chia, 2022). This concept emphasizes that the application of multiliteracies pedagogy lies not solely in the use of multimodal media or texts, but rather in teachers' pedagogical decisions in designing learning (Lim & Tan-Chia, 2022; Yap, 2023). Previous research indicates that when teachers' conceptual understanding of multiliteracies is limited, this approach tends to be reduced to superficial use of technology without significant changes in pedagogical orientation (Kim et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2022). To support the reflective application of multiliteracies pedagogy, Cope and Kalantzis (2015) proposed a Learning by Design framework encompassing four knowledge processes: experience, conceptualization, analysis, and application. These processes are not intended as a fixed sequence of learning steps, but rather as flexible pedagogical categories that teachers can use to design and reflect on learning practices appropriate to the classroom context. Thus, multiliteracies pedagogy demands a deep conceptual understanding from teachers as a foundation for meaningful pedagogical change.

2.2 Teacher Cognition in the EFL Context

Teacher cognition provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding how teachers interpret multiliteracies pedagogy and how this understanding influences their teaching practices. In the EFL context, teacher cognition is shaped by the interaction between teaching experience, educational background, and the social and institutional context in which teachers work (Borg, 2003).

2.2.1 Teacher Beliefs, Knowledge, and Understanding

According to Borg (2003), teacher cognition encompasses teachers' beliefs, knowledge, perceptions, and assumptions about teaching and learning. These cognitive elements provide a framework that shapes how teachers interpret new pedagogical approaches and make instructional decisions in the classroom. Research shows that

teachers' beliefs often have a greater influence on practice than theoretical knowledge acquired through formal training (Calafato, 2024; Lőrincz, 2022; Rohmani & Andriyanti, 2022). In MLP, teacher cognition shapes how educators interpret literacy as multimodal and contextual, influencing whether implementation is superficial or transformative. Previous research shows that teachers often carry initial assumptions that are not fully aligned with multiliteracies principles, thus influencing how they interpret and apply this approach in their teaching practices (Yap, 2022; Lim et al., 2022).

2.2.2 Changes in Teacher Cognition through Practice

Teacher cognition evolves gradually through practice, reflection, and negotiation between initial assumptions and classroom realities. When teachers implement new pedagogical approaches, they encounter tensions between their initial understandings and classroom realities, which encourage reflection and pedagogical adjustment. However, the experience of implementing new pedagogical approaches in the classroom allows teachers to renegotiate their initial understandings and develop more contextualized pedagogical understandings (Calafato, 2024; Maia, 2022). In the context of multiliteracies pedagogy, initial implementation functions as a space for teachers' professional learning. Initial implementation is understood as a space for teachers' professional learning, where conceptual understanding develops through interactions with classroom realities, student responses, and pedagogical reflection (Loerts & Belcher, 2024). This process allows teachers' understanding of multiliteracies pedagogy to develop gradually and contextually (Maia, 2022; Loerts & Belcher, 2024). Therefore, changes in teachers' understanding of multiliteracies pedagogy are positioned as a process that develops through initial implementation, rather than as a fully formed state prior to practice. This change is not always immediate or linear, but rather emerges as a pedagogical shift that occurs gradually through experience and ongoing reflection.

2.3 Pedagogical Shifting and Teacher Professional Learning

Pedagogical shifting refers to gradual changes in teachers' orientations toward lesson design, classroom interaction, and learner agency (Fradale, 2024). This change is not instantaneous, but rather develops reflectively and contextually (Sharma, 2025). In the context of multiliteracies pedagogy, pedagogical shifting is characterized not only by the use of multimodal texts but by changes in how teachers view literacy, meaning, and learning as social and multimodal processes (Simpson & Walsh, 2010; Rajendram, 2020).

Despite recognition of pedagogical shifts, little research has examined how initial implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy functions as a site of professional learning in EFL contexts. To address this gap, the present study adopts the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1, which explains the dynamic relationships among teacher cognition, initial implementation, pedagogical shifts, and professional learning.

2.3.1 Pedagogical Change as a Gradual Process

Research on teacher professional development indicates that pedagogical change is a complex, gradual, and non-linear process. Teachers often change their practices first before experiencing deeper shifts in understanding and beliefs. This process is influenced by classroom experiences, reflection, and the support of the professional context (Loerts & Belcher, 2024; Maia, 2022). In the context of language education, pedagogical shifting involves a shift in orientation from transmission-based learning to learning oriented toward

the design of meaning, learner agency, and socio-cultural context (Rajendram, 2020; Simpson & Walsh, 2010).

2.3.2 Initial Implementation as a Trigger for Pedagogical Shifting

The initial implementation plays a central role in triggering pedagogical shifts. Through this, teachers confront tensions between pedagogical ideals and classroom realities, prompting critical reflection on their teaching assumptions and practices (Lim et al., 2022; Yap, 2023). This experience enables teachers to make gradual pedagogical adjustments and develop a deeper understanding of multiliteracies pedagogy. In the Indonesian EFL context, several studies have shown that implementing multiliteracies pedagogy presents both opportunities and challenges for EFL teachers, particularly regarding the curriculum, teacher preparedness, and institutional context (Lim et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2022). Despite recognition of pedagogical shifts, little research has examined how the initial implementation of MLP functions as professional learning in EFL contexts, which this study addresses.

2.4 Conceptual Framework of the Study

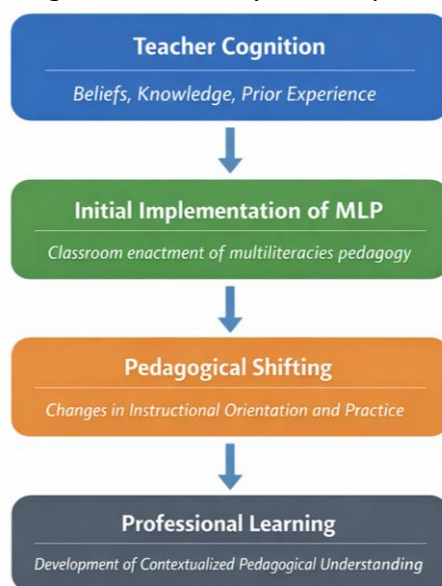
Building on the previous discussion of multiliteracies pedagogy, teacher cognition, and pedagogical change, this study adopts a conceptual perspective that positions teachers' cognitive processes as central to the enactment of pedagogical innovation. In the context of MLP, the teacher does not simply apply a predetermined instructional model; rather, she interprets and negotiates pedagogical principles through her existing beliefs, knowledge, and classroom experiences (Borg, 2003; Maia, 2022). Within this perspective, teacher cognition serves as the starting point for pedagogical enactment. Teachers' beliefs, prior knowledge, and professional experiences influence how she interprets MLP and shape her initial pedagogical decisions (Calafato, 2024; Lim et al., 2022). However, these initial understandings are often partial and continue to evolve through engagement with classroom practice.

Initial implementation, therefore, becomes a critical stage in which the teacher translates conceptual understanding into classroom practice. During this process, the teacher encounters various classroom dynamics, including student responses, instructional constraints, and contextual factors, which may challenge her initial assumptions about teaching and learning (Yap, 2023; Loerts & Belcher, 2024). Through these experiences, the teacher may begin to adjust their instructional approaches, resulting in what has been described as pedagogical shifting. This shift reflects gradual changes in how she conceptualizes learning, designs instruction, and engages students in meaning-making processes (Rajendram, 2020; Sharma, 2025). Importantly, these changes often occur incrementally as the teacher reflects on her classroom experiences and reconsiders her hermeneutical orientations.

As pedagogical shifting develops, the process simultaneously functions as a form of professional learning. The teacher constructs new pedagogical understandings by negotiating between theoretical principles and practical classroom realities (Maia, 2022; Loerts & Belcher, 2024). In this sense, early implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy can be understood not only as instructional practice but also as a site of professional learning. From this perspective, this study conceptualizes the relationship among teacher cognition, initial implementation, pedagogical shifts, and professional learning as an interconnected process, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of Teacher Cognition and Early MLP Implementation



3. Research Method

This research employed a qualitative single-case design, descriptive and exploratory in nature. Case study design is widely recognized for its ability to explore complex educational phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018). This design enabled intensive exploration of pedagogical change in a real-life EFL classroom, focusing on how an EFL teacher's understanding of multiliteracies pedagogy developed and how this development was reflected in instructional practice during initial implementation. The study was conducted at a high school that teaches English as a foreign language. The participant was purposively selected based on her active involvement in planning, implementing, and reflecting on multiliteracies-based instruction. To provide a clearer contextual description of the participant and the teaching environment, the teacher profile and classroom context are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant and Teaching Context

Aspect	Description
Participant	Female EFL teacher.
Teaching Experience	More than 20 years of teaching English at the secondary school level.
Educational Background	Master's degree in English Language Education.
Professional Role	Full-time English teacher responsible for teaching upper secondary students.
Prior Exposure to MLP	Limited prior familiarity; the teacher had not formally implemented multiliteracies pedagogy before this study.
School Type	A public senior high school where English is taught as a compulsory subject.
Student Level	Upper secondary students (Grade 12).
Student Demographics	Students represent a typical Indonesian EFL classroom with varied English proficiency and socio-academic backgrounds.

Data sources included interviews, lesson plans, and classroom observations, providing triangulated perspectives on teacher cognition and practice. To clarify the data collection procedures and the study duration, the sources of data and their characteristics are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Data Collection Procedures

Data Source	Description	Frequency / Amount	Duration
Interviews	Semi-structured interviews exploring teacher cognition before and after implementation	Two interviews (pre- and post-implementation)	Approximately [40–60] minutes each
Lesson Plans	Lesson plans prepared before and during multiliteracies implementation were analyzed to examine instructional design	Two lesson plans	During the implementation phase
Classroom Observations	Observations documenting how multiliteracies pedagogy was enacted in classroom practice	Six classroom sessions	Conducted across approximately six weeks of instruction

Semi-structured interviews were conducted before and after implementation to examine changes in the teacher’s pedagogical understanding. Lesson plans, both before and after the initial implementation, were analyzed as documentary evidence of instructional design. Classroom observations were conducted during the implementation phase. Observations focused on documenting the initial implementation rather than on a longitudinal comparison of practices (Patton, 2015).

Data were analyzed thematically through iterative coding of interviews, lesson plans, and observations following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved multiple coding cycles. The first cycle applied inductive coding to identify emerging patterns across the data. In the second cycle, related codes were grouped into broader categories and themes representing patterns in teacher cognition and instructional practice. The coding process was iterative, with repeated review of the data to refine categories and ensure coherence among themes. Examples of initial codes included references to instructional decision-making, reflections on student engagement, and adjustments to lesson design during implementation. The coding process was documented as part of the study’s audit trail to ensure analytical transparency.

The validity of the research was maintained through triangulation of data sources, audit trails, and rich descriptions to ensure the trustworthiness of interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additional strategies were applied to strengthen trustworthiness. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with the participating teacher to confirm the accuracy of findings. Peer debriefing with academic colleagues was also carried out to discuss emerging interpretations and minimize potential researcher bias. Furthermore, the researcher maintained reflexive notes during data analysis to document assumptions and analytical decisions throughout the research process. Ethical procedures included informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participant identity.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Changes in the Teacher's Understanding of Multiliteracies Pedagogy

Findings reveal a developmental trajectory in the teacher's understanding of multiliteracies pedagogy, shifting from procedural to conceptual orientation. Prior to initial implementation, the teacher's understanding was fragmented and activity-driven. Through implementation, this understanding evolved into a more coherent framework that guided instructional decision-making. This pattern aligns with studies of teacher cognition, which view teachers' pedagogical understanding as a dynamic construct formed through the interaction of knowledge, experience, and practical reflection (Borg, 2003; Lőrincz, 2022).

The analysis of interview data indicates that the teacher's understanding gradually shifted from a surface-level operational interpretation to a deeper conceptual engagement with multiliteracies pedagogy as a meaning-oriented framework. This transition reflects what Borg (2003) describes as the restructuring of teacher cognition through experiential engagement with classroom practice.

4.1.1 Procedural and Fragmented Understanding before the Initial Implementation

Pre-implementation interview data showed that initially, the teacher equated multiliteracies with varied media use, focusing on engagement rather than pedagogical goals. Multiliteracies pedagogy was perceived as a strategy to make learning more engaging by using videos, images, and digital text, rather than as a conceptual framework guiding meaning-making processes. For example, during the pre-implementation interview, the teacher explained:

"Multiliteracies pedagogy is a term I have read and heard about, describing a form of learning that involves various communication modalities, such as text, images, audio, and video. Judging from the term itself, "multi" refers to multimodality and literacy, which refers to students' literacy skills." (Pre-Interview)

This pattern of understanding reflects a general trend in EFL practice, where multiliteracies are often reduced to aspects of multimodality without deep conceptual integration (Hong & Hua, 2020; Kim et al., 2020).

The teacher's understanding of the core MLP components was not yet fully integrated; concepts such as multimodality and critical thinking were understood in isolation rather than as part of a coherent pedagogical framework. Another interview excerpt illustrates this procedural orientation:

"I don't yet fully understand the four main components. But I do remember explicit instruction and critical analysis. I haven't fully implemented them in class yet."

"The biggest challenge in getting children to think critically is that they're not used to being asked 'why' or 'how'. So, I have to continually encourage them to reflect and analyze more deeply." (Pre-Interview)

This is particularly evident in the teacher's understanding of critical framing, which is often the most challenging aspect of the teacher's initial understanding of MLP (Lim et al., 2022; Yap, 2023). At this stage, critical framing was understood narrowly as distinguishing fact from opinion, rather than analyzing purpose, audience, and social implications of texts.

The teacher also acknowledges the limits of her understanding and relies on external guidance, such as pre-existing teaching modules and learning formats.

“I usually follow the lesson format provided in the module and I have a text analysis template that they fill out every time they read a new text. But it's not MLP-based yet; it's still in separate terms.” (Pre-Interview)

This dependency indicates that, in its early stages, MLP was positioned as a set of steps or procedures to follow, rather than as a lens for thinking that guided instructional decision-making (Rajendram, 2020; Esperat, 2024).

From an analytical perspective, this orientation suggests that multiliteracies pedagogy was initially interpreted within a transmission-based epistemological framework, in which instructional decisions were driven primarily by activity management rather than by intentional knowledge design. Thus, prior to the initial implementation, MLP was understood more as an object of practical knowledge than a conceptual pedagogical framework.

4.1.2 Conceptual Tensions During the Implementation Process

As the teacher began to implement multiliteracies pedagogy in her learning practices, conceptual tensions emerged, marking a transitional phase in her understanding. The implementation process revealed a gap between their procedural understanding and the pedagogical demands of multiliteracies-based learning. Observation data illustrate moments when the teacher struggled to translate conceptual ideas into classroom interaction. For example, during one classroom discussion, the teacher initially asked a question about the main idea of a text but later reformulated it to encourage deeper interpretation:

“Why do you think the writer presents the issue in this way? What message do you think the writer wants the readers to understand?” (Classroom Observation)

This shift in questioning suggests an emerging awareness that meaning-making involves interpretive engagement rather than merely identifying textual information.

Tensions arose particularly in translating abstract concepts such as critical framing into concrete classroom practice. In the post-lesson reflection interview, the teacher described this challenge:

“So, I realized that I hadn't developed critical thinking skills in my students until I learned about multiliteracies pedagogy. And it turns out that critical thinking is crucial for students.” (Post-Interview)

This tension did not indicate a rejection of MLP, but rather reflected an ongoing reflective process where the teacher began to question her initial assumptions about learning. Analytically, this moment represents a transitional cognitive phase in which the teacher's pedagogical reasoning began to shift from activity-based instruction toward knowledge-oriented pedagogy. This finding strengthens the arguments of Maia (2022) and Papadopoulos and Bisiri (2024) that the initial implementation functions as a professional learning space that triggers the teacher's critical reflection on their pedagogical practices and beliefs.

4.1.3 Reconstruction of Pedagogical Understanding after the Initial Implementation

Post-implementation interview data indicate a reconstruction of the teacher's understanding of MLP. The teacher explained:

"Multiliteracy pedagogy is more flexible, exploring students' interests in relevant fields. Therefore, the meaning of the text is represented in a mode that students prepare. This allows for greater exploration and greater depth. This undoubtedly leads to more critical thinking and more relevant writing." (Post-Interview)

Post-implementation, the teacher reconceptualized multiliteracies pedagogy as a pedagogical orientation guiding planning, implementation, and reflection. Furthermore, critical framing evolved from distinguishing fact and opinion to analyzing the purpose, audience, and social impact of texts. For instance, during classroom discussion, students were encouraged to consider the social implications of the text being analyzed:

"Who do you think benefits from this message? Is there another perspective that might be missing?" (Observation excerpt)

This aligns with the MLP's conceptualization of analyzing the social functions and ideological implications of texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2013, 2000). From a theoretical perspective, this development reflects the emergence of what Cope and Kalantzis (2015) describe as critical knowledge processes, in which learners engage not only with textual meanings but also with the social and ideological dimensions that shape discourse.

The teacher reflected on their changing role in the classroom, from a conveyor of knowledge to a facilitator of students' meaning-making processes (Rahman et al., 2022; Loerts & Belcher, 2024). This transformation indicates a shift in epistemological orientation from transmission-based pedagogy to dialogic knowledge construction, in which authority over meaning is distributed among participants in classroom discourse. Thus, these findings demonstrate that the initial implementation serves as a professional learning tool, enabling the teacher to develop a conceptual understanding of multiliteracies pedagogy through continuous practice and reflection.

4.2 Pedagogical Shifts in the Teacher's Learning Practices

The research findings show that the development of the teacher's understanding of MLP is clearly reflected in their learning practices during the initial implementation. Rather than representing isolated instructional adjustments, these pedagogical shifts indicate a broader transformation in the teacher's epistemological stance toward classroom learning. Learning practices are understood as a manifestation of changes in the teacher's pedagogical cognition (Borg, 2003; Calafato, 2024).

4.2.1 Changes in Learning Design

Analysis of lesson plans prior to the initial implementation indicates that learning was designed in a linear manner and oriented toward achieving a final product: a text. For example, the pre-implementation lesson plan stated:

"Students are able to write various hortatory exposition texts through the writing process by paying attention to the purpose of writing, writing scheme, and linguistic form of hortatory exposition texts." (Lesson Plan 1)

Learning objectives were formulated specifically around the outcomes, while students' meaning-making processes regarding the text and its social context were not yet a primary focus. Conversely, post-implementation lesson plans demonstrate a shift in the teacher's view of the function of lesson planning. A revised lesson objective illustrates this shift:

"Students are able to create hortatory exposition texts about environmental issues that include all required structural components and persuasive language features, and transform them into a multimodal product as assessed through rubric-based evaluation by the end of the learning unit." (Lesson Plan 2)

Activities were designed to be more open and flexible, allowing for diverse student responses. This change reflects a movement from product-oriented instructional design toward a meaning-making-oriented pedagogical framework consistent with multiliteracies theory. These findings also support research by Kim et al. (2020) and Rajendram (2020), which suggests that a growing understanding of multiliteracies encourages teachers to design lessons oriented toward students' meaning-making processes rather than solely toward linguistic products.

4.2.2 Changes in Question-Asking Practices

This pedagogical shift is also evident in the way the teacher asked questions during lessons. Observation excerpts illustrate the evolution of questioning practices:

Initial questioning pattern:

"What is the main idea of this paragraph?" (Observation)

Later questioning pattern:

"Why do you think the writer chooses this example? What perspective is the writer trying to highlight?" (Observation)

Initially, questions were closed-ended and literal; later, they became reflective and interpretive, encouraging critical engagement. This change indicates a restructuring of classroom discourse practices, where questioning functions not merely as an assessment tool but as a dialogic mechanism for constructing shared meaning. Thus, the shift in questioning practices reflects a shift in the teacher's orientation from evaluating understanding to facilitating critical thinking (Huot et al., 2025).

4.2.3 Changes in Teacher Position and Role in the Classroom

Classroom observation data indicate a change in the way the teacher facilitated discussions and student interactions. In initial practice, the teacher tended to steer discussions toward specific interpretations and to provide direct evaluations of student responses. However, during the implementation phase, the teacher increasingly positioned students as active contributors to classroom discourse. Observation notes recorded the following interaction:

Student A : "I think the writer wants readers to feel worried about the environment."

Teacher : "That is interesting. Does anyone see it differently?"

During the initial implementation, the teacher tended to withhold direct evaluations, allowing space for discussions among students to develop. This interaction illustrates a shift

in discursive authority within the classroom. Rather than positioning herself as the primary evaluator of meaning, the teacher facilitated peer-to-peer interpretation and collaborative knowledge construction. This shift reflects multiliteracies pedagogy's emphasis on dialogic learning and distributed pedagogical authority (Huot et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2022; Loerts & Belcher, 2024).

4.2.4 Learning Practices as a Reflection of Changing Understanding

The observed learning practices reflect pedagogical shifts aligned with the teacher's developing understanding of MLP. Changes in lesson design, questioning practices, discussion facilitation, and the teacher's role demonstrate that evolving conceptual understanding materialized in their daily instructional decision-making. Importantly, these practices should not be interpreted as a mechanical application of multiliteracies stages. Instead, they represent an evolving pedagogical reasoning process in which the teacher selectively adapted multiliteracies principles within the constraints of the EFL classroom context. Thus, the pedagogical shifts in this study can be understood as manifestations of changes in the teacher's cognition, shaped through initial implementation and continuous reflection (Borg, 2003; Calafato, 2024). The findings, therefore, contribute to multiliteracies research by illustrating how initial implementation functions as a professional learning process through which teachers gradually reconstruct their epistemological orientation toward meaning-making, discourse, and knowledge construction in the classroom.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the initial implementation of MLP constitutes a critical site for teacher professional learning. The findings show that the teacher's understanding evolved from a fragmented, activity-oriented perception of multiliteracies to a more integrated conceptual orientation that informed instructional decision-making. Through reflective engagement with classroom practice, MLP gradually functioned not merely as a set of instructional activities but as a pedagogical framework guiding lesson design, questioning strategies, classroom dialogue, and the teacher's role in facilitating students' meaning-making processes. These findings indicate that teacher pedagogical understanding is dynamically constructed through the interaction of classroom experience, pedagogical experimentation, and reflective practice.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on MLP and teacher cognition by illustrating how the conceptual understanding of multiliteracies develops through the initial classroom implementation process. While previous studies often focus on the structural stages of multiliteracies pedagogy, the findings of this study highlight the cognitive and epistemological shifts experienced by teachers as they engage with multiliteracies principles in practice. In this sense, the study extends teacher cognition research by demonstrating how the implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy can function as a professional learning process that reshapes teachers' pedagogical reasoning and knowledge construction in classroom discourse.

The findings also carry implications for teacher development and educational policy. Specifically, they suggest that professional development initiatives should move beyond short-term concept-based training and instead provide sustained opportunities for teachers to experiment with multiliteracies practices within authentic classroom contexts. Integrating reflective practice, collaborative lesson design, and classroom-based inquiry into teacher

development programs may better support teachers in translating multiliteracies principles into meaningful pedagogical practices in EFL classrooms.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. As a single-case study involving one teacher within a specific educational context, the findings cannot be generalized to all EFL settings. In addition, the study primarily focuses on the teacher's pedagogical understanding and classroom practices during the initial implementation phase, without examining long-term instructional development or direct impacts on student learning outcomes. Future research could expand this line of inquiry by examining the implementation of multiliteracies across multiple teachers and educational contexts, as well as by conducting longitudinal studies that investigate how sustained engagement with MLP influences both teacher cognition and student learning over time. Such studies may provide deeper insights into how multiliteracies-oriented teaching practices develop and become embedded within EFL classroom environments.

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LINGUISTIC HEDGING STRATEGIES IN DONALD TRUMP'S PEACE FORUM SPEECH: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examines hedging strategies in a contemporary diplomatic speech delivered by Donald Trump, focusing on how epistemic stance is calibrated in a high-stakes political context. Drawing on Hyland's (1998, 2005) metadiscourse framework, the study employs qualitative discourse analysis alongside frequency-based identification of hedging devices. The analysis identifies 34 instances of hedging, with lexical judgmental verbs such as *I think*, and *I believe* constituting the dominant category (62%), followed by modal auxiliaries including *may* and *might*. The findings show that hedging is systematically clustered in discourse segments addressing future negotiations and geopolitical uncertainty, while more assertive constructions are used when referring to past achievements. This patterned alternation suggests a form of controlled epistemic modulation, defined in this study as the deliberate calibration of commitment strength in response to contextual volatility and diplomatic risk. Rather than signaling weakness or indecision, hedging in the analyzed speech functions as a rhetorical resource for balancing authority and negotiability, contributing to the construction of a diplomatic yet assertive leadership persona. The study offers a refined perspective on metadiscourse by highlighting the central role of lexical hedging verbs in political stance management and proposing a nuanced account of epistemic modulation in contemporary diplomacy.

Keywords: *board of peace; hedging; metadiscourse; political discourse; speech.*

1. Introduction

In the context of escalating geopolitical tensions, shifting alliances, and ongoing global conflicts, political discourse has become an increasingly critical site for examining how language constructs power, persuasion, and ideological positioning. Contemporary diplomatic communication, particularly in forums addressing peace, security, and international cooperation, requires a careful balance between assertiveness and strategic ambiguity. Within the field of language studies, analyzing political speech is therefore essential for understanding how linguistic choices shape public perception and influence international relations.

Among the rhetorical strategies employed by political leaders, hedging plays a particularly significant role in negotiating stance and managing uncertainty (Hyland, 1998, 2019). Hedging enables speakers to express evaluation, probability, and strategic flexibility without committing to absolute claims, allowing them to navigate sensitive political contexts while maintaining credibility. While hedging has been extensively examined in academic

discourse, its function in diplomatic and peace-related political communication remains underexplored.

In contemporary global politics, diplomatic speeches frequently address high-risk issues such as armed conflict, nuclear policy, and international alliances. In such contexts, categorical or overly explicit statements may carry substantial geopolitical consequences. As a result, political leaders strategically deploy linguistic resources that mitigate commitment while preserving authority. Recent studies have emphasized the role of stance-taking and metadiscourse in political rhetoric, demonstrating that interactional markers shape persuasion, credibility, and audience alignment (Fetzer & Bull, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). However, limited attention has been given to judgmental verb hedging in global peace forums, particularly in spoken diplomatic discourse.

The speech delivered by Donald Trump at the Board of Peace Forum provides a relevant case for examining hedging strategies in high-stakes diplomatic communication. Although Trump is widely characterized as an assertive and direct communicator, his peace-oriented speech reveals a more nuanced approach to stance management. This apparent contrast raises an important linguistic question: how does a leader associated with rhetorical assertiveness employ hedging in diplomatic contexts? Addressing this question contributes to a more refined understanding of political persuasion and discourse strategy.

Previous research has primarily focused on hedging in academic writing and institutional (Hyland, 1998, 2017), while more recent studies have explored political discourse and stance construction, highlighting the role of interactional resources in shaping political identity (Blassnig, 2023; House et al., 2024). Nevertheless, research that integrates quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative interpretation of judgmental verb hedging in peace diplomacy speeches remains limited. This gap underscores the need for a systematic investigation that combines discourse analysis with empirical frequency data to enhance methodological rigor. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of hedging devices, particularly judgmental verbs, are used in Trump's diplomatic speech?
2. What pragmatic and rhetorical functions do these hedging devices perform?
3. How do these hedging strategies contribute to the construction of diplomatic stance and controlled epistemic modulation?

To address these questions, this study analyzes hedging strategies in Trump's Board of Peace Forum speech through the lens of interpersonal metadiscourse theory. Specifically, it identifies the types and frequency of judgmental hedging verbs, examines their pragmatic and rhetorical functions, and interprets their role in constructing diplomatic ambiguity. By integrating qualitative discourse analysis with quantitative frequency measurement, this study introduces the concept of controlled epistemic modulation to explain how hedging operates selectively in political speech. This perspective extends the application of hedging theory beyond academic discourse and demonstrates its relevance to contemporary global political communication.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to language and discourse studies by refining the application of metadiscourse theory in political contexts. In addition, the study offers pedagogical implications for language teaching, particularly in English for Specific Purposes and political communication courses, where understanding persuasive and diplomatic language strategies is increasingly important.

2. Literature Review

Hedging has become a central concept in discourse studies because it reflects how speakers manage uncertainty, politeness, and epistemic positioning. The concept was initially introduced in linguistic research as a means of expressing fuzziness or tentativeness in communication. Early work emphasized that hedging allows speakers to avoid categorical claims and maintain interpersonal harmony in interaction. Since then, the notion of hedging has developed into a multidimensional construct encompassing epistemic, pragmatic, and rhetorical dimensions. In particular, hedging is closely linked to stance-taking and metadiscourse, which shape how speakers construct relationships with audiences and negotiate authority (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Hyland, 2022).

Hyland's interpersonal metadiscourse framework has been widely used to examine how linguistic resources signal speakers' attitudes, judgments, and degrees of commitment. Within this framework, hedges function as interactional resources that reduce the strength of propositions and open space for alternative viewpoints. This approach has been highly influential in academic discourse research, demonstrating that hedging is not merely a sign of weakness but a strategic rhetorical tool that enhances credibility and persuasion. Recent developments further extend metadiscourse analysis to political, institutional, and diplomatic discourse. However, these studies tend to prioritize written genres, particularly academic texts, leaving spoken political discourse comparatively underexplored.

In political communication, hedging plays a crucial role in balancing authority and flexibility. Political leaders operate in complex and unpredictable global contexts, where definitive statements may entail diplomatic risks. Consequently, hedging enables them to express commitment while maintaining strategic ambiguity. Previous studies show that political actors employ hedges to mitigate responsibility, manage face, and maintain audience alignment (Brown & Treviño, 2021). A limitation of this line of research is its predominant focus on modal verbs and adverbs, with relatively little attention given to lexical verbs as hedging devices.

Judgmental verbs represent a specific category of hedging that expresses evaluation, belief, or probability. Verbs such as *think*, *believe*, *suggest*, and *seem* allow speakers to frame propositions as subjective interpretations rather than objective facts, thereby reducing potential conflict and enhancing persuasive effectiveness. In this study, judgmental hedging verbs are defined as lexical verbs that encode epistemic stance by signaling the speaker's personal evaluation, belief, or degree of certainty, while simultaneously mitigating propositional commitment. (Added explicit definition for terminology consistency) In diplomatic discourse, these verbs contribute to relational positioning and signal openness to negotiation. Recent research highlights that evaluative stance and epistemic judgment are central to political credibility and leadership identity (Biber et al., 2021). However, the specific role of judgmental verb hedging in high-level peace diplomacy remains insufficiently examined.

Another important dimension is the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches in hedging research. Earlier studies predominantly relied on qualitative discourse analysis, offering in-depth insights into rhetorical functions but limited empirical generalizability. More recent work advocates mixed-method approaches that combine frequency analysis with contextual interpretation to produce more robust findings (Koh, 2023). Nevertheless, such integrated approaches are still relatively scarce in political speech analysis, particularly in emerging contexts such as peace forums and global governance discourse.

In addition, the role of hedging in constructing leadership identity has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Political leaders strategically employ stance markers to present themselves as both authoritative and open to dialogue. This dual positioning is especially important in peace discourse, where assertiveness must be balanced with diplomacy. Studies suggest that effective political rhetoric often relies on controlled ambiguity to maintain credibility while managing uncertainty (Fetzer & Weizman, 2014). However, few studies have examined how leaders known for assertive communication styles adapt their rhetorical strategies in diplomatic settings.

Overall, existing research has established that hedging is a key resource for stance-taking and persuasion, particularly within Hyland's metadiscourse framework, and has demonstrated its importance in both academic and political discourse. However, three key gaps remain. First, prior studies largely focus on modal and adverbial hedging, with limited attention to judgmental verb hedging as a distinct category. Second, research on political hedging often emphasizes written or institutional texts, leaving spoken diplomatic discourse—especially in peace forums—underexplored. Third, although mixed-method approaches are increasingly advocated, few studies systematically integrate quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative discourse interpretation in examining political speech.

This study addresses these gaps by analyzing judgmental verb hedging in a contemporary diplomatic speech delivered by Donald Trump at the Board of Peace Forum. It applies Hyland's interpersonal metadiscourse framework to spoken political discourse, integrates qualitative and quantitative methods, and introduces the concept of controlled epistemic modulation to explain how hedging is selectively deployed to balance authority and flexibility in high-stakes diplomatic contexts.

By addressing these gaps, this research contributes to language and discourse studies, political communication, and applied linguistics. It also offers practical implications for teaching political communication, English for diplomacy, and intercultural negotiation, where understanding strategic language use is essential in global contexts.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative-dominant mixed-method approach to investigate hedging strategies in the speech delivered by Donald Trump at the Board of Peace Forum. (Improvement 2: Mixed-method explicitly stated) While qualitative discourse analysis serves as the primary analytical framework, quantitative frequency analysis is incorporated to identify the distribution and dominance of hedging devices. This combination allows for both in-depth interpretation and empirical pattern identification. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for exploring linguistic meaning, speaker stance, and pragmatic functions in political discourse. The study adopts an interpretive paradigm, emphasizing contextual meaning construction rather than statistical generalization.

The primary data consist of the official speech delivered by Donald Trump at the Board of Peace Forum. (Improvement 1: Replicability details added) The speech was delivered on 19 Feb 2026, with a total duration of approximately 50:03 minutes and a transcript length of 8178 words. The video was obtained from an official public platform https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVLfhspv_wY&t=7s to ensure authenticity and reliability. The speech was selected purposively as it represents contemporary diplomatic discourse in a high-stakes international context.

The data collection process involved downloading the video, repeatedly listening to the speech, and producing a verbatim transcription to preserve linguistic accuracy, including

modal expressions, pauses, and emphasis. This transcription procedure follows established practices in discourse analysis to retain pragmatic and rhetorical features of spoken language (O'Keeffe et al., 2021). After transcription, the data were segmented into clauses based on systemic functional linguistic principles, which consider clauses as key units of interpersonal meaning.

The analytical framework is based on Hyland's hedging model, which integrates linguistic form and pragmatic function. The analysis focuses particularly on judgmental hedging verbs (e.g., believe, think, assume, suggest), as these forms are central to expressing epistemic stance and subjective evaluation in political discourse.

The coding process was conducted in several stages. First, all potential hedging expressions were identified manually through close reading of the transcript. These included modal verbs, epistemic lexical verbs, adverbs of uncertainty, tentative adjectives, and approximators. To ensure consistency, identification was guided by Hyland's functional criteria, where a linguistic item is considered a hedge if it reduces propositional commitment or signals epistemic uncertainty. Second, each identified item was verified contextually to distinguish hedging usage from literal or non-epistemic meanings.

The coding was primarily manual, supported by systematic annotation using a coding sheet to track frequency and categories. (Improvement 3: manual/software clarification) Where necessary, basic text-search functions were used to ensure that recurrent lexical items (e.g., I think, I believe) were consistently identified across the dataset.

To enhance reliability, a second coder with a background in linguistics independently reviewed a subset of the data (approximately 20%), and inter-rater agreement was calculated using percentage agreement. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus to refine the coding scheme.

After identification, hedging expressions were categorized according to Hyland's taxonomy, including epistemic modality, evidentiality, tentativeness, and judgmental hedging. The classification aimed to determine dominant hedging types and their distribution patterns. Quantitative frequency analysis was then applied to calculate the occurrence and percentage of each hedging category, providing empirical support for the qualitative interpretation.

The interpretive stage examined the pragmatic and rhetorical functions of hedging strategies. Specifically, the analysis explored how hedging is used to manage uncertainty, maintain diplomatic flexibility, reduce political commitment, enhance credibility, and build rapport with international audiences. This stage considers the broader socio-political context, including the international setting of the speech, the speaker's political positioning, and the communicative goal of promoting cooperation and stability (Fairclough, 2015; Partington, 2022).

To ensure research rigor and trustworthiness, several validation strategies were applied. Credibility was maintained through repeated listening and transcript verification. The study employed theoretical triangulation by integrating metadiscourse theory and discourse analysis frameworks. Thick description was used to provide detailed contextual interpretation. In addition, peer debriefing and expert consultation were conducted to minimize researcher bias and strengthen interpretive validity. These procedures align with established qualitative research standards for ensuring credibility, dependability, and analytical robustness (Lincoln et al., 1985).

4. Results and Discussion

In line with the research objectives stated earlier, the analysis first identifies the dominant forms of hedging and then examines their pragmatic and rhetorical functions in Donald Trump's Board of Peace Forum speech. Moving beyond descriptive categorization, the discussion situates the findings within interpersonal metadiscourse theory and contemporary political discourse studies. The analysis demonstrates that hedging in this speech functions as a mechanism of controlled epistemic modulation, whereby commitment is strategically calibrated according to geopolitical sensitivity.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Frequency, Distribution, and Strategic Patterning of Hedging

The analysis identifies a total of 34 hedging instances, with judgmental hedging verbs constituting the dominant interactional resource. The frequency of judgemental hedging verbs below:

Table 1

Frequency of Judgmental Hedging Verbs

Hedge Type	Frequency	Percentage
I think	12	35%
I believe	7	20%
I hope	5	15%
Modal Verbs	6	18%
Others	4	12%
Total	34	100%

Among them, I think appears with the highest frequency, followed by I believe, I hope, and I want. Modal auxiliaries such as may, might, and could occur less frequently and are largely confined to future-oriented propositions. Importantly, the distribution of hedging is systematically patterned across discourse segments. For example, in the statement: *"I think it's the most consequential board ever created."* the clause is grammatically structured as a declarative proposition. However, the insertion of I think transforms what could be an absolute evaluative claim into a subjective stance marker. According to (Hyland, 2019), such hedges reduce the illocutionary force of propositions and open dialogic space for negotiation. The epistemic responsibility shifts from objective fact to personal assessment, thus mitigating potential contestation. Similarly, in the excerpt: *"I think they become friends."* the speaker projects a prediction regarding international actors. The use of I think frames the proposition as speculative rather than guaranteed. In diplomatic discourse, where predictions carry political risk, this hedging device allows interpretative flexibility without signaling uncertainty overtly.

The verb I believe functions in a slightly different epistemic register. Consider: *"I believe we will achieve lasting peace."* Compared to I think, I believe conveys stronger affective commitment while still retaining subjectivity. It constructs conviction without asserting inevitability. This subtle gradation reflects what can be termed epistemic scaling — a calibrated adjustment of certainty levels depending on rhetorical need. Modal auxiliaries appear primarily in conditional or forward-looking contexts: *"It may lead to a new era of cooperation."* *"There could be tremendous opportunities."* Here, epistemic modality explicitly encodes probability. Unlike judgmental verbs, modal auxiliaries grammatically encode

uncertainty within the proposition itself. However, their lower frequency suggests that the speaker prefers subjective lexical hedging over grammatical modalization in managing diplomatic ambiguity.

A significant finding is the topic-based distribution of hedges. Segments describing past economic achievements are largely unhedged, for example: *"We created the strongest economy in history."* This contrast between unhedged achievement claims and hedged diplomatic projections indicates strategic rhetorical alternation. Hedging intensifies in segments concerning peace negotiations, international cooperation, and future geopolitical outcomes, while assertiveness dominates self-legitimizing narratives. This patterned variation supports the argument that hedging is contextually calibrated rather than stylistically habitual.

4.1.2 Pragmatic and Rhetorical Functions of Judgmental Hedges

The qualitative analysis reveals four interrelated pragmatic functions.

1. Epistemic Mitigation

Judgmental verbs reduce propositional commitment. In: *"I think we're very close to something historic,"* the hedge buffers the predictive claim. If the anticipated outcome does not materialize, the epistemic burden remains mitigated. This aligns with (Hyland, 1998) view that hedges function as risk-management devices in high-stakes discourse.

2. Diplomatic Face Management

In discussions of international relations, categorical assertions may threaten relational harmony. The use of: *"I believe they want peace."* Attributes intention without imposing factual certainty. This indirectness protects interlocutors' face and avoids accusatory tone, consistent with pragmatic politeness strategies in political discourse.

3. Persuasive Subjectivity

By foregrounding personal cognition (I think, I believe), the speaker constructs an ethos of reflective leadership. Rather than presenting himself as dogmatic, he appears deliberative. This rhetorical positioning enhances credibility by signaling evaluative reasoning rather than authoritarian certainty.

4. Authority–Flexibility Balance

A central finding is the oscillation between assertive and hedged constructions. When legitimizing past performance, the speaker employs categorical claims. When addressing uncertain geopolitical processes, hedging increases. This alternation reflects strategic stance modulation rather than inconsistency.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Hedging as Context-Sensitive Stance Calibration

The results suggest that hedging is systematically patterned according to thematic sensitivity and geopolitical risk, rather than randomly distributed. While previous studies on political discourse have emphasized that hedging serves as a resource for managing accountability and projecting credibility. However, the present findings suggest a more dynamic pattern: hedging intensifies specifically in segments dealing with future negotiations, international cooperation, and uncertain geopolitical developments, while it

decreases in segments describing past achievements. This patterned distribution indicates not random stylistic preference but context-sensitive epistemic calibration.

This finding extends prior research by demonstrating that hedging is not uniformly embedded across political speech but strategically clustered in high-risk discursive zones. In this sense, hedging operates as a mechanism of rhetorical risk management, allowing the speaker to preserve authority while maintaining negotiability. This indicates that hedging functions as a mechanism of context-sensitive epistemic calibration, allowing speakers to adjust commitment levels depending on political risk.

4.2.2 Lexical Hedging and the Construction of Diplomatic Persona

Another significant implication concerns the preference for lexical judgmental verbs (*I think*, *I believe*) over modal auxiliaries (*may*, *might*). While modal verbs grammatically encode uncertainty, lexical hedges foreground personal cognition and evaluation. This distinction is crucial.

By repeatedly using expressions such as "*I think*" and "*I believe*", the speaker frames propositions as reflective judgments rather than impersonal probabilities. This lexical choice constructs a persona of deliberative leadership rather than detached speculation. Unlike modal auxiliaries, which abstract uncertainty into grammatical form, judgmental verbs personalize epistemic positioning.

This pattern suggests that hedging in this speech contributes not only to uncertainty management but also to identity construction. The speaker presents himself as confident yet thoughtful, assertive yet open to negotiation. Such dual positioning aligns with findings in political discourse studies that effective leadership rhetoric requires balancing decisiveness with adaptability.

4.2.3 Controlled Epistemic Modulation: A Conceptual Refinement

Building on these observations, this study proposes the notion of controlled epistemic modulation to account for the patterned alternation between assertive and hedged constructions.

Controlled epistemic modulation refers to the deliberate adjustment of epistemic strength across discourse segments in response to contextual volatility. Unlike general notions of strategic ambiguity, which emphasize vagueness, controlled epistemic modulation highlights calibrated variation in commitment intensity depending on: thematic sensitivity (peace negotiations vs. economic achievements), temporal orientation (future projections vs. past accomplishments), and political risk exposure (international diplomacy vs. domestic validation).

This conceptual refinement advances metadiscourse theory by demonstrating that hedging is not simply a marker of tentativeness but a structured rhetorical mechanism embedded within broader leadership strategy. The alternation between categorical claims and hedged projections reflects discursive competence in navigating high-stakes diplomatic settings.

4.2.4 Implications for Political Discourse Studies

The findings contribute to political linguistics by illustrating that hedging functions as a strategic authority-management device rather than as an indicator of uncertainty alone. In diplomatic contexts, excessive assertiveness may appear confrontational, while excessive

tentativeness may undermine credibility. The patterned deployment observed in this speech demonstrates a calibrated middle ground.

Moreover, this study underscores the importance of examining lexical hedging as a central resource in spoken political discourse. While previous research has frequently emphasized modal auxiliaries, the present analysis suggests that cognitive verbs may play a more prominent role in constructing interpersonal alignment in public political speech.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that hedging plays a significant role in shaping the pragmatic and rhetorical functions of Donald Trump's speech at the First Board of Peace meeting. Hedging is not merely used to express uncertainty or politeness, but functions strategically to construct diplomatic positioning, mitigate potential criticism, and maintain flexibility in political commitments.

The analysis shows that the use of judgmental verbs, modal expressions, and other hedging devices enables the speaker to balance authority with caution, particularly in sensitive contexts such as peace, international cooperation, and global stability. In this way, hedging contributes to persuasive discourse by framing propositions as negotiable and adaptable—an essential feature of effective diplomatic communication.

This study contributes theoretically by proposing the concept of controlled epistemic modulation, which explains how speakers deliberately adjust commitment levels across discourse segments in response to contextual sensitivity and political risk. This perspective extends existing metadiscourse research by demonstrating that hedging operates as a structured and context-dependent rhetorical strategy rather than a general marker of tentativeness.

In addition to its theoretical contribution, the study offers pedagogical implications for language education, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and discourse analysis. The findings highlight the importance of developing learners' pragmatic awareness, critical discourse competence, and sensitivity to rhetorical strategies in political communication.

For future research, comparative studies across political leaders, cultural contexts, and international forums are recommended to further explore variation in hedging strategies. Moreover, integrating corpus-based methods and computational discourse analysis could enhance analytical rigor and expand the scope of investigation. Overall, this study reinforces the view of hedging as a dynamic and multifunctional linguistic resource in political discourse and provides a foundation for further theoretical and applied research in this area.

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RELIGIOUS CONTACT AND LOANWORD STRATIFICATION IN INDONESIAN: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

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Abstract

This study examines how successive waves of religious contact—including Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian influences—have contributed to loanword stratification in the Indonesian language. Religious contact has been a major driver of lexical borrowing across multilingual societies, yet its role in producing stratified loanword systems within national languages remains insufficiently understood. However, few studies have examined how successive waves of religious contact produce stratified lexical systems in contemporary Indonesian. Using a corpus-based analysis of 1,402 lexical items compiled from major dictionaries and national linguistic corpora, the study classifies loanwords according to their etymological origins and semantic domains. The results reveal a layered pattern of borrowing aligned with historical phases of religious and cultural contact. Sanskrit-derived terms constitute the largest group (31.2%), followed by Dutch (24.2%), Arabic (13.1%), and Portuguese (4.6%), with smaller contributions from Hindi, Pali, and regional languages. While these lexical strata reflect distinct historical influences, many borrowed forms have become fully integrated into contemporary Indonesian across religious, institutional, and everyday domains. The findings demonstrate that religious contact contributed not only to specialized religious vocabulary but also to broader layers of lexical borrowing that now form part of a shared sociolinguistic repertoire. By linking historical language contact with patterns of lexical integration, this study highlights how religious interaction can produce enduring stratification within the Indonesian lexicon.

Keywords: *Corpus-based analysis; Indonesian language; lexical borrowing; lexical stratification; religious contact; sociolinguistics.*

1. Introduction

Religious contact has long been recognized as an important driver of linguistic change in multilingual societies. Throughout history, the spread of religious traditions has facilitated the movement of lexical items across linguistic boundaries through trade, missionary activity, education, and institutional governance (Nesher, 2025, p. 40). These processes often leave lasting traces in national vocabularies, particularly in semantic domains related to ritual practice, ethics, law, and social organization. Despite the acknowledged importance

of religious contact in language history, the mechanisms through which successive religious encounters produce stratified lexical systems in contemporary languages remain theoretically underdeveloped and empirically underexplored.

Previous studies on language contact in Southeast Asia have documented extensive lexical borrowing from Sanskrit, Arabic, and various European languages into Malay and Indonesian (De Casparis et al., 1997, p. 11; Julul et al., 2020, p. 143). Research has examined phonological adaptation, semantic change, and the historical diffusion of loanwords within the region. However, much of this scholarship focuses on individual source languages or on etymological cataloguing of borrowed vocabulary. Fewer studies have examined how multiple waves of religious and cultural contact interact over time to generate layered lexical systems that remain active in modern language use (Harahap et al., 2025, p. 29).

Indonesia provides a particularly revealing context for examining this phenomenon. As the world's largest Muslim-majority nation and one of the most linguistically diverse societies in the world, Indonesia has experienced successive periods of religious and cultural contact over more than a millennium. Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms, the spread of Islam through maritime trade networks, and the arrival of Christian missions during the colonial period each contributed new lexical resources to the evolving Malay-Indonesian linguistic system. As a result, contemporary Indonesian contains a complex mixture of loanwords originating from Sanskrit, Arabic, Portuguese, Dutch, and other regional languages, reflecting different historical phases of religious interaction (Musgrave, 2014, p. 89; Ricklefs, 1993, p. 8).

These historical encounters have left visible traces in everyday language use. Many lexical items originally associated with specific religious traditions now appear across a wide range of social contexts, including administration, education, media discourse, and daily conversation. Expressions such as *Insha Allah*, *Alhamdulillah*, and *Amin*—derived from Arabic—are widely used in everyday interaction, while Sanskrit-derived terms such as *agama* or *bahasa* function as neutral institutional vocabulary (Abdulkarim et al., 2020, p. 378). This coexistence suggests that religiously mediated borrowing may contribute not only to lexical expansion but also to the formation of shared linguistic repertoires across communities.

This study investigates how religious contact has contributed to the formation and lexical stratification of loanwords in the Indonesian language. Drawing on a corpus-based analysis of 1,402 lexical items compiled from major dictionaries and national linguistic corpora, the study examines the etymological origins of religiously associated vocabulary and explores how these lexical layers correspond to historical periods of religious influence.

Specifically, this study addresses three main research questions:

1. What proportion of Indonesian vocabulary derives from religiously associated languages?
2. Through which historical processes did these loanwords enter Indonesian?
3. How are these loanwords used in contemporary Indonesian?

By linking historical etymology with patterns of contemporary language use, this study contributes to broader discussions in sociolinguistics and historical linguistics concerning the role of cultural and religious contact in shaping national languages. The findings highlight how successive waves of religious interaction have produced a stratified

lexical system in Indonesian that continues to function as part of a shared sociolinguistic repertoire in a multilingual society.

2. Literature Review

The Indonesian lexicon reflects multiple layers of linguistic contact shaped by successive religious and cultural encounters. Previous research has extensively documented lexical borrowing from Sanskrit, Arabic, and European languages, highlighting the role of trade, religion, and colonialism in shaping the vocabulary of Malay and Indonesian (Mahfud et al., 2021, p. 229; Rokib et al., 2023, p. 530). These studies have demonstrated how borrowed terms undergo phonological adaptation and semantic change, becoming integrated into local linguistic systems (Batais & Wiltshire, 2022, p. 247; Julul et al., 2020, p. 139).

However, much of the existing literature has focused on individual source languages or on descriptive cataloguing of loanwords. Research on Sanskrit influence emphasizes its role in governance, philosophy, and literary traditions, while studies on Arabic borrowing highlight its importance in religious discourse and everyday communication (Alnizar et al., 2025). Similarly, scholarship on European influence, particularly Portuguese and Dutch, has examined the introduction of administrative and institutional vocabulary during the colonial period.

While these studies provide valuable insights into the origins and adaptation of loanwords, fewer have examined how these multiple layers of borrowing interact to form a stratified lexical system within contemporary Indonesian. In particular, the relationship between religious contact and the long-term structuring of the lexicon remains underexplored. Existing research rarely considers how successive waves of religious influence contribute not only distinct lexical items but also enduring patterns of coexistence among different etymological layers.

Recent studies in sociolinguistics and language contact theory suggest that borrowing processes in multilingual societies often operate through accumulation rather than replacement, resulting in layered lexical systems that reflect historical trajectories of cultural interaction (Harahap et al., 2025, p. 30). From this perspective, the Indonesian lexicon can be understood as a product of cumulative contact, in which Sanskrit, Arabic, and European elements coexist and interact within a shared linguistic repertoire.

Building on this perspective, the present study examines how loanwords introduced through religious contact contribute to lexical stratification in Indonesian. By combining corpus-based analysis with historical interpretation, this study seeks to bridge the gap between etymological description and sociolinguistic explanation, providing a more integrated account of how religious contact shapes the structure of the lexicon over time.

2.1 Sanskrit Foundations

The earliest layer of lexical borrowing in Indonesian derives from Sanskrit, introduced through Hindu-Buddhist cultural and political influence in the Indonesian archipelago. Previous studies have shown that Sanskrit functioned as a language of governance, religion, and intellectual discourse, contributing a substantial number of lexical items to Old Malay and later Indonesian (Gil, 2024, p. 490).

Sanskrit-derived loanwords are particularly prominent in domains such as governance (*raja*, *desa*), philosophy (*jiwa*, *rasa*), and law (*jaksa*) (Mahfud et al., 2021). These terms illustrate how early cultural and religious contact established a foundational layer of vocabulary that continues to shape the Indonesian lexicon.

Importantly, this Sanskrit layer has not been replaced by later borrowings but has remained embedded within the language, coexisting with subsequent lexical influences. This pattern supports the view that lexical borrowing in Indonesian operates through cumulative layering rather than replacement, forming a stratified lexical system over time.

2.2 Arabic Enrichment

The spread of Islam introduced a substantial layer of Arabic-derived vocabulary into Malay and Indonesian, primarily through trade networks, religious education, and institutional practices. Previous research has documented the extensive influence of Arabic on the Indonesian lexicon, with loanwords spanning both religious and everyday domains (Alnizar et al., 2025; Julul et al., 2020, p. 139).

Arabic loanwords are particularly prominent in religious discourse, including terms such as *iman* ("faith"), *masjid* ("mosque"), and *zakat* ("almsgiving"). However, their influence extends beyond strictly theological contexts, with many items becoming integrated into everyday language, such as *dunia* ("world") and *kursi* ("chair"). This dual distribution illustrates how lexical items introduced through religious contact can expand into broader semantic domains.

Studies have also shown that Arabic borrowings in Indonesian often undergo semantic specialization or extension. For example, *shalat* retains a specific religious meaning, while *ayat* has expanded to include broader interpretations such as "legal clause" or "sign" (Alnizar et al., 2025). These processes highlight the dynamic adaptation of borrowed vocabulary within local linguistic systems.

Importantly, the integration of Arabic loanwords reflects not only linguistic processes but also sociocultural dynamics. As noted in previous studies, the codification of Arabic-derived vocabulary in official dictionaries such as the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI) can influence which forms are standardized and widely adopted (Rokib et al., 2023, p. 531). This suggests that lexical borrowing is shaped not only by contact but also by institutional and ideological factors.

From the perspective of lexical stratification, Arabic-derived vocabulary constitutes a distinct but overlapping layer within the Indonesian lexicon. Rather than replacing earlier Sanskrit-derived terms, Arabic loanwords coexist with them, contributing to a cumulative and stratified lexical system shaped by successive waves of religious contact.

2.3 European Layers

European contact introduced an additional layer of lexical borrowing into Indonesian, primarily through Portuguese and Dutch influence during the colonial period. These borrowings differ from earlier Sanskrit and Arabic layers in that they are less directly tied to religious transmission and more closely associated with administration, education, and technological change (Wijaya et al., 2021, p. 90).

Portuguese influence, dating from the sixteenth century, contributed a limited but significant set of loanwords, many of which are associated with religion, trade, and material culture. Examples include *gereja* ("church"), *Natal* ("Christmas"), and *sabun* ("soap").

Although smaller in scale compared to later borrowings, Portuguese lexical items represent an early stage of European linguistic influence in the region.

Dutch influence, by contrast, constitutes one of the largest layers of borrowing in Indonesian. During several centuries of colonial rule, Dutch served as the language of administration, education, and governance, introducing a wide range of lexical items into Malay and later Indonesian. These include terms such as *kantor* (“office”), *sekolah* (“school”), and *universitas* (“university”), which remain central to modern institutional vocabulary.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, European loanwords illustrate how colonial and institutional power structures shape lexical adoption and standardization (Harahap et al., 2025, p. 34). Unlike earlier borrowings associated with religious transmission, Dutch-derived vocabulary became embedded in formal and bureaucratic domains, reflecting the role of colonial governance in structuring linguistic change.

In terms of lexical stratification, European borrowings constitute a later layer that coexists with earlier Sanskrit and Arabic elements. Rather than displacing these earlier forms, European-derived terms expand the functional range of the lexicon, contributing to a cumulative and multi-layered linguistic system shaped by successive historical encounters.

2.4 Mechanisms of Adaptation

Lexical borrowing in Indonesian involves systematic processes of phonological, morphological, and semantic adaptation that enable foreign lexical items to be integrated into the local linguistic system. Previous studies have shown that borrowed forms are typically adjusted to conform to Indonesian phonotactic constraints, often resulting in simplified consonant clusters and vowel substitutions (Batais & Wiltshire, 2022; Julul et al., 2020, p. 138).

Phonological adaptation is particularly evident in borrowings from European languages. For example, Dutch *schroef* becomes *sekrup* in Indonesian, illustrating the restructuring of consonant clusters to fit Indonesian phonological patterns (Ricklefs, 1993, p. 11). Similarly, Arabic loanwords may undergo phonetic simplification while retaining recognizable morphological structures, as seen in forms such as *zakat* and *iman*.

In addition to phonological change, semantic adaptation plays a central role in the integration of loanwords. Borrowed terms may undergo specialization or extension in meaning depending on their usage context. For instance, certain religious terms retain their original meanings, while others expand into broader domains of everyday usage. These processes reflect the dynamic interaction between imported lexical forms and local semantic systems (Julul et al., 2020, p. 138).

Morphological integration further contributes to the assimilation of loanwords, as borrowed items become compatible with Indonesian affixation patterns. This allows loanwords to participate fully in grammatical processes, reinforcing their incorporation into the lexicon.

From a broader perspective, these mechanisms of adaptation facilitate the long-term stability of borrowed vocabulary within Indonesian. By enabling lexical items from different historical sources to conform to a shared linguistic system, phonological and semantic adaptation support the coexistence of multiple etymological layers. This process is central to the formation of a stratified lexicon shaped by successive waves of language contact.

2.5 Sociolinguistic Functions of Loanwords in Indonesian

Loanwords in Indonesian do not merely reflect historical processes of language contact; they also perform important sociolinguistic functions in contemporary communication. Rather than being restricted to specific domains, borrowed lexical items operate as markers of register, identity, and social interaction, shaping how speakers position themselves within diverse communicative contexts (Lauder, 2010).

One key function of loanwords is their role in signaling formality and institutional authority. Sanskrit- and Dutch-derived terms are frequently associated with formal registers, particularly in administrative, legal, and educational contexts. Their continued use reflects the historical prestige of these linguistic sources and their institutionalization within official discourse. In contrast, Arabic-derived expressions often function in both formal and informal settings, bridging religious and everyday communication.

Loanwords also contribute to the expression of social identity and cultural affiliation. The use of specific lexical items can index religious belonging, educational background, or participation in particular speech communities (Alsaawi, 2020, p. 249). For example, the incorporation of Arabic expressions in everyday interaction may signal not only religious orientation but also shared norms of politeness and sincerity. In this sense, borrowed vocabulary operates as a resource for constructing social meaning rather than merely conveying lexical content.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the coexistence of multiple lexical layers enables speakers to navigate different communicative contexts by selecting from a stratified repertoire. This flexibility allows Indonesian speakers to shift between registers and social meanings, drawing on Sanskrit-derived formal vocabulary, Arabic-derived expressions of religiosity, and European-derived institutional terminology. Such patterns illustrate how lexical stratification is not only a historical phenomenon but also an active component of contemporary language use.

These observations suggest that loanword stratification in Indonesian is sustained not only by historical processes of contact but also by ongoing sociolinguistic practices. The persistence of multiple lexical layers reflects the ways in which speakers continuously reinterpret and deploy borrowed forms to negotiate identity, authority, and social relationships within a multilingual and culturally diverse society (Julul et al., 2020).

2.6 Research Gaps and Future Directions in Loanword Stratification

Despite extensive research on lexical borrowing in Indonesian, several important gaps remain in the literature. Existing studies have largely focused on identifying the origins of loanwords and describing processes of phonological and semantic adaptation (Julul et al., 2020, p. 139; Mahfud et al., 2021, p. 230; Rokib et al., 2023, p. 528). While these contributions have significantly advanced understanding of language contact in the region, they tend to examine borrowing from individual source languages in isolation, without fully accounting for the interaction between multiple layers of lexical influence.

One key gap concerns the lack of integrative approaches that analyze how successive waves of religious and cultural contact contribute to the formation of a stratified lexicon. Previous research has documented Sanskrit, Arabic, and European influences separately, but fewer studies have explored how these layers coexist and interact within contemporary Indonesian (Alnizar et al., 2025). As a result, the cumulative and structured nature of lexical borrowing remains insufficiently theorized.

A second gap relates to the limited attention given to the relationship between historical borrowing processes and present-day language use. While many studies emphasize etymology, fewer examine how loanwords continue to function across different sociolinguistic contexts. In particular, the ways in which speakers draw on multiple lexical layers to construct meaning, negotiate identity, and navigate communicative settings remain underexplored.

Additionally, methodological limitations persist in the study of Indonesian loanwords. Much of the existing research relies on relatively small datasets or qualitative examples, which may not capture broader patterns of lexical distribution (Rokib et al., 2023, p. 530). There is a need for corpus-based approaches that allow for systematic comparison across different etymological sources and semantic domains, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of lexical stratification.

Future research should therefore adopt more integrative and data-driven frameworks that combine historical, sociolinguistic, and corpus-based perspectives. Such approaches would make it possible to examine not only the origins of loanwords but also their distribution, functional differentiation, and long-term stability within the lexicon. In this regard, the present study contributes to addressing these gaps by providing a corpus-based analysis of loanword stratification in Indonesian, linking historical processes of religious contact with patterns of contemporary language use.

2.7 Historical and Religious Background

2.7.1 Hinduism and the Sanskrit Tradition

The earliest major religious influence on the Indonesian archipelago was Hinduism, which arrived through trade networks linking South Asia and Southeast Asia during the early centuries of the Common Era. Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms such as Srivijaya and Majapahit played an important role in disseminating Sanskrit as a language of religion, administration, and intellectual culture (Saputra et al., 2024, p. 250). Through these institutions, a substantial number of Sanskrit lexical items entered Old Malay and later Indonesian.

Many of these borrowings relate to governance, philosophy, and social organization. Examples include *agama* ("religion"), *bahasa* ("language"), *sastra* ("literature"), *raja* ("king"), *putra* ("son"), *putri* ("daughter"), and *manusia* ("human"). While some words retain meanings close to their Sanskrit origins, others have undergone semantic change over time. For instance, *svarga* evolved into *surga* ("heaven"), and *guru*, originally referring to a spiritual teacher, now also denotes a general instructor (Gu, 2025, p. 16).

Sanskrit loanwords frequently entered Indonesian through intermediary languages such as Old Javanese, which preserved Sanskrit vocabulary in literary traditions including kakawin poetry and court chronicles. The prominence of Sanskrit-derived vocabulary in the Indonesian lexicon reflects the long-standing cultural prestige of Hindu-Buddhist civilization in the region (De Casparis et al., 1997, p. 13).

2.7.2 Buddhism and Pali Influence

Buddhism spread to the Indonesian archipelago through the same maritime trade networks that facilitated Hindu influence. By the seventh century, the Srivijaya kingdom in Sumatra had become a significant center of Buddhist learning, attracting scholars and

pilgrims from across Asia. Early Buddhist texts in the region were written primarily in Sanskrit, although the *Theravāda* tradition later introduced elements of Pali vocabulary (Makin, 2016, p. 13).

Pali-derived loanwords in Indonesian are fewer than Sanskrit borrowings but remain significant in religious discourse. Terms such as *bhikkhu* (“monk”), *dana* (“charity”), *dukkha* (“suffering”), *karma* (“action”), and *nirwana* (“liberation”) reflect the doctrinal vocabulary of Buddhist traditions. These borrowings illustrate how religious concepts circulated through regional intellectual networks and became incorporated into the evolving Malay-Indonesian lexicon (Manguin, 2021, p. 89).

The coexistence of Hindu and Buddhist traditions also fostered a syncretic cultural environment in which Sanskrit and Pali vocabulary circulated widely. As a result, many religious and philosophical terms entered the linguistic repertoire of the region before the arrival of later religious traditions (Gu, 2025, p. 26).

2.7.3 Islam and Arabic Influence

Islam reached the Indonesian archipelago between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries through maritime trade networks connecting the region with the Middle East, India, and the wider Muslim world. As Islam spread, Arabic became an important source of religious vocabulary in Malay and Indonesian, particularly through Qur’anic recitation, religious education, and legal discourse (Mahfud et al., 2021).

Arabic loanwords in Indonesian include core theological terms such as *iman* (“faith”), *Islam*, *Muslim*, *ulama* (“religious scholar”), *imam* (“prayer leader”), *syariah* (“Islamic law”), and *zakat* (“almsgiving”). In addition to explicitly religious vocabulary, many Arabic-derived words have entered broader domains of everyday language, including *kabar* (“news”), *daftar* (“list”), and *jadwal* (“schedule”) (Ricklefs, 1993, p. 1).

Arabic expressions are also widely used in daily interaction. Greetings and formulaic expressions such as *Assalamualaikum*, *Insyallah*, and *Alhamdulillah* function not only in religious contexts but also as markers of politeness and social identity. The widespread use of such expressions illustrates how religiously derived vocabulary can extend beyond strictly theological domains and become integrated into everyday discourse (Suri et al., 2020, p. 33).

2.7.4 Christianity and European Influence

The arrival of Europeans in the sixteenth century introduced Christianity and new languages to the archipelago. Portuguese traders captured Malacca in 1511 and established outposts in the Moluccas (Musgrave, 2014, p. 88). Along with goods and missionaries, they brought the Catholic faith and the Portuguese language. Portuguese words found their way into Malay and Indonesian via the *papiá cristão* contact language used in trade and evangelization. Religious Portuguese loanwords include *gereja* (“church”, from *igreja*), *baptis* (“baptism”, from *batismo*), *Natal* (“Christmas”), *Kristus* (“Christ”), *Paulus* (“Paul”) and *Maria* (“Mary”). Many other Portuguese borrowings are secular: *bola* (“ball”), *boneka* (“doll”), *bendera* (“flag”), *kereta* (“wagon”), *mentega* (“butter”), *almari* (“cupboard”), *tempo* (“time”), *meja* (“table”), *jendela* (“window”), *sepatu* (“shoe”), *garpu* (“fork”) and *keju* (“cheese”). These words reflect the material culture and technology introduced by the Portuguese.

Dutch involvement in Indonesia began with the establishment of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1602. After displacing the Portuguese, the Dutch gradually consolidated control over trade and territory, culminating in the colonial administration of the Dutch East Indies (Braithwaite et al., 2010). The Dutch language dominated education, law, administration and commerce for more than three centuries. Consequently, Dutch has bequeathed a large number of loanwords to Indonesian—340 items (24 percent) in our corpus. Religious terms include *gereformeerd* (“Reformed”) and *dominee* (“minister”). Many more borrowings are secular: *kantor* (“office”), *asuransi* (“insurance”), *dompet* (“wallet”), *kulkas* (“refrigerator”), *apel* (“apple”), *kursus* (“course”), *stasiun* (“station”), *bioskop* (“cinema”), *polisi* (“police”), *sinterklas* (“Santa Claus”), *negara* (“state”, from *negarij*), *kolam* (“pond”), *kemeja* (“shirt”), *raket* (“racket”), *selimut* (“blanket”) and *sabun* (“soap”). Many of these words have been fully adapted to Indonesian phonology and morphology, sometimes acquiring new meanings in the process.

Dutch terms also contributed to administrative and legal vocabulary: *anggaran* (“budget”), *perkara* (“case”), *putusan* (“judgement”), *kontrak* (“contract”), *notaris* (“notary”), *faktur* (“invoice”), *organisasi* (“organisatie”), *partai* (“party”) and *universitas* (“university”). The prevalence of Dutch loanwords reflects the intensity and longevity of colonial rule and demonstrates how colonial languages can leave deep lexical imprints even after decolonization.

2.7.5 Other South Asian and Regional Influences

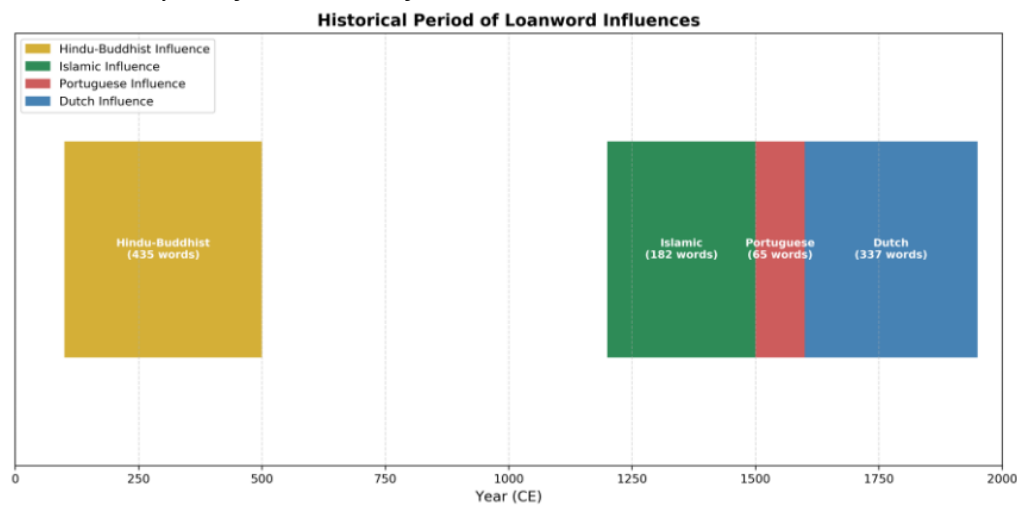
In addition to Sanskrit and Arabic, other South Asian languages have contributed vocabulary to Indonesian through historical trade and cultural exchange. Hindi-derived terms such as *ayah* (“caretaker”), *bibi* (“aunt”), and *garam* (“salt”) reflect these interactions (Ricklefs, 1993, p. 11). Although fewer in number, such borrowings demonstrate the broader network of linguistic exchange connecting Indonesia with South Asia.

Local languages within the Indonesian archipelago have also influenced the national lexicon. Languages such as Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese have contributed numerous lexical items related to everyday life, cultural practices, and social organization. Examples include *sawah* (“rice field”), *gamelan* (a traditional musical ensemble), and *wayang* (shadow puppet theatre).

Furthermore, Chinese contact languages, particularly Hokkien, have contributed vocabulary related to trade, cuisine, and daily life, including words such as *mie* (“noodles”), *bakso* (“meatball”), and *teko* (“teapot”) (Makin, 2016, p. 5). These borrowings reflect the long history of commercial and cultural interaction between Chinese communities and Indonesian society.

These additional lexical influences illustrate the broader networks of cultural and linguistic exchange that contributed to the layered structure of the Indonesian lexicon analyzed in this study.

The historical layering of these linguistic influences is summarized in Figure 1, which provides a conceptual overview of the major phases of lexical borrowing that underpin the stratified structure of the Indonesian lexicon.

Figure 1.*Historical layers of loanword influence in Indonesian.*

The figure summarizes the major phases of linguistic influence associated with Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and European contact, which contribute to the stratified structure of the Indonesian lexicon.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

This study is based on a corpus of 1,402 lexical items in Indonesian whose etymological origins are associated with languages introduced through major religious and cultural contact. The dataset was compiled from authoritative sources, including the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI), historical dictionaries, and existing linguistic studies on loanwords in Indonesian.

Lexical items were selected based on their documented etymological origin and their relevance to domains historically associated with religious and cultural contact, including religion, governance, education, and everyday communication. While not all items are religious in meaning, their introduction into Indonesian is linked to languages transmitted through religious or colonial interaction.

3.2 Classification of Loanwords

The collected lexical items were classified according to their primary etymological source. The main categories include Sanskrit, Arabic, Dutch, Portuguese, Pali, Hindi and other South Asian languages, as well as regional and other sources.

In cases where etymology is contested or involves multiple possible origins, classification was based on the most widely accepted source in the literature. This approach ensures consistency while acknowledging the complexity of historical linguistic transmission.

To avoid misleading categorizations, language sources were not directly equated with specific religions. Instead, classifications reflect broader historical contexts of contact. For example, Dutch-derived loanwords are associated with colonial and institutional domains rather than exclusively with Christian influence.

The distribution of lexical items across these categories is presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1.

Distribution of Loanwords by Etymological Source in Indonesian

Source Language / Category	Number of Items	Percentage (%)
Sanskrit	438	31.2
Dutch (Colonial/Institutional)	340	24.2
Arabic	184	13.1
Regional and Other Sources	315	22.5
Portuguese	65	4.6
Hindi and Other South Asian	49	3.5
Pali	11	0.8
Total	1,402	100

The Regional and Other Sources category includes loans from regional languages, terms associated with indigenous belief systems and rare borrowings from Chinese and Persian sources. Some words, such as *sabun* (“soap”) and *kursi* (“chair”), have contested origins (Arabic vs. Dutch) and are assigned based on the balance of evidence. Although in the respect of *sabun*, for example, many etymological studies trace it further back to Greek through Arabic trade routes.

3.3 Analytical Approach

The analysis combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitatively, the study examines the distribution of loanwords across etymological categories, identifying patterns of lexical stratification within the Indonesian lexicon. Percentages were calculated based on the total number of lexical items in the dataset.

Qualitatively, the study analyzes patterns of semantic adaptation, functional distribution, and sociolinguistic usage. Particular attention is given to how loanwords from different historical layers coexist and are used across religious, institutional, and everyday contexts.

This combined approach allows for a comprehensive examination of how successive waves of religious and cultural contact have contributed to the formation of a stratified lexical system in Indonesian.

The distribution shown in Table 1 provides the basis for the quantitative analysis of lexical stratification.

3.4 Data Availability and Replicability

The dataset used in this study was compiled from publicly available sources, including the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI) and published linguistic studies. While the full dataset is not included in this article, the criteria for data selection and classification are described in detail to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

Future research may build upon this dataset by applying similar classification criteria or expanding the corpus using additional lexical sources.

Representative examples of loanwords are provided in Appendix A.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Distribution of Loanwords by Etymological Source

The analysis reveals a clear stratification of loanwords in Indonesian, reflecting successive phases of religious and cultural contact. As shown in **Table 1**, Sanskrit-derived loanwords constitute the largest proportion of the dataset (31.2%), followed by Dutch (24.2%) and Arabic (13.1%), with smaller contributions from Portuguese, Hindi and other South Asian languages, and Pali.

This dominance suggests that early religious contact exerted long-term structural influence on the Indonesian lexicon, supporting cumulative models of lexical development rather than replacement-based models. The implication is that early religious contact continues to shape the core structure of contemporary Indonesian vocabulary, particularly in institutional and philosophical domains.

The substantial proportion of Dutch-derived loanwords reflects the enduring influence of colonial administration and institutional systems. This pattern indicates that later historical phases contribute functionally specialized lexical layers without displacing earlier ones. Theoretically, this supports models of layered lexical coexistence in language contact, where different historical influences map onto distinct functional domains. The implication is that colonial contact not only expanded the lexicon but also restructured domain-specific vocabulary in education, governance, and administration.

Arabic-derived loanwords, while representing a smaller proportion of the dataset, occupy a unique position due to their distribution across both religious and everyday contexts. This dual presence suggests that vocabulary introduced through religious transmission can extend beyond specialized domains into general communication. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this supports the view that religiously derived lexical items function as markers of identity and interaction. The implication is that religious contact contributes not only to lexical expansion but also to the formation of shared communicative repertoires across social contexts.

4.2 Patterns of Lexical Stratification

The findings demonstrate that lexical borrowing in Indonesian operates through cumulative layering rather than replacement. Each wave of contact—Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and European—has contributed new lexical resources without displacing earlier layers. As a result, the Indonesian lexicon exhibits a stratified structure in which multiple etymological layers coexist and interact.

This pattern suggests that language change in Indonesian does not follow a linear model of lexical substitution. Instead, it reflects an additive process in which successive layers accumulate and remain functionally differentiated. From a theoretical standpoint, this challenges replacement-based models of language change and supports stratification-based approaches in language contact theory. The implication is that lexical stratification constitutes a stable and enduring organizational principle of the lexicon rather than a transitional stage.

The differentiation of lexical layers across domains further reinforces this interpretation. Sanskrit-derived vocabulary is associated with formal and institutional registers, Arabic-derived terms with religious and interpersonal communication, and Dutch-derived forms with administrative and educational contexts. This distribution suggests that lexical stratification is not only historical but also functionally organized. The implication is

that speakers actively draw on different lexical layers to navigate communicative contexts, reinforcing the persistence of stratified lexical systems in contemporary usage.

4.3 Semantic and Functional Integration

In addition to their distribution across sources, loanwords in Indonesian exhibit patterns of semantic adaptation and functional integration. Many borrowed terms retain meanings close to their original forms, while others undergo semantic extension or specialization depending on context.

This variation suggests that lexical borrowing is not a uniform process but involves dynamic semantic adjustment within the recipient language. From a theoretical perspective, this supports models of semantic integration in language contact, where borrowed forms are adapted to fit local communicative needs. The implication is that the long-term survival of loanwords depends on their ability to align with existing semantic and functional structures within the language.

For example, Arabic-derived terms such as *iman* and *zakat* maintain strong religious associations, whereas other borrowings extend into broader domains of use. Similarly, Sanskrit-derived terms now permeate institutional vocabulary, often stripped of their original religious connotations. This pattern suggests that semantic flexibility facilitates the coexistence of multiple lexical layers. The implication is that semantic adaptation plays a central role in sustaining lexical stratification by enabling borrowed forms to remain relevant across changing contexts.

4.4 Sociolinguistic Implications

The coexistence of multiple lexical layers has important sociolinguistic implications. Loanwords in Indonesian function as resources for expressing register, identity, and social positioning. Speakers can draw on Sanskrit-derived formal vocabulary, Arabic-derived expressions of religiosity, and Dutch-derived institutional terminology to navigate different communicative contexts.

This pattern suggests that lexical stratification operates not only as a historical artifact but also as an active sociolinguistic resource. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with sociolinguistic models that emphasize language as a repertoire of stylistic and social choices. The implication is that stratified lexical systems provide speakers with a flexible set of linguistic resources for constructing meaning and negotiating identity.

Furthermore, the ability to shift between lexical layers indicates that speakers actively engage with the historical depth of the language. This suggests that lexical stratification contributes to the richness and adaptability of Indonesian as a national language. The implication is that language contact not only shapes vocabulary but also enhances the expressive capacity of the linguistic system.

4.5 Theoretical Implications

The findings contribute to broader discussions in language contact theory and sociolinguistics by demonstrating how religious and cultural contact can produce durable lexical stratification within a national language. The Indonesian case shows that borrowing processes in multilingual societies often operate through accumulation rather than

replacement, resulting in layered lexical systems that reflect historical trajectories of interaction.

This suggests that existing models of language contact should place greater emphasis on long-term layering and functional differentiation rather than focusing primarily on borrowing as isolated events. Theoretically, this study supports an additive model of lexical development, in which successive layers remain active within the lexicon. The implication is that lexical stratification should be considered a central outcome of sustained language contact rather than a secondary effect.

By linking etymological origin with sociolinguistic function, this study also highlights the importance of integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the analysis of loanwords. Future research would benefit from moving beyond descriptive cataloguing toward analytical frameworks that account for both the distributional patterns of loanwords across domains and their functional role within the lexicon — an agenda for which corpus-based methodologies are particularly well-suited.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the role of religious and cultural contact in shaping the Indonesian lexicon through a corpus-based analysis of 1,402 loanwords. The findings demonstrate that lexical borrowing in Indonesian reflects a stratified structure resulting from successive historical phases of contact, including Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and European influences.

The analysis shows that these layers do not replace one another but accumulate over time, forming a stable and functionally differentiated lexical system. Sanskrit-derived vocabulary constitutes a foundational layer associated with institutional and philosophical domains, while Arabic-derived terms extend across both religious and everyday contexts. Dutch and other European loanwords contribute an additional layer linked to administrative, educational, and modern institutional practices. Together, these patterns illustrate how different historical influences continue to coexist within contemporary Indonesian.

Beyond documenting the distribution of loanwords, this study advances research in language contact by demonstrating how religious interaction contributes to durable lexical stratification in a national language. The findings support a model of additive lexical development, in which successive layers of borrowing remain active and functionally differentiated rather than being replaced over time. This perspective highlights the importance of examining not only the origins of loanwords but also their interaction and use within a shared sociolinguistic system.

The study also underscores the value of corpus-based approaches for analyzing large-scale patterns of lexical borrowing. By combining quantitative distributional analysis with qualitative interpretation, it provides a more comprehensive account of how historical processes of contact shape contemporary language use.

A limitation of this study is its reliance on dictionary-based data and does not account for frequency variation in actual language use. Future research may address this limitation by incorporating frequency-based corpus analysis and examining variation across regions and speech communities. Further work could also explore how lexical stratification interacts with emerging forms of digital communication and language change.

In conclusion, the Indonesian lexicon illustrates how sustained religious and cultural contact can generate a layered and dynamic system of lexical resources. This case

contributes to broader discussions in sociolinguistics and language contact studies, demonstrating how historical processes continue to shape linguistic structure and social meaning in contemporary contexts.

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Appendix A

Representative Loanwords by Etymological Source

Table A1Error! Reference source not found. provides representative examples of loanwords in Indonesian according to their etymological origin, along with their typical domains of use. The examples are drawn from the corpus analyzed in this study and are intended to illustrate patterns of lexical distribution and functional differentiation discussed in the main text.

Table A 1

Distribution of Lexical Origins by Region and Religious Prevalence

Lexical Origin	Associated Religion(s)	Primary Region(s)	Examples (from Corpus)	Notes on Use or Function
Sanskrit	Hinduism, Buddhism	Bali, Central Java	<i>Agama, Dharma, Upacara, Karma</i>	Institutional, ceremonial, and philosophical vocabulary.
Arabic	Islam	Java, Sumatra, Madura	<i>Iman, Doa, Masjid, Shalat, Zakat</i>	Deeply embedded in religious and daily vocabulary.
Dutch	Christianity (Protestantism), Colonial administration	Urban Java, Ambon	<i>Gereja, Sekolah, Katekismus, Pendeta</i>	Common in education, religious instruction, and governance.
Portuguese	Christianity (Catholicism)	Flores, Timor, Maluku	<i>Misa, Padre, Altar, Salib</i>	Predominant in Catholic-majority eastern regions.
Pali	<i>Theravāda</i> Buddhism	Limited (Buddhist minorities)	<i>Bhikkhu, Vinaya, Sangha</i>	Mostly found in textual or monastic contexts.

PSEUDO NOUN INCORPORATION IN BATAK TOBA: A MORPHOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study investigates the occurrence of Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) in Batak Toba, a phenomenon not previously been analyzed within incorporation frameworks. PNI has been widely described in languages such as Niuean, Sakha, Hindi, and Tamil. The researchers realize that former studies have not examined PNI in Batak Toba. Drawing on two theoretical accounts by Massam (2001) and Baker (2014), this research analyzes morphosyntactic properties such as verb–noun adjacency, reduced nominal structure, and detransitivization. Using a qualitative descriptive approach based on corpus data and native-speaker judgments, the study identifies several PNI characteristics in Batak Toba, including adjacency, non-specific interpretation, restricted modification, and word-order variation. The findings demonstrate that PNI in Batak Toba aligns with cross-linguistic patterns while also exhibiting language-specific constraints, particularly in the absence of overt case marking. The present study fills and investigates the gap in which PNI in Batak Toba is possibly materialized. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to systematically describe PNI as it occurs naturally. The data were obtained from naturalistic corpus data and relevant literatures. It is done to ensure empirical validity and grammatical reliability. The findings indicate that Batak Toba displays several characteristics of PNI, including adjacency and verb detransitivization. Furthermore, modified nominals, conjoined nominals, and changes in word order are also observed. Overall, this study offers the first systematic description of PNI in Batak Toba and contributes to broader typological and theoretical discussions of pseudo incorporation.

Keywords: *adjacency; Austronesian language; Batak Toba; detransitivization; pseudo noun incorporation; syntactic structure*

1. Introduction

In morphosyntax, incorporation occurs when a noun or other element is systematically inserted into a verb to form a single word, altering argument structure and meaning (Mithun, 1984; Baker, 1986). More broadly, it refers to any type of complex word formation that involves placing a root into a different word structure, where the inserted root is expected to modify that structure (Shluinsky, 2022). Furthermore, it also refers to a

specific type of compounding process in which complex verbs are derived from other verbs by inserting a nominal (noun) element into their structure. This type of incorporation is typically associated with polysynthetic languages, although several instances have also been found in languages with different structural types and from various regions (Olthof, 2020).

Generally, there are three classifications of incorporation found across languages: verb incorporation (Winaya, 2016; Simanjuntak & Mulyadi, 2019), prepositional incorporation (Mulyadi, 1997; Peck & Lin, 2019), and noun incorporation (Johns, 2017). Additionally, Gerdt (2017) also states that another type of it is the position is still unclear, namely pronoun incorporation. In fact, many studies on incorporation and affixation processes have been conducted, yielding numerous findings. However, no single study can fully explain the range of this phenomena across different languages, particularly in terms of their morphosyntactic behavior and functional distribution. This is because each language exhibits unique structural characteristics that influence how incorporation operates within its grammatical system. Consequently, further investigation is needed to explore how incorporation manifests in specific languages and to determine whether existing typological classifications adequately account for the patterns found in those languages. Such studies are important not only for enriching the typological understanding of incorporation but also for revealing how morphosyntactic processes interact with language-specific grammatical structure.

Research on in Batak Toba has grown moderately in recent years (Simaremare & Mulyadi, 2025). Previous studies have examined incorporation across different languages, such as *Types of Incorporation of Verb Deletion in Balinese* (Winaya, 2016), *Incorporation with the implementation of verbs in Aceh* (Maulana & Mulyadi, 2019) and *Prepositional Incorporation in Batak Toba Language* (Simaremare & Mulyadi, 2025). One notable example is the study by Simanjuntak and Mulyadi (2019) on Batak Toba, which explores incorporation involving verb deletion. Their findings indicate that shifts in verb position may result in verb deletion. However, the mechanisms responsible for this process have not been clearly explained. Despite extensive research on incorporation, the status of pseudo noun incorporation in Austronesian languages remains underexplored, particularly in languages lacking overt case marking such as Batak Toba.

This study is novel in its focus on Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) in Batak Toba, a phenomenon not systematically analyzed before. Unlike prior studies that discuss incorporation in broader typological contexts, this research identifies and analyzes the analyzed beststructural patterns, grammatical behavior, and syntactic functions of PNI in Batak Toba. This investigation contributes new insights into incorporation typology and highlights the unique morphosyntactic features of Batak Toba within the broader Austronesian linguistic landscape.

Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) is a phenomenon closely related to noun incorporation and has been extensively discussed within the broader literature on incorporation (Mithun, 1984; Massam, 2001; Dayal, 2011). The concept was first introduced by Mithun (1984), who investigated noun incorporation across a wide range of languages. Her study revealed that, in certain constructions, nouns do not undergo complete morphological fusion with verbs; nevertheless, they form a unified semantic unit with the predicate. Expanding on this view, Borik and Gehrke (2015) argue that PNI involves bare nominals that combine with verbs to create a single complex predicate. Although these

nominals are interpreted as incorporated at the semantic level, they remain syntactically independent constituents (Mithun & Corbett, 2011). Furthermore, Baker (2014) classifies PNI as a subtype of noun incorporation in which the incorporated element is phrasal rather than a lexical head. He contends that PNI is best analyzed as a process of complex predicate formation resulting from head movement, whereby the head noun of an object Noun Phrase (NP) incorporates into the verb.

Against this theoretical background, the present study investigates the phenomenon of Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) in the Batak Toba language. Given the linguistic complexity and distinctive morphosyntactic characteristics of Batak Toba, this research seeks to address the following questions:

1. What are the morphosyntactic properties of Pseudo Noun Incorporation in Batak Toba?
2. How is Pseudo Noun Incorporation licensed and realized in the Batak Toba language?

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are twofold: (1) to identify and analyze the morphosyntactic properties of Pseudo Noun Incorporation in Batak Toba, and (2) to investigate the mechanisms through which Pseudo Noun Incorporation is licensed and realized in the language.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Incorporation

The term Incorporation in linguistics originally referred to classifications of languages into analytic, syntactic, fusional, and incorporative types (Keraf, 1990 p. 62), or into isolating, agglutinating, (in)flexional, and polysynthetic types (Spencer, 1993:38). Over time, the concept of incorporation expanded into a structural notion referring to a construction in which an argument becomes integrated into the verb, leading to what is known as *noun incorporation*, *object incorporation*, or simply *incorporation*. Moreover, Baker (1988) explains that grammatical-function changing typically involves shifting a lexical category from its original syntactic position to a new one, where one lexical item becomes embedded within another through a particular morpheme. This incorporation process alters the governing relationship between a predicate and its argument. Furthermore, the Toba Batak language also exhibits processes of affixation and lexical incorporation.

Example:

- (1a) *Mangalang debban si Butet*
 Mang-alang **debban* si Butet
 ACT- eat betel ART Butet
 'Butet eats Betel'

Example (1a) illustrates an active verbal construction in Toba Batak in which the verb is followed by a nominal object and then the subject. The structure follows the typical Verb–Object–Subject (VOS) word order found in Toba Batak. In contrast with (1b) The construction *mang-alang debban* shows properties commonly associated with Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI). The object *debban* appears immediately after the verb without a determiner and receives a non-specific interpretation.

(1b) *Mardebban si Butet*

Mar-debban si Butet

V -betel ART Butet

'Butet eats betel'

before the affix *mar* is added, *debban* is Noun, but after the affixation *mar+debban* it becomes Verb. **Debban* is piper betel which culturally eaten by Batak Toba and Karonese.

2.2 Types of Incorporation

There are several types of incorporation studied by different linguists worldwide. However, some linguists have different terms on few types of incorporation. For instance, while Katamba (1993) emphasizes morphological incorporation, Baker (1988) and Massam (2001) highlight syntactic mechanism, showing complementary perspectives. However, he identifies several types of structures that function as or resemble incorporation. These fall under the broader domain of lexical morphology, where elements are combined into a single morphological unit. From Katamba's morphological framework, incorporation can be understood as involving Noun Incorporation (NI), Lexical Compounding Incorporation, Affixal/Derivational Incorporation and Zero-Derivation (Conversion) Incorporation.

In addition, the frameworks proposed by Massam (2001) and Baker (2014) provide important theoretical foundations for analyzing noun incorporation, particularly in languages where incorporation interacts with verb-initial syntax and morphological case systems. However, their explanatory adequacy for Batak Toba appears to be only partial. Baker's approach, which treats incorporation as a syntactic operation in which a nominal head moves to attach to the verb, also captures certain aspects of the Batak Toba data, especially the formation of complex predicates. However, Baker's model is largely based on languages with robust morphological case systems (e.g., Sakha). Batak Toba, by contrast, lacks overt morphological case marking on nouns. As a result, argument licensing relies more heavily on positional or adjacency-based mechanisms rather than morphological case. This typological difference creates what may be described as a single-adjacency constraint in Batak Toba: only one non-subject argument can occupy the structurally licensed position adjacent to the verb. Consequently, true ditransitive structures with two bare DP objects are generally disfavored, and the second argument must instead be expressed through an oblique phrase (e.g., introduced by *tu* "to").

In addition, Massam, working primarily on Niuean, analyzes verb-initial word order—particularly VSO/VOS alternations—through the syntactic movement of the VP or predicate rather than the movement of DP subjects. These characteristics are also found in Batak Toba language which is typically verb-initial (VOS) but can also surface as SVO, with variation influenced by information structure and discourse factors. However, the unique voice system in Batak Toba and specific licensing requirements both challenge and extend these models. The primary distinction lies in what moves and why. In Niuean, movement is often driven by the "reduced" status of the object, whereas in Batak Toba language, it is a more rigid structural requirement of the voice system.

1.3 Pseudo Noun Incorporation

There are several characteristics if one language experiences pseudo noun incorporation (PNI). Driemel (2020) states that in languages that have PNI, the object does not carry case marking (no causative marker, no determiner and no classifier). Moreover, it

cannot refer to a specific, known or topical entity and it must be interpreted in the narrowest, VP-internal domain. Earlier analyses of PNI that concentrate on the distribution and movement of these objects argue that incorporated nouns cannot be displaced from their original VP-internal position. This restriction follows from their weakened nominal structure, since they lack the functional layers associated with DP, they cannot receive case or undergo syntactic movement or because they are absorbed into a complex predicate with the verb, which prevents them from moving independently (Massam, 2001; Lopez, 2012; Frey, 2015). One of classic example is provided by Massam (2001) from Niuean, an Oceanic language with obligatory verb-initial word order.

(2) *Niuean*

Takafaga tumau ni e ia e tau ika.
 Hunt always EMPH ERG 3SG ABS PL fish
 'he is always fishing'

Massam claims it as PNI process since the verb and the noun are adjacent, the object *ika* ('fish') appears right next to the verb, with no full DP structure separating them. Then, the object loses its typical nominal features. According to Massam, in PNI constructions, the object shows clear signs of reduced nominal structure. It cannot take a determiner, and elements such as *e* (ABS) do not function as normal absolutive case markers. The object also lacks number and case marking in the usual sense and receives a non-specific interpretation. Massam argues that in examples like *tau ika*, the object does not behave as a full DP referring to "the fish," but instead patterns as a bare NP with the general meaning "fish." Similarly, she proposes that Niuean has an obligatory verb-initial word order. PNI occurs when the verb moves to the front while the bare NP remains inside the VP, and both are interpreted together as a complex predicate. This property of PNI is known as immobility.

Secondly, after analyzing language in Tamil and Sakha, Baker (2014) argues that PNI differs from true noun incorporation because it must be empty, meaning the noun and verb must appear directly next to each other in one linear line. A key point in his analysis is that head movement is not triggered by any feature-checking requirements, which means that such movement is entirely optional.

(3) *Tamil* (Baker, 2014)

Naan nalla paṣam tee- r- een
 I good fruit seek-PRS-1SG.SBJ
 'I am looking for (some/a) good fruit(s).'

The example Baker states behave like a bare NP, not a full DP. The phrase *nalla paṣam* 'good fruit' contains an AP (adjective) *nalla* 'good' a N' → N *paṣam* 'fruit'. But it does not project to a DP (no case, no determiner, no number marking). Hence, it is a typical property of PNI objects. Baker says that PNI requires string-vacuity movement, meaning the noun and the verb must stay right next to each other in the sentence. Baker claims that in PNI there is a linear adjacency between verb and noun. This category is called adjacency in PNI.

Another feature of PNI is studied by Dayal (2011) in Hindi. He finds that direct objects can sometimes appear without accusative case shows that incorporation is happening not

only semantically but also syntactically. He also argues that, in Hindi, inanimate objects do not always need accusative marking.

(4a) *Hindi*

Anu har kitaab/ har kitaab-ko paRhegi
 Anu every book every book-ACC will-read
 “Anu will read every book.”

(4b). *Anu kitaab/ kitaab-ko paRhegi*

Anu book book-ACC will-read
 “Anu will read a the book/the book.”

-ko shows that the object is general books, not specific one. *-ko* is optional in the noun specific object and it is one of the characteristic in pseudo noun incorporation. Semantically, the verb ‘reading’ as if unites with the object ‘book’. Therefore, another characteristic of PNI is the evident of bare noun. It means that in PNI the noun is non specific. (Öztürk, 2003).

Another language that also studied by Baker is Sakha and Tamil. He claims that PNI can only occur with certain kinds of complex predicates. In some types of predicates—such as verb + resultative adjective combinations—PNI cannot appear (see 5a, b).

(5) *Sakha*

a. Bu oqo djolloox oŋor-or.
 this child happy make- AOR.3sS
 ‘This makes a child/children happy.’

b. *Tamil*

Adu paṇam perisaa aakkar-itu.
 It fruit big make.PRES-3nS
 ‘It makes fruit big’

According to him, the adjective must adjoin to the verb to form a complex predicate (Baker 2003). Because the adjective must be adjacent to the verb, there is no available position for the object to undergo PNI, which also requires adjacency.

Hence, several characteristics of Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) have been identified. Incorporated elements typically appear as bare nouns without determiners, case markers, or plural marking, receive non-specific or generic interpretations, and must be adjacent to the verb. Although the verb and noun remain separate words, they function as a single semantic unit, and the occurrence of PNI depends on the syntactic structure of the language and the type of predicate involved (Massam 2001; Baker 2014; Borik & Gehrke 2015; Levin 2015)

2.4 Batak Toba

Batak Toba an Austronesian language and it has canonical order is verb-initial, typically VOS such as in example (1). Besides, there is no grammatical tense yet temporal interpretation depends on aspectual markers, adverbs such as *dung* means done and contextual information. (Erlewine, 2018). The diagnostics commonly associated with pseudo

noun incorporation (PNI)—including adjacency between the verb and the noun, the appearance of bare nouns, restricted modification, and a tendency toward detransitivization—provide useful criteria for identifying incorporation-like constructions. In Batak Toba, these diagnostics appear to apply in a consistent and systematic way, allowing PNI-like constructions to be distinguished from simple verb–object sequences or lexical compounding.

First, bare nouns in Batak Toba that participate in PNI-like constructions display a characteristic non-specific and activity-oriented interpretation, as in *mangallang ihan* “eat fish” or *manjaha buku* “read book,” where the noun does not refer to a particular referent but instead contributes to the event description. When determiners or quantifiers such as *si*, *do*, *angka*, or *sasude* ‘every/all’ are introduced, the noun becomes referential and the construction behaves like a regular transitive clause rather than an incorporation-like structure. This shift in interpretation supports the diagnostic role of bare nouns.

Second, Batak Toba exhibits a strict adjacency requirement in which nouns receiving incorporation-like interpretations must occur immediately after the verb, as intervening modifiers disrupt this interpretation. This verb–noun sequence forms a tightly integrated predicate-like unit rather than a typical verb–object configuration.

These constructions also show detransitivization-like properties described in PNI literature although Batak Toba lacks overt case marking, the incorporated noun behaves as a syntactically reduced object and the clause focuses on the activity rather than a specific patient. Semantically, Batak Toba patterns with languages that have optional object case marking, where the absence of marking correlates with incorporation-like readings. These parallels suggest that Batak Toba employs a syntactic incorporation strategy consistent with the broader typology of PNI across languages.

While Massam (2001) emphasizes syntactic adjacency and reduced nominal structure, Baker (2014) frames PNI as covert incorporation involving head movement. However, both frameworks assume structural conditions that may not fully apply to languages without overt case marking, such as Batak Toba. Taken together, these diagnostics allow PNI-like constructions in Batak Toba to be distinguished from simple verb–object sequences, where the object is referential and freely modifiable, and from lexical compounds, which are typically fixed lexicalized units rather than productive syntactic constructions. Thus, despite the absence of overt case marking, the combination of semantic non-specificity, adjacency constraints, restricted modification, and event-oriented interpretation provides a reliable basis for identifying pseudo noun incorporation in Batak Toba.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design combined with formal syntactic analysis. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows researchers to explore and describe linguistic phenomena in their natural context without relying on numerical measurement (Creswell, 2014). It is also used to collect natural language data and to describe the distributional patterns of bare nouns in Batak Toba, while the formal analysis applies theoretical models of Pseudo Noun Incorporation (PNI) from Massam and Baker to investigate how the Batak Toba encodes PNI structures.

- (b) *Mangampu hata si togar*
 mang-ampu (hata) si Togar
 ACT-say. words of gratitude PN Togar
 'Togar say words of gratitude'

In (6a) *appu* is a bare noun which means words of gratitude. After the prefixation *mang*, the N 'joined' the Verb and it forms a tight verb-noun unit. *Hata* is licensed via linear adjacency with *mang-ampu* (6b), forming a syntactic unit without additional morphology or case marking. In other words, PNI in Batak Toba language indicates a compatible case in which the nominal heads happen to be adjacent to the verb. On the contrary, adjacency cannot happen in Batak Toba if particle *do* appears between verb and noun since it results in verb and the noun that are no longer in an adjacent position. It is exemplified by (7)

- 7(a) *manjangkit do ibana hau*
 Man-jangkit do ibana hau
 ACT. climb FOC 3SG tree
 'he climbed the tree'

In the sentence *Manjangkit do ibana hau* 'He climbed a tree', the verb *manjangkit* 'climb' and the noun *hau* 'tree' are separated by the focus particle *do* and the subject *ibana*. Consequently, the verb and the noun are not adjacent, and the construction does not exhibit the tight V–N configuration typically associated with pseudo noun incorporation.

4.2 Detransitivization

One of the characteristics of PNI is detransitivization of verbs (Johnson, 2015). It is a syntactic and semantic process in which a verb that normally takes a direct object (a transitive verb) is transformed so that it no longer requires, or cannot take, a direct object (Massam, 2001). Essentially, it becomes intransitive. In Batak Toba, prefixation also change a transitive clause into intransitive by incorporating the bare noun to the verb. (8)

- (8a) *Mangallang indahan ibana*
 mang-allang indahan ibana
 ACT-eat rice 3SG
 'He eats rice.' (transitive)
- (8b) *Mangallang ibana*
 mang-allang ibana
 ACT-eat 3SG
 'He eats.' (detransitivized / object not expressed)
- (8c) *Mangindahan ibana*
 mang-indahan ibana
 ACT-rice 3SG
 'He rice-eats.' (pseudo noun incorporation)

The data in (8a–c) demonstrate three different clause types in Batak Toba: transitive, detransitivized, and pseudo noun incorporation constructions. In (8a), *mangallang* ‘eat’ is a transitive verb that requires a direct object, resulting in a two-argument structure. In (8b), the object is omitted and the verb becomes intransitive, indicating detransitivization and a reduction in verb valency. In (8c), the noun *indahan* ‘rice’ is morphologically incorporated into the verb, forming *mangindahan*. The incorporated noun is non-referential and does not function as an independent object, but instead forms a predicate-like unit with the verb. This pattern is consistent with pseudo noun incorporation as described in Massam (2001), where the noun is syntactically reduced and tightly integrated with the verb.

In many languages, including Batak Toba, detransitivization creates a verb that no longer requires a fully projected, case- marked object; instead, the verb can take a bare, non-specific nominal that functions more like a lexical modifier than a true argument. For example, detransitivized forms such as *marsipanganon* (‘engage in food-related activity’) illustrate how the verb becomes more generalized, enabling the nominal element to be interpreted as part of a verb–noun complex. Thus, detransitivized verbs naturally facilitate PNI because the object position is semantically incorporated but syntactically reduced, allowing the bare noun to be licensed without structural case.

4.3 Non-Specific Interpretation

One central characteristic of PNI is the non-specific interpretation of the object, where the bare noun does not refer to a particular entity but instead denotes a general type associated with the event (Dayal 2011). The example in Batak Toba is in (9a)

- (9a) *marende ende ibana*
 mar-ende ende ibana
 ACT.sing song 3SG
 ‘he sings song’ (non specific)

- (9b) *marende ende i ibana*
 mar-ende ende i ibana
 ACT-sing song DEF 3SG
 ‘he sings the song’ (specific)

The difference between (9a) and (9b) lies in the interpretation of the noun *ende* ‘song’. In (9a), the noun appears as a bare noun and receives a non-specific interpretation, referring to songs in general. In (9b), the noun is marked with the determiner *i*, which makes the noun definite and specific, referring to a particular song. This contrast shows that bare nouns in Batak Toba tend to have non-specific interpretation, which is one of the main characteristics of pseudo noun incorporation.

4.4 Modified and Conjoined Nominals

Massam maintains, in Niuean, PNI is attainable with modified and conjoined nominals. Conjoined bare nouns in Batak Toba behave similarly to pseudo noun incorporation objects, forming a single predicate-like unit with the verb and receiving a non-specific interpretation.

- (10) *mangingani jabu na bolon*
 mang-ingani jabu na bolon
 ACT.live. in house REL big
 'live in big house'

Example (10) shows that pseudo noun incorporation in Batak Toba can also occur with modified nominals. The noun *jabu* 'house' is modified by *bolon* 'big', forming the modified nominal *jabu na bolon* 'big house'. Even though the noun is modified, the noun phrase remains bare and does not contain a determiner or definiteness marker. The modified noun phrase appears directly adjacent to the verb *mangingani* 'live in' and forms a tightly integrated predicate-like unit with the verb. Semantically, the noun phrase does not refer to a specific identifiable house but rather to a general type of house, resulting in a non-specific interpretation. This behavior is consistent with pseudo noun incorporation, where the incorporated nominal may be modified but still behaves as a non-referential object.

- (11) *Ucok do mangaloppa ihan dohot indahan nabodari*
 Ucok do mang-aloppa ihan dohot indahan na-bodari
 PN FOC ACT-cook fish and rice PST
 'Ucok cooked fish and rice.'

Example (11) illustrates pseudo noun incorporation with conjoined bare nouns in Batak Toba. The nouns *ihan* 'fish' and *indahan* 'rice' are conjoined using *dohot* 'and', and both appear as bare nouns without determiners or markers of definiteness. The conjoined nouns function together as a single semantic unit associated with the verb *mangaloppa* 'cook'. Rather than referring to specific fish and rice, the nouns receive a non-specific interpretation, referring to food in general. Syntactically, the conjoined nouns remain adjacent to the verb and form a tightly integrated predicate-like unit. This shows that pseudo noun incorporation in Batak Toba can also occur with conjoined bare nouns. Hence, these examples show that pseudo noun incorporation in Batak Toba is not limited to simple bare nouns, but can also occur with modified nominals and conjoined bare nouns, as long as the nominal remains non-specific and forms a tight predicate-like unit with the verb.

4.5 Restricted Modification

The last, like Niuean, Batak Toba shows word order shifts under PNI confirming adjacency as a licensing condition. For example, the normal transitive structure of the sentence is VSO but with PNI, the word order is VOS. It also occurs in PNI in Batak Toba but from VOS to SVO. It is shown in example (12a).

- (12a) *Manjangkit hau ibana*
 Man-jangkit hau ibana
 AV-Climb tree 3SG
 'He climb(s) tree' (modification)

- (12b) *Manjangkit hau na ganjang ibana*
 Man-jangkit hau na ganjang ibana
 AV-climb tree REL high 3SG
 'He climbs the high tree' (noun with modification)

In example (12a), the noun *hau* ‘tree’ appears as a bare noun immediately following the verb *manjangkit* ‘climb’. The noun does not carry any modifier such as an adjective, numeral, or demonstrative. In this construction, the noun receives a non-specific interpretation and forms a tight semantic unit with the verb. This pattern is characteristic of pseudo noun incorporation, where the verb and noun behave like a single predicate meaning ‘tree-climb’ rather than a regular verb–object structure.

In contrast, example (12b) shows that when the noun is modified, as in *hau na ganjang* ‘the tall tree’, the incorporation-like interpretation is no longer available. The presence of the modifier *na ganjang* ‘tall’ turns the noun phrase into a full noun phrase rather than a bare noun. As a result, the construction behaves like a regular transitive clause rather than a pseudo noun incorporation construction. This contrast demonstrates that Batak Toba pseudo noun incorporation constructions exhibit restricted modification, meaning that only bare nouns without modifiers can participate in incorporation-like structures, while modified nouns function as regular objects.

Massam observes that when PNI occurs, the word order systematically shifts to VOS. This word order change is not arbitrary; it follows from the syntactic behavior of the incorporated object. In Batak Toba it is predominantly VOS/VS(O). Then, the object normally appears immediately after the verb with bare nouns are common because the language lacks obligatory determiners. Baker's prediction for PNI is that verb must be adjacent to bare NP and Batak Toba places object immediately after verb (see 12). Moreover, he argues that incorporated NP must stay in situ (immobile). In Batak Toba, objects cannot move to the left of the verb (O-V is ungrammatical). Lastly, Baker also claims that PNI tends to appear in verb-initial languages. Indeed, Batak Toba is verb-initial (VOS).

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Theoretical Implications of PNI in Batak Toba

The findings support Massam's analysis that pseudo noun incorporation is closely related to reduced transitivity. The presence of bare nouns, strict verb–noun adjacency, non-specific interpretation, and the reduced syntactic status of the object indicate that Batak Toba exhibits PNI-like constructions rather than full morphological incorporation. Unlike languages such as Niuean, Batak Toba does not rely on case marking to distinguish incorporated objects. Instead, adjacency and word order function as the main licensing mechanisms. This suggests that PNI can be syntactically licensed through linear adjacency rather than morphological case.

The findings also support Baker's view that pseudo incorporation forms a complex predicate structure, where the verb and noun form a tight semantic and syntactic unit within the VP. In addition, detransitivization plays an important role in Batak Toba PNI. Voice prefixes such as *mar-* and *mang-* reduce verbal valency, allowing the object to lose full argument status and behave more like an incorporated element. Overall, the Batak Toba data support the view that PNI is closely associated with reduced transitivity and complex predicate formation.

4.2.2 Functional and Typological Significance

Functionally, PNI in Batak Toba emphasizes the event or activity rather than the object. The incorporated noun typically has a non-specific interpretation and serves to classify the type of activity rather than refer to a particular entity. The data also show that

information structure plays an important role: focus markers such as *do* interrupt verb–noun adjacency and block the PNI interpretation. This demonstrates that PNI in Batak Toba is influenced not only by syntax, but also by discourse and pragmatics.

Typologically, this study shows that PNI is not limited to polysynthetic languages, but can also occur in Austronesian languages with relatively analytic morphology such as Batak Toba. This finding expands the typological distribution of PNI and shows that incorporation-like constructions can arise through syntactic adjacency rather than morphological incorporation.

4.2.3 Contribution to Austronesian Linguistics

This study provides a novel contribution to Austronesian linguistics by identifying and systematically analyzing PNI in Batak Toba, a language that has received limited attention in incorporation studies. Moreover, the study highlights that voice system and argument structure in Batak Toba play a crucial role in shaping PNI behavior. Unlike languages with fixed subject-object alignment, Batak Toba allows flexibility in word order (VOS/SVO), yet still maintains strict constraints on verb–object adjacency in PNI constructions. This suggests that PNI is tightly integrated with the broader grammatical system of the language.

In conclusion, Batak Toba provides important empirical evidence that:

1. PNI can exist without overt case marking
2. Adjacency can serve as a primary licensing mechanism
3. Detransitivization plays a key role in facilitating incorporation-like structures
4. Discourse elements such as focus marking can interfere with PNI

These findings contribute to refining current theoretical models of PNI and highlight the need for more cross-linguistic studies that include underrepresented languages such as Batak Toba.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the characteristics of Pseudo Noun Incorporation in Batak Toba using corpus data and elicited judgments. The findings show that Batak Toba exhibits several core properties associated with PNI cross-linguistically, including strict verb–noun adjacency, restricted nominal mobility, detransitivization, and word-order alternation. These properties align Batak Toba with the typological patterns described by Massam (2001) and Baker (2014). The results also show that PNI influences clause structure by favoring verb–object sequences and reflecting the role of low-prominence nominals in clause organization.

The presence of PNI in Batak Toba, an Austronesian language that is not polysynthetic, has important implications for cross-linguistic typologies of incorporation. It shows that incorporation is not limited to polysynthetic languages with rich morphology, but can also occur in languages with relatively analytic structures. These findings suggest that incorporation should be viewed as a continuum rather than a typologically restricted phenomenon.

This indicates that syntactic and semantic integration can function as alternatives to morphological incorporation. Typological classifications should therefore account for languages that exhibit incorporation-like constructions without polysynthesis. This expands theoretical models to include more diverse morphosyntactic systems. Future research

should explore PNI in other Austronesian languages to determine whether adjacency-based licensing represents a broader areal feature.

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CONCEPTUAL METONYMY IN PRESIDENT PRABOWO'S FLOOD DISASTER SPEECH

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Abstract

This study analyzes conceptual metonymy in the President's speech during the flood disaster inspection in Bener Meriah Regency. The study focuses on metonymy within the Thing and Part Configuration of the Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) proposed by Kövecses (1998), which includes the relations of whole-for-part and part-for-whole metonymy. Using qualitative discourse analysis, the study examined a 380-word official transcript of President Prabowo's speech. Data collection employed documentation and indirect observation techniques, supported by audiovisual validation. Data analysis followed the framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings show that whole-for-part metonymy dominates, while part-for-whole occurs less frequently. The dominance of whole-for-part metonymy reflects a discourse strategy that emphasizes institutional responsibility and collective solidarity in crisis contexts. By employing this strategy, the President legitimizes state presence and authority while guiding public perception of disaster management. In this way, the study demonstrates that metonymy simplifies institutional realities, constructs collective responsibility, and facilitates public understanding in crisis communication. This research contributes to cognitive semantics and political discourse studies by highlighting metonymy's role in crisis communication.

Keywords: *ICM (idealized cognitive model); metonymy, part-for-whole metonymy; whole-for-part metonymy*

1. Introduction

Presidential speech in disaster contexts plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding, constructing collective responsibility, and representing state presence (Swetha & Aravind, 2025). In crisis situations, linguistic choices function as strategic tools to convey authority, empathy, and institutional action. While previous studies have examined metonymy in diverse context, little attention has been given to its role in crisis-related presidential discourse. To address this gap, this study draws on cognitive semantics as its analytical framework.

Cognitive semantics views meaning as a product of conceptual processes shaped by human experience (Lakoff, 1987; Talmy, 2020). Within this framework, metonymy is a conceptual mechanism in which one element provides access to another related element within the same domain (Kövecses, 1998). In political discourse, whole-for-part and part-for-whole metonymy enable speakers to simplify complex institutional realities and construct shared understanding of roles and responsibilities (Köder & Falkum, 2020). This makes metonymy particularly relevant for analyzing crisis communication, especially in presidential discourse during disaster situations. Building on this theoretical perspective, the President's speech in Bener Meriah provides a relevant case to examine how metonymy operates in crisis communication. In this setting, language not only conveys information but also constructs state responsibility and social solidarity during disaster response.

This study aims to: 1) Identify instances of whole-for-part and part-for-whole metonymy in the President's speech, 2) Explain how they are conceptualized through Kövecses's ICM, 3) Reveal their functions in presidential crisis discourse.

This study contributes to cognitive semantics and political discourse analysis by showing how metonymy functions as a strategic tool in crisis communication.

2. Literature Review

Metonymy involves a system of mappings within a single domain, a central principle in cognitive linguistics (Eizaga Rebollar, 2015). It is a conceptual mapping in which one entity provides mental access to another related entity within the same conceptual structure or Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) (Kövecses, 1998; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Littlemore, 2015; Wang & Zhang, 2022). Within cognitive semantics, language is understood as a representation of human knowledge and experience, where meaning is constructed through conceptual processes (Mushyrovskaya et al., 2022). In discourse, metonymy functions as a cognitive mechanism that enables speakers to access complex meanings through salient and contextually relevant elements (Köder & Falkum, 2020; Zhao et al., 2023). It commonly operates through whole-for-part and part-for-whole relations (Kövecses, 1998).

Whole-for-part metonymy involves using a complete entity to refer to a specific component, while part-for-whole metonymy uses a salient element to represent a broader entity. Examples such as "America" for the United States or "the car" for its exterior illustrate whole-for-part metonymy, whereas expressions like "the crown" for monarchy represent part-for-whole relations. Such mappings are particularly relevant in presidential disaster discourse, where institutions, actors, and responsibilities are often represented through simplified conceptual structures.

Previous studies have examined metonymy across various discourse domains. In advertising and media discourse, metonymy functions to simplify narratives and enhance audience engagement (Juliana & Mulyadi, 2024; Sidabutar & Mulyadi, 2023). In cultural and literary contexts, metonymy represents social interaction and symbolic meanings, such as in Javanese phatic expressions and literary narratives (Russida, 2018; Zulaicha, 2019). It also contributes to lexical meaning development through associative relations (Yusuf, 2021). Overall, these studies highlight that metonymy serves as a cognitive mechanism that structures and simplifies meaning across different discourse contexts.

Unlike previous research, this study focuses on presidential crisis communication. It applies Kövecses's Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) to analyze how metonymy constructs state presence, collective responsibility, and social solidarity. This study extends metonymy

research by demonstrating its strategic role in shaping public understanding and collective responsibility in crisis communication.

3. Research Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design to analyze whole-for-part and part-for-whole metonymy in President Prabowo's speech in Bener Meriah. The analysis focuses on the whole-part configuration of Kövecses's Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) (Kövecses, 1998).

The dataset consists of 380 words from the President's official speech obtained from the website of the Ministry of State Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia. The speech was selected because it represents presidential crisis discourse, combining institutional responsibility and direct communication with disaster-affected citizens.

Data collection employed documentation and indirect observation techniques, supported by audiovisual validation. The data were obtained from the official transcript published on the Ministry's website, ensuring data validity (Creswell, 2014).

Data analysis followed the framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In this study, the analysis involved identifying and coding instances of whole-for-part and part-for-whole metonymy. These instances were then categorized based on Kövecses's Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) to determine their conceptual functions in the discourse.

To ensure reliability, the coding process was cross-checked against the official transcript and verified through repeated analysis. This structured approach ensures methodological rigor and provides a replicable framework for analyzing metonymy in presidential crisis discourse.

4. Results and Discussion

Metonymy in presidential discourse functions as a cognitive strategy to simplify complex realities.

The results show that Prabowo's speech in Bener Meriah contains instances of whole-for-part and part-for-whole metonymy, analyzed within the ICM. The frequency distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Frequency of Metonymy

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Whole-for-Part	8	88.89%
Part-for-Whole	1	11.11%

Whole-for-part metonymy accounts for 88.89% of instances, while part-for-whole appears only once (11.11%). This distribution indicates that the President primarily uses whole-for-part metonymy to represent institutional actions through salient components, emphasizing collective responsibility and state authority in crisis communication. By contrast, the limited use of part-for-whole metonymy suggests that broader conditions are less frequently conceptualized through individual elements. Overall, this pattern reflects a

discourse strategy that prioritizes institutional representation and collective action in the presidential speech.

4.1 Thing and Part ICM Configuration

Thing and Part ICM configuration refers to a conceptual structure in which an entity is understood as consisting of interrelated parts within the same cognitive domain. This model allows speakers to access meaning by shifting attention between a whole entity and its constituent parts, or vice versa. In other words, an object, institution, group, or abstract entity can stand for one of its parts, and a specific part can also stand for the whole to which it belongs.

A. Whole-for-Part Metonymy

Eight instances of whole-for-part metonymy were identified in Prabowo's speech in Bener Meriah. The data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Whole-for-part metonymy

No	Data	Whole	Target (part)
1.	" Pemerintah akan bekerja sangat keras"	The government	State apparatus (ministers, TNI, police, BNPB, civil servants).
2.	" Presiden Republik Indonesia tidak punya tongkat Musa"	President of the Republic of Indonesia	The President as an individual actor.
3.	" Kita sudah kerahkan puluhan helikopter, puluhan pesawat"	We	TNI, BNPB, and operational agencies.
4.	"Panglima TNI, Kapolri, pasukannya turun semua"	Troops	Field personnel.
5.	" Semua jembatan akan kita perbaiki"	All bridges	Bridges damaged by the disaster.
6.	" Listrik akan kita hidupkan semuanya"	Electricity	Damaged power networks and installations.
7.	" Kita akan bersama dengan Bapak-bapak, Ibu-ibu"	We	The President and accompanying officials.
8.	"Saya monitor dan akan saya perhatikan semuanya "	Everything	Disaster management in the affected area.

The term *pemerintah* (government) refers to specific state apparatus such as ministers, the military, and disaster management agencies. This whole-for-part metonymy allows the President to represent complex institutional actions in a simplified and accessible way.

The phrase *Presiden Republik Indonesia* highlights the President as an individual actor, mapping the institutional role onto a human agent with limitations. This use emphasizes personal responsibility while maintaining institutional authority.

The pronoun *kita* (we) constructs collective responsibility by mapping state institutions onto concrete actors. It is used to represent both operational actions, such as deploying helicopters and aircraft, and solidarity with affected citizens.

Similarly, terms such as *pasukan* (troops), *jembatan* (bridges), and *listrik* (electricity) refer to specific operational elements rather than entire systems. These expressions direct attention to the most relevant aspects of disaster response, such as field personnel, damaged infrastructure, and disrupted utilities.

B. Part-for-whole Metonymy

One instance of part-for-whole metonymy was identified in Prabowo's speech in Bener Meriah. The data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Part for the Whole thing

NO	Data	Part (Vehicle)	Whole (Target)
1.	" rumah yang hanyut, yang rusak"	Houses	Community settlement conditions

The term *rumah* (house) represents broader settlement conditions, illustrating part-for-whole metonymy by linking a concrete element to the overall impact of the disaster.

These examples demonstrate that whole-for-part metonymy enables efficient communication by simplifying complex institutional processes and emphasizing actionable components in crisis situations. This finding is consistent with Kövecses (1998) and Panther and Raden (1999), as the speech demonstrates how metonymy provides cognitive access to salient elements within a conceptual domain. It also aligns with Charteris-Black (2011), who highlights the strategic role of figurative language in political discourse. This is further supported by Brown and Wijland (2018), who emphasize that metonymy functions as a cognitive mechanism that simplifies complex realities through salient elements.

Unlike prior studies in advertising, sports, and cultural or literary contexts, this case highlights metonymy's strategic role in crisis communication. Through these metonymic expressions, the President reinforces state presence and shapes public perception of disaster response.

Overall, the dominance of whole-for-part metonymy reflects a discourse strategy that emphasizes institutional responsibility and collective solidarity in crisis contexts. By employing whole-for-part metonymy, the President legitimizes state presence and authority, guiding public perception of disaster management.

5. Conclusion

This study finds that whole-for-part metonymy dominates Prabowo's speech in Bener Meriah, emphasizing institutional responsibility and coordinated state response in crisis communication. This pattern shows how complex governmental processes are communicated in a simplified and accessible way to the public. Part-for-whole metonymy appears minimally, representing broader conditions through concrete elements such as damaged houses. This indicates that the President prioritizes a macro perspective that

highlights institutional responsibility rather than individual representations of the crisis, thereby reinforcing a unified view of disaster management.

These findings contribute to cognitive semantics by demonstrating how metonymy provides cognitive access to complex institutional realities through simplified representations. They also contribute to political discourse analysis by showing how metonymy functions as a strategic tool to reinforce state presence, authority, and public understanding in disaster contexts. This study enhances understanding of how cognitive mechanisms underpin political rhetoric, offering insights for discourse analysis and language education.

This study is limited to a single presidential speech and qualitative interpretation. Future research may examine metonymy across different crisis contexts, conduct comparative analyses across multiple presidential speeches, or explore cross-linguistic variations in political discourse. It may also investigate audience reception to better understand how metonymy shapes public perception and trust in government communication.

This study contributes to cognitive semantics and political discourse analysis by demonstrating how metonymy functions as a strategic tool in crisis communication.

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MANUFACTURED INCLUSIVITY: A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF *MAD FOR MAKEUP'S* INSTAGRAM CAMPAIGN

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Abstract

This study examines how inclusivity is constructed through verbal and visual strategies in *Mad For Makeup's* #GetPearlFectSkin campaign within the context of Indonesian social media beauty marketing. Using a qualitative multimodal discourse analysis approach, three testimonial videos were purposively selected based on their representation of diverse skin tones. The data were analyzed using Genre Relations Theory, Appraisal Theory, and visual ambience frameworks. The findings reveal a systematic multimodal coordination across the campaign, including an identical three-stage genre structure consisting of context, description, and evaluation. Linguistically, positive attitude dominated the discourse (56%), while negative attitude appeared minimally (1%). In addition, linguistic upscaling frequently occurred (37.93%) to intensify positive evaluations. Visually, the campaign employed a standardized ambience characterized by warm tones (79%) and familiar settings (78%), creating a sense of intimacy and relatability. These patterns suggest that inclusivity in the campaign functions primarily as a manufactured branding strategy rather than an organically emerging practice. Although the campaign provides greater visibility for diverse beauty representations, such inclusivity remains constrained by commercial control. Overall, this study highlights the tension between surface-level diversity and genuine empowerment, contributing to broader discussions on manufactured authenticity in digital beauty marketing.

Keywords: *beauty marketing; inclusivity; instagram; mad for makeup; multimodal discourse analysis.*

1. Introduction

Social media has reshaped identity construction and marketing practices, particularly in the beauty industry where inclusivity narratives are increasingly foregrounded. Among the most widely used social media is Instagram, which allows users to share updates through photos, videos, and comments, fostering real-time interaction and visual storytelling. This benefit of Instagram has also influenced marketing practices, shifting from one-way promotion to a more dialogical strategy in which brands engage consumers through shared values such as authenticity, inclusivity, and empowerment.(Herrada-Lores et al., 2025). Researchers argue that social media is a digital social mirror in which people, particularly among Generation Z users, who actively negotiate identity through feedback, engagement

metrics, and self-expression (Nurrachmah, 2025; Pérez-Torres, 2024). As a result, social media has evolved from a simple platform for interactions to a strategic place for branding, customer engagement, and digital commerce.

This shift of strategy is particularly evident in the beauty industry, where promotional strategies increasingly respond to evolving body image discourses shaped online (Hidayat et al., 2023; Pramusita, 2021). In Indonesia, brands such as Mad For Makeup employ community-based campaigns to foster authentic interaction and inclusivity (Alianti & Tindaon (Alianti & Tindaon, 2024). Studies have shown that dialogical engagement, which aligns with Gen Z's emphasis on authenticity and relatable storytelling, increases purchase intention (Nurrachmah, 2025). This two-way communication allows brands and consumers to co-construct narratives that challenge narrow beauty stereotypes (Tanca, 2024). (Purwati & Ariyani, 2025) found that combining storytelling with influencer collaboration enhances engagement and brand awareness.

To address this gap, this study examines Mad For Makeup, a rapidly growing Indonesian cosmetic brand recognized for its digital presence and innovative marketing strategies. (Rahmasari & Zaim, 2024). Previous studies note that the brand positions itself as challenging rigid beauty standards and promoting awareness of beauty, freedom, and change (Hidayat et al., 2023; Yolinda, 2021), yet (Sances et al., 2022) suggest that its campaigns may reflect elements of performative feminism. Responding to these conflicting perspectives, this study investigates the brand's Instagram campaign #GetPearlfectSkin on Instagram, launched alongside the Pearl-Fect Cover Skintint marketed as an acne-safe complexion product offering a "pearl-like glow" and a wide shade range tailored to Indonesian undertones. By analyzing testimonial videos featuring influencers of diverse skin tones this study investigates (1) the beauty narratives constructed in the campaign and (2) how inclusivity is communicated through multimodal coordination. Drawing on Genre Relations Theory, Appraisal Theory, and visual ambience analysis. The study ultimately seeks to understand how local brands use digital storytelling to negotiate cultural beauty standards while positioning themselves competitively and whether they genuinely advocate these values or primarily deploy them for branding purposes.

2. Literature Review

One of the most important aspects of advertising is language. Through language, brands construct narratives that communicate their ideas via genre. According to (Martin & Rose, 2008), Genres are goal-oriented social processes, making them essential to analyze in advertising discourse. *Structured brand storytelling directly represents this idea*. In beauty advertising, evaluative texts structure consumer judgments and attitudes toward products. Previous research by (Devira & Westin, 2021; Fadhilah & Rahmadina, 2021) using Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) genre studies has shown that evaluative texts, such as online reviews and critical analyses, follow certain structures and necessary steps. These studies show that the main social function of these genres is to express attitude and make judgments through the evaluation system. This demonstrates that digital communication is carefully structured to negotiate meaning between communicator and audience.

Since advertisement contain more than just language, it should be analyzed holistically, as meaning emerges from the interplay of verbal, visual, gestural, and audio modes. Previous studies highlight the importance of looking at all parts together, showing that modern marketing, especially in beauty product ads, creates meaning through a mix of different methods, not just words. (Yanti et al., 2022), demonstrated, using multimodal

semiotics, that cosmetic advertisements employ various multimodal semiotics (verbal, visual, gestural, and audio). Their work argued that the construction of women's beauty shows a "complexity of meaning" and that the meanings conveyed refer to specific ideals of physical beauty.

Furthermore, (Pricilia & Suyudi, 2023) state that linguistic and non-linguistic features must be mutually sustainable and closely connected to produce advertising meaning, resulting in a message that is comprehensive and easily understood by the audience. This multimodal approach is confirmed as essential for brand communication, as the combined semiotic resources, like those found in Instagram advertisements featuring celebrities, actively collaborate to portray aesthetic qualities, as shown by (Khoirunnisaa & Harti, 2023) who found that multimodal resources collaborate to portray aesthetic qualities.

Following the understanding that advertisements are complex multimodal texts created with specific intentions, the focus must shift to the dynamics of the creator-viewer relationship, which is the basis for meaning negotiation. This relationship is theoretically framed by the interpersonal metafunction within Kress and Van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics, which concerns how the visual message engages the viewer. In beauty advertising, gaze, angle, and distance establish intimacy and authority, shaping how viewers relate to models and products. Research by (Martínez Lirola, 2022), analyzing the interpersonal dimension of picture books, details how elements of visual design establish mood, contact, and power relations, thereby structuring how the viewer is meant to relate to the subject matter. (Wang & Yin, 2024) confirm the necessity of this perspective, arguing that the analysis of interpersonal meaning, including elements like gaze, angle, and distance, is crucial for discerning the relationship between the visual text and its audience. Therefore, by extending this theoretical lens to social media beauty advertising, a deeper understanding can be gained regarding the visual and textual strategies brands employ to forge a direct, personal, and influential connection with their target consumers, thus moving the research beyond merely analyzing what is presented to how the viewer is addressed.

Another study of Instagram beauty advertisements utilizes a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to investigate the deeper ideological meaning encoded in the visuals and language. These studies highlight how beauty advertisements reflect and often reproduce societal norms. Critical discourse analysis reveals how beauty ads reproduce societal norms, often influenced by the Korean Wave and hierarchical standards. For instance, (Khoirunnisaa & Harti, 2023) and (Pramusita, 2021), using multimodal and critical discourse frameworks on Indonesian beauty products, demonstrate the substantial influence of the Korean Wave in shaping local beauty standards, with advertisements often favoring models aligned with those ideals. The concept of femvertising, as discussed by (Hidayat et al., 2023) found that while some brands attempted to promote diversity, others ultimately reinforced shifting yet hierarchical beauty standards in Indonesia. (Listiani et al., 2023) warned that empowerment messages are often profit-driven, misinterpreting feminist principles.

Conversely, some brands resist stereotypes, as shown by (Yolinda, 2021) and Tanca (2024) who analyzed campaigns challenging conventional beauty ideals analyzed the #ImPerfectBeauty campaign, finding that the brand sought to spread awareness about the misconception of beauty in Indonesia by featuring unconventional models, while (Tanca, 2024) used semiotic analysis on a BLP Beauty advertisement to show how it offers products

for women who want to enhance their beauty without conforming to existing beauty stereotypes.

Moreover, existing studies focus on representation and ideology, with limited attention to how local brands challenge dominant discourses and construct inclusivity through digital storytelling and multimodal strategies in Indonesia digital campaigns. Research shows that ads often reproduce ideals of femininity, modernity, and fair skin, influenced by the Korean Wave (Khoirunnisaa & Harti, 2023; Pramusita, 2021)ions about the authenticity of empowerment messages, as noted by Listiani et al., (Listiani et al., 2023), who argue that women empowerment is frequently used as a profit-driven strategy that reinforces the male gaze. Such findings echo broader critiques of faux-feminism, where promotional content urging women to conceal flaws contradicts empowerment narratives (Sances et al., 2022). Despite extensive discussion, this research integrates genre, appraisal, and visual ambience to examine how inclusivity is systematically constructed in Indonesian beauty campaigns and aims to fill this gap (Yolinda, 2021) and (Tanca, 2024).

3. Research Method

This study employs qualitative methods alongside multimodal discourse analysis as its primary analytical approach. *Multimodal Discourse Analysis is grounded in rigorous qualitative research principles and* acknowledges that digital data is actively constructed rather than passively collected (Flick, 2018a). This approach allows for a nuanced examination of both verbal and visual elements to uncover how meaning is systematically produced across media texts, aligning with the qualitative goal of exploring and interpreting social narratives (Biber, 2018).

The primary data comprises three testimonial videos sourced from the Mad For Makeup Instagram campaign #GetPearlFectSkin. Three videos were purposively selected as representative cases to capture diverse skin tone representation. (Schreier, 2018) This technique was intentionally applied to select cases rich in information. Three videos were selected to enable in-depth multimodal analysis rather than broad generalization. Specifically, three influencers representing light, medium, and tan skin tones were selected. The selected content was downloaded, screenshotted, and transcribed. The analysis aims to address two main research questions: (1) what beauty narratives are constructed through the campaign's storytelling? (2) How is inclusivity communicated through multimodal coordination of verbal and visual elements?

The data analysis procedure is designed based on the concept of methodological triangulation (Flick, 2018b), which systematically combines different analytical methods (verbal and visual) to achieve a fuller, more complex understanding of the phenomenon. The data analysis procedure involves several steps. First, all verbal content from the videos was transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then translated where necessary to ensure accurate coding. Next, each transcript was segmented based on (Martin & Rose, 2008) genre model to identify genre structures. After analyzing the genre, each clause was coded using Appraisal Theory categories: Attitude (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation) and Graduation (Force, Focus). (Martin & White, 2005) framework. For visual analysis, representative frames from each video were systematically coded using ambience parameters (Painter et al., 2012) were applied to classify frames as ambient-infused or non-infused. The resulting codes from the verbal and visual modes are systematically grouped. Patterns were synthesized at the

meso-level to identify recurring strategies across the dataset. Lastly, these findings, which arise from the systematic comparison of the two analytical modes, were critically interpreted to reveal underlying branding strategies and inclusivity narratives.

4. Results and Discussion

This section provides the findings and discussion of the testimonial videos by three influencers representing light, medium, and tan skin tones were analyzed under the hashtag #GetPearlfectSkin. The analysis covered the identification of the structure of the text, including its genre and linguistic features, from the lens of interpersonal meaning. The schematic structure of the text will first be analyzed, then the detailed analysis of the interpersonal metafunction, including appraisal systems and ambience.

4.1 Beauty Narratives Construction through Story Telling

4.1.1 Genre Structure

Building on the theoretical framework for analyzing the testimonial videos from the #GetPearlfectSkin campaign reveals a clear and organized genre structure. As posited, genres are staged, goal-oriented social processes in which a text is organized into a predictable structure to achieve a specific purpose.

Table 1.

Genre structure of @evelyn.ramli videos script

Category	Full Verbal Excerpt
Context	Imagine looking like a pearl. Not really, but like imagine being so glowy and smooth and perfect because you can get this flawless look too
Description	I'm actually so shocked at the result of the skin tint. It's medium to full coverage, has 8-hour oil control, UV protection, and the most luminous pearl finish. It's also super comfy to wear.
Evaluation	I'm having a deal right now, so run and get your perfect skin tint. The pun is so cute.

Table 2.

Genre structure of @raniazzhr videos script

Category	Full Verbal Excerpt
Context	So, I just tried this new skin you guys.
Description	Please look at this, it's super runny, but once you apply it on your face, boom! It gives medium to full coverage. And trust me, it's very lightweight. I'm using shade N2, and it matches my skin tone perfectly. Okay, let me finish my makeup first. Oh, wait! I also got their eyelash curler, and it's super cute. And here's my final makeup, the pearl finish makes it look like my skin but better, perfect for daily use. And one more thing, they also have a mini size that you can easily carry everywhere.
Evaluation	So, go try it and get perfect skin!

Table 3.

Genre structure of @papisels video script

Stages	Full Verbal Excerpt
Context	Can you imagine? Stepping out into the crisp winter air, and your skin still looks flawless even in this weather. Let's see, if this skin tint can handle that magic today. Honestly, this is my go-to winter complexion this time
Description	It is specifically designed for oily skin. It has this 8-hour oil control formula. Here's a quick close-up of my bare skin for reference. The coverage is said to be medium to full. It's perfect if you like something buildable. I don't even use concealer here, if you notice. This is super lightweight. It's not heavy or cakey at all, which I think is really great for everyday wear. It has a pearl finish, so it gives a natural glow with a next-level radiance.
Evaluation	I'm ready for the day, grabbing my bag, which by the way has a small version of charm pearlfect skin tint. Like, how are they so innovative? That day, the weather was really unpredictable, and all my activities were outdoors. Anyway, I've been wearing this for 10 hours, and it still looks flawless. What do you think? Totally worth checking out

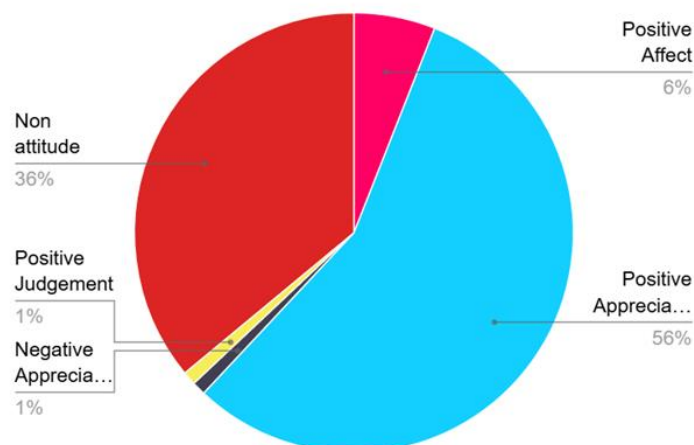
From the three tables, it shows that the testimonial videos use the same three-part structure (Context, Description, Evaluation) to deliver messages in a structured manner that promotes inclusivity for Instance “Can you imagine stepping out into crisp winter air...,” to make it easy for people imagine the situation and giving the audience the context that the product still works even in extreme weather. The Description stage mixes technical information with personal stories like “8-hour oil control” and “I don't even use concealer” to make the product seem more credible and to show that different types of users can get the similar results. The evaluation stage closes with persuasive calls to action emphasizing everyday accessibility e.g., “perfect for daily use,” “totally worth checking out”.

This pattern aligns with Genre Theory, which views communication as a staged, goal-oriented process. Specifically resembling the Review subgenre, the structure shifts from simple endorsement to a demonstration of universal efficacy. As (Derewianka & Jones, 2016) state the purpose of such genres is to analyze and assess specific subjects. Ultimately, this framework challenges traditional beauty hierarchies by positioning everyday users as authoritative evaluators rather than relying on exclusive models, effectively constructing a narrative of commercial inclusivity.

4.1.2 Attitude

Appraisal theory focuses on how speakers evaluate people, things, and experiences to shape audience perception (Tanca, 2024). The videos utilize attitude, expressing feelings, judgments, and evaluations to convey approval, disapproval, appreciation, or emotion, thereby influencing audience perceptions and fostering emotional resonance.

Figure 1.
Attitude Distribution of the testimonials videos



The analysis of attitude distribution across all three testimonial videos revealed 87 instances with significant dominance of positive attitudes. Positive appreciation was most frequent at 49 instances (56%), followed by non-attitude at 31 instances (36%). Less frequent were positive affect (5 instances, 6%) and positive judgment (1 instance; 1%). Negative attitudes were minimal or absent, negative appreciation appeared in only 1 instance (1%), while negative affect and negative judgment recorded zero instances.

Table 4.
Attitude Strategies

Attitude Category	Verbal Excerpt	Sub Category	Appraising item	Appraiser	Apprised
Appreciation	The coverage is said to be medium to full.	Positive Valuation	Medium to full	Speaker	The coverage
Affect	This is super lightweight.	Positive Reaction	Super lightweight	Speaker	Skin tint
	I'm actually so shocked at the result of the skin tint.	Satisfaction	So shocked	Speaker	Skin tint result
	Finally, I found the Pearl-fect Skin Tint for daily use.	Satisfaction	Pearlfect	Speaker	Skin Tint
Judgement	like, how are they so innovative?	Positive Capacity	Innovative	Speaker	The Company

Table 4 shows that evaluative language in the testimonials is dominated by positive appreciation, revealing a strong focus on product performance and functionality. This domination highlighting a strong focus on product performance and functionality. Appreciation assesses the worth of objects or processes rather than individuals' conduct or emotions (Martin & White, 2005). This category's dominance (56%) indicates discourse centering on product effectiveness “medium to full coverage”, comfort “super lightweight”, and practicality “perfect for daily use”. This pattern supports claims that review genres systematically evaluate products (Devira & Westin, 2021), but the #GetPearlFectSkin

campaign adapts this function to promote inclusivity by emphasizing universal product benefits rather than exclusive beauty ideals, marking a shift from traditional Indonesian beauty advertisements prioritizing whitening or conforming to specific beauty standards (Khoirunnisaa & Harti, 2023; Pramusita, 2021)

Positive Affect (6%) enhances emotional authenticity through expressions like “I’m actually so shocked at the result” and “Finally, I found the Pearl-fect Skin Tint.” These reactions, termed “authorial affect” (Martin & White, 2005), make testimonials appear genuine and relatable, echoing research on digital authenticity (Nurrachmah, 2025; Pérez-Torres, 2024). Judgment appears minimally (1%), limited to brief praise of brand innovation rather than evaluation of people. The overall absence of negative affect and judgment, with only one instance of negative appreciation, creates a consistently positive discourse that frames inclusivity as harmonious and desirable. However, this careful positivity might show that the authenticity is being managed (Listiani et al., 2023), meaning that while the campaign successfully promotes inclusivity through positive feedback, it is still influenced by business goals.

4.1.3 Graduation

Graduation addresses how attitudes are amplified or softened through two sub-systems: Force and Focus (Martin & White, 2005). Force increases or decreases evaluation intensity, while Focus sharpens or blurs categorical boundaries, signaling whether something is prototypical or marginal.

Table 5.
Graduation Distribution on the testimonials video

Type			Number	Frequency
Focus	Sharpen		8	9%
	Soften		0	0%
Force	Intensification	Quality	20	23%
		Process	2	2%
	Quatification	Number	0	0%
		Mass	3	3%
		Extent	0	0%
Scaling	Upscale		33	38%
	Downscale		0	0%
Isolating	Isolated		27	31%
	Infused		6	7%
Non graduation			54	62%
Total Clause			87	100%

The data above reveal the distribution of graduation across the three total testimonial videos. Out of 87 measured clauses, the most frequent finding is non-graduation, 54 instances (62%), indicating that most statements are presented without explicit linguistic upscaling or downscaling. However, when present, Graduation is overwhelmingly for upscaling. Upscale categories collectively represent the highest frequency of graduation types at 33 instances (38%). This is primarily driven by quality intensification in 20 instances (23%). In contrast, forms of attenuation are minimal or absent. Soften is not used at all, and

other downscaling forms are similarly rare. Furthermore, the data shows that isolated graduation with 27 instances (31%) is significantly more frequent than infused graduation with 6 instances (7%), meaning that the intensification of meaning is more often achieved through explicit intensifiers rather than implicit grammatical choices.

Table 6.
Linguistics graduation strategies

Graduation Category	Except	Sub Category	Isolated/infused	Scaling
Focus	that you can easily carry everywhere.	Intensification: Process	Isolation-non figurative	Upscale
	This is super lightweight	Intensification: Quality	Isolation-non figurative	Upscale
	It gives medium to full coverage.	Quantification : Mass/ Presence	Isolation-non figurative	Upscale
Force	It's so convenient to use, and it literally takes less than 5 min to finish my base	Focus : Sharpen	Infused-non figurative	Upscale
	and it matches my skin tone perfectly.	Focus : Sharpen	Isolation-non figurative	Upscale

The strategies for using graduation in the testimonial videos employ linguistic intensification to demonstrate inclusivity while reflecting commercial control. Quality intensification is achieved through isolated intensifiers meaning words added specifically for emphasis in phrases for instance “super lightweight,” “most luminous pearl finish,” and “really great for everyday wear,” amplifying product qualities and inviting audience alignment (Martin & White, 2005). Additionally, the “Sharpen” category of Focus uses both infused and isolated terms to make claims appear precise and indisputable. Unlike isolated terms, infused intensification occurs when the scaling or “strength” is built directly into the meaning of a single word. For example, while the word “perfectly” (isolated) uses a separate adverb to sharpen the focus on a match, the word “literally” (infused) functions to sharpen the claim by being semantically fused with the sense of exactness. These explicit upscaling and sharpening patterns construct inclusivity as definitive, though uniformity across influencers suggests commercial orchestration (Herrada-Lores et al., 2025; Sances et al., 2022).

The linguistic integration of genre structure, attitude, and graduation construction in the #GetPearlFectSkin campaign builds its inclusivity narrative. The similar three-stage genre structure (context, description, evaluation) frames relatable peer reviews, while positive attitude, especially appreciation, emphasizes practical product benefits such as coverage, lightness, and comfort (Devira & Westin, 2021; Martin & Rose, 2008; Martin & White, 2005). Graduation enhances these judgments with intensifiers, converting functional assessments into compelling assertions of universal applicability. Collectively, these combination storytelling strategies create inclusivity especially accessibility, democratic aesthetics for a varied user base, mirroring current participatory marketing tendencies (Herrada-Lores et al., 2025). Systematic structural repetition, predominantly favourable assessments, and

consistent intensification indicate that “commercial inclusivity” influences the representation of diversity and combines authentic inclusivity with brand-centric messaging (Khoirunnisaa & Harti, 2023; Listiani et al., 2023; Pramusita, 2021; Sances et al., 2022).

4.2 Inclusivity through a Multimodal Elements

4.2.1 Ambience

In multimodal analysis, the visual environment affects how people feel about the emotional tone and interpersonal stance of visual texts. (Painter et al., 2012) characterize ambience as established through three parameters: vibrancy (color saturation), ranging from muted tones that suggest restraint to vibrant coloration that conveys excitement; warmth (color temperature), where warm colors evoke comfort and cool tones promote distance; and familiarity (color variety), where extensive palettes indicate everyday realism and limited palettes signify detachment. These factors create interpersonal meaning by directing viewers' emotional alignment with visuals (Martínez Lirola, 2022; Wang & Yin, 2024). In beauty advertising, ambient design assumes an ideological significance, framing beauty as either accessible or exclusive, hence influencing inclusivity or exclusion in brand portrayal.

Table 7.

Ambience distribution on the testimonial videos

Ambience Category			Number	Frequency
Activated	Vibrancy	Light	73	68%
		Dark	10	9%
		Vibrant	1	1%
	Warmth	Warm	84	79%
		Cool	0	0%
	Familiarity	Familiar	83	78%
		Remove	0	0%
Ambience non infused	Denied		0	0%
	Defused	Dramatised	0	0%
		Flat	23	21%
	Non ambient		0	0%

Ambience analysis indicates that visuals are primarily warm (79%), familiar (78%), and light (68%), with minimal representation of dark (9%) and vibrant (1%) *settings*. The only notable non-infused feature, flat ambience (21%), suggests that while visuals occasionally simplify, ambience remains constant. An examination of 107 frames from three testimonial videos reveals a consistently identical ambience, enabling the videos to be both accessible and authentic.

Following (Painter et al., 2012), warm, familiar, and light ambience dominance creates intimacy, comfort, and approachability, positioning beauty as part of everyday life rather than exclusivity. This validates studies that visual design fosters interpersonal meaning through affective connection (Martínez Lirola, 2022; Wang & Yin, 2024). The similarity of these ambient selections signifies systematic manufacturing control, implying that diversity and authenticity are visibly enacted yet meticulously crafted to ensure brand continuity.

Figure 2.

Visual ambience across diverse testimonial videos via a. @evelyn.ramli, (light skin), b. @raniazzhr (medium skin), and c. @papisels (medium to tan skin)



Figure 2 provides visual evidence of systematic ambience patterns, as shows in Table 7. Three screenshots were captured during moments of product application across testimonials provided by @evelyn.ramli (light skin), @raniazzhr (medium skin), and @papisels (medium to tan skin) reveal remarkable production consistency despite ostensibly independent user creation. Although testimonials feature different skin tones, all employ consistent warm lighting and familiar domestic settings. Even when using different product shades, this standardization sometimes prevents videos from accurately portraying true skin colour.

By showing different influencers in similar settings, this visual similarity supports the campaign's message of acceptance. The identical atmosphere across various skin tones creates an equivalent ambience, visually portraying each influencer's story as equally authentic and relevant. Intentional multimodal synchronization meticulously designs aesthetically pleasing advertising images (Yanti et al., 2022). The significant uniformity of ambience patterns (79% warm, 78% familiar, and 0% cool or remote categories) suggests intentional creation rather than spontaneous user generation, corroborating assertions that linguistic and visual components jointly communicate producers' intentions (Suryani et al., 2021). Standardized lighting may obscure actual skin tone differences, potentially undermining claims of visual inclusivity. A thorough multimodal study shows that the #GetPearlFectSkin campaign's stories of inclusion are made by carefully coordinating verbal and visual resources across three integrated dimensions. This creates both fake authenticity and meaningful representation.

First, the alignment of verbal casual intimacy (stages of conversational context, practical description, and comfortable appreciation) and visually familiar warmth (78% familiar settings and 79% warm ambience) positions diversity. This approach highlights beauty within accessible domestic settings rather than idealized salons, which challenges the typical detachment observed in Indonesian beauty promotion (Khoirunnisaa & Harti, 2023). However, flawless consistency among testimonials suggests a manufactured rather than genuine accessibility.

Second, functional authenticity is constructed through "verbal evidential evaluation" (56% performance appreciation, 38% upscaling, and positive affect) combined with "visual transparent documentation," such as light vibrancy and clear application evidence. This integration provides visible proof to back verbal claims, making the evaluation more trustworthy. Nevertheless, standardized lighting may alter true color tones, indicating that

the documentation was strategically planned rather than spontaneity diversity. This spontaneous, which could lead to questions about the authenticity of the visual evidence presented. Third, inclusive diversity is achieved through "structural equivalence," where identical genre staging and equal evaluative intensity are applied across diverse skin tones. This strategy promotes equality by ensuring parallel treatment at both levels, thereby challenging exclusionary beauty standards (Pramusita, 2021). This uniformity, however, constrains genuine individual variation, highlighting the tension between representational equality and authentic diversity.

These coordination patterns confirm that linguistic and non-linguistic features are most effective when they are mutually sustainable and closely connected (Pricilia & Suyudi, 2023). This verbal-visual integration constitutes the fabric of messages that convey producers' intentions (Suryani et al., 2021), where visual modalities work in concert to influence consumer perception (Khoirunnisaa & Harti, 2023). In the #GetPearlFectSkin campaign, such coordination constructs inclusivity through what Wang & Yin (2024) describe as "multimodal emotional coherence."

However, the campaign's inclusivity is ultimately commercially constructed. It provides progressive representation (equal production quality across skin tones, a functional rather than transformative beauty focus, and accessible everyday positioning), but it also shows systematic control to keep the brand consistent. This tension embodies commercial inclusivity empowerment narratives framed within profit-driven structures (Listiani et al., 2023). The campaign occupies a liminal space between resistance-oriented campaigns promoting diverse representation (Tanca, 2024) and the orchestrated authenticity of profit-centered femvertising. The campaign embodies both genuine and manufactured inclusivity, reflecting tensions between representation and commercial control. Although the campaign promotes progressive representation, the market's needs limit its multimodal design.

This study has several limitations, and it would be beneficial for future research to focus on these limitations. First, limitations include the small sample size (three videos), exclusion of audience reception, focus solely on Instagram, and reliance on a single coder for ambience analysis. Second, it didn't take into account how the audience reacted and only looked at what the producers said, leaving out opinions on authenticity. Third, the study only examined Instagram, not other sites that could affect inclusivity. Fourth, visual ambience coding was conducted by a single researcher, suggesting the need for multiple coders to enhance reliability.

5. Conclusion

This multimodal analysis demonstrates that the #GetPearlFectSkin campaign constructs narratives of inclusivity through the strategic integration of verbal and visual resources. Across testimonials featuring individuals with diverse skin tones, the campaign consistently employs a three-stage generic structure—*context*, *description*, and *valuation*—alongside predominantly positive evaluative patterns, including positive affective feedback (56%) and linguistic upscaling (38%), while notably excluding negative attitudinal expressions. Visually, the campaign reinforces these narratives through the recurrent use of warm (79%) and familiar (78%) settings, thereby creating a cohesive representation of inclusivity and relatability.

However, the findings also suggest that such representations reflect a form of controlled authenticity, whereby individual experiences are carefully curated within a standardized branding framework. While the campaign promotes diversity through the

inclusion of varied skin tones and personal testimonials, these representations remain aligned with commercial objectives and brand identity. Consequently, the campaign exemplifies a model of commercial inclusivity in which empowerment is encouraged but simultaneously constrained by market-driven considerations. This tension reveals a broader discrepancy between the performance of diversity and the realization of genuine empowerment in digital beauty marketing.

The study contributes to the growing body of research on manufactured authenticity and inclusive branding by demonstrating how inclusivity is strategically constructed and communicated through multimodal discourse. Furthermore, it advances the field of multimodal discourse analysis by illustrating how linguistic and visual semiotic resources operate in tandem to shape contemporary narratives of inclusion, authenticity, and consumer engagement within social media advertising.

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PERSUASIVE LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES IN DIGITAL TOURISM: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE DOLAN BANYUMAS WEBSITE

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Abstract

This study analyses persuasive linguistic strategies on the Dolan Banyumas tourism website to examine how promotional discourse constructs destination image and shapes audience perception. Using qualitative discourse analysis, the study examines promotional texts across key sections of websites, including homepage narratives, destination descriptions, cultural content, and calls-to-action. The findings reveal that persuasive discourse is effective through the integration of emotional engagement, experiential storytelling, and credibility-oriented information, presenting Banyumas as an attractive, accessible, and culturally distinctive destination. The website strategically combines evocative language with informative content to enhance affective appeal while maintaining institutional legitimacy. A key contribution of this study is its identification of vernacular affective language, particularly the local expressions *ngangeni* and *mbetaih*, which function as symbolic resources to reinforce authenticity and emotional attachment in digital tourism promotion. The study contributes theoretically and methodologically to tourism discourse and digital discourse analysis by demonstrating how persuasive language functions across promotional contexts. Practically, the findings offer insights for culturally sensitive digital place branding, highlighting the value of local affective expressions in strengthening destination image and audience engagement.

Keywords: *destination image; digital place branding; persuasive linguistic strategies; tourism website discourse; vernacular affective language*

1. Introduction

Tourism websites function not only as sources of information but also as persuasive platforms that shape how destinations are perceived. Through strategic language choices, these websites construct destination image by combining factual information with emotional and evaluative appeals that influence audience attitudes and travel intentions (Marine-Roig, 2021). As a result, promotional discourse plays a central role in contemporary digital place branding.

Recent studies emphasize that destination image emerges from the interaction between tangible attributes and symbolic meanings communicated through language,

visuals, and narratives (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2021; Zein & Maharani, 2025). While global research has increasingly explored the rhetorical and discursive construction of destination image in online tourism promotion, limited attention has been paid to how localized cultural meanings are strategically embedded in official regional tourism websites. Indonesian government-managed platforms, which now serve as primary digital gateways for regional tourism promotion, provide a particularly relevant context for examining culturally situated persuasive discourse.

This study focuses on the Dolan Banyumas tourism website, the official digital platform managed by the Banyumas Regency Government. The website is notable for its use of local affective concepts to project authenticity, emotional closeness, and cultural distinctiveness, aligning with recent calls to examine culturally grounded communication in destination branding (Chauhan, 2021). This makes Dolan Banyumas an appropriate case for investigating how persuasive linguistic strategies operate within localized digital tourism promotion.

Using qualitative discourse analysis, this study examines promotional texts across key website sections, including destination descriptions, cultural narratives, and calls-to-action. Rather than providing a surface-level description of linguistic features, the study analyzes how persuasive strategies function discursively to construct Banyumas as an appealing, accessible, and culturally rich destination (Li, Pearce, & Morrison, 2023).

Accordingly, this study aims to identify dominant persuasive linguistic strategies, analyze their discursive functions in constructing destination image, and examine the role of vernacular affective expressions in digital tourism promotion. The study addresses the following research questions: (1) What persuasive strategies are used in Dolan Banyumas promotional texts?; (2) How do these strategies construct destination image and shape audience perception?; (3) How are vernacular affective expressions integrated into persuasive discourse?

This study contributes academically to tourism discourse and applied linguistics by demonstrating how persuasive language operates in localized digital tourism contexts. Practically, it offers insights for destination managers and policy-makers on embedding local cultural values into effective and culturally sensitive digital place branding strategies, responding to current challenges in regional digital tourism governance (Govers & Go, 2024).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Persuasive Language and Rhetoric in Tourism Discourse

Tourism promotion is primarily persuasive, aiming to shape how audiences imagine, evaluate, and emotionally connect with destinations. Recent discourse-oriented studies conceptualize tourism language as a form of strategic rhetoric in which linguistic choices guide interpretation, legitimize destinations, and stimulate desire (Koller, 2021). Rather than relying solely on promotional adjectives, persuasive discourse operates through interacting resources such as evaluation, narrative framing, emotional appeal, and credibility-building information. Scholars increasingly emphasize that persuasion in tourism discourse must be understood as a contextual and culturally embedded practice, where meaning emerges from the interaction of linguistic strategies within specific communicative settings. This perspective provides the conceptual foundation for examining how such strategies are realized within digital tourism genres, particularly official websites.

2.2 Tourism Websites as Digital Promotional Genres

Digital tourism websites have become key sites for destination image construction, functioning as hybrid genres that integrate information, promotion, and storytelling. Recent research highlights that websites differ from traditional promotional media by enabling multimodal orchestration, interactive navigation, and audience-directed pathways through hyperlinks and calls-to-action (Bateman, 2020; Li, Pearce, & Morrison, 2023). Studies of official tourism websites show that institutional actors strategically align language and visuals to frame destinations as authentic, accessible, and emotionally appealing. However, much of this research remains descriptive, focusing on isolated features rather than explaining how persuasive strategies collectively operate to construct destination image in a systematic way. This gap points to the need for a discourse-based approach that connects textual strategies with broader processes of destination image construction.

2.3 Destination Image and Place Branding through Discourse

Contemporary tourism research increasingly views destination image as discursively constructed rather than passively reflected. Recent studies emphasize that language and narrative play a constitutive role in shaping the cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image, particularly within official promotional texts (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2021). Place branding scholarship similarly positions discourse as a central mechanism through which destinations articulate identity, values, and differentiation strategies in competitive tourism markets. Despite this theoretical convergence, few studies explicitly connect micro-level persuasive strategies such as evaluative language and affective expressions to macro-level branding outcomes such as authenticity, emotional attachment, and cultural distinctiveness. Accordingly, this study seeks to bridge this gap by demonstrating how localized linguistic choices contribute to the construction of destination image and branding in digital contexts.

2.4 Vernacular and Affective Language in Tourism Promotion

Recent tourism discourse studies highlight affect as a critical dimension of persuasion, noting that emotional resonance often precedes rational evaluation in travel decision-making (Molz, 2022). However, this body of research has predominantly focused on globally legible emotional appeals expressed in dominant languages, thereby overlooking the nuanced role of vernacular affective expressions. In Southeast Asian contexts, for example, affective rhetoric is frequently embedded in local linguistic and cultural practices. In Javanese tourism discourse, expressions such as “*ayem*,” “*adem*,” and “*ramah*” convey not only comfort but also culturally specific values of harmony and social warmth. Similarly, Balinese tourism promotion often employs affective expressions linked to “*taksu*” (spiritual charisma) and “*keramahtamahan*” to evoke emotional and cultural authenticity. These examples suggest that vernacular affective language functions not merely as decorative elements but as culturally grounded persuasive resources that shape how destinations are experienced and imagined. Emerging work suggests that culturally specific expressions can function as powerful symbolic resources, conveying authenticity, intimacy, and belonging in tourism promotion. However, the rhetorical functions of such vernacular affective expressions and their interaction with broader persuasive strategies remain under theorized, particularly in the context of official tourism websites. Therefore, this study extends existing

literature by systematically examining how vernacular affective language operates within a broader persuasive discourse framework in a Southeast Asian context.

2.5 Indonesian Regional Tourism Websites and Digital Promotion

Over the past decade, Indonesian tourism research has increasingly addressed digital promotion, including social media, websites, and mobile applications (Utami & Indriani, 2018; Putra & Nurhadi, 2022). These studies demonstrate that digital platforms are instrumental in disseminating official tourism narratives and promoting regional destinations. However, scholarly attention has largely focused on national branding campaigns or commercial platforms, with relatively limited focus on regional government–managed tourism websites.

Where regional portals are examined, analyses often prioritize content themes or marketing effectiveness rather than detailed linguistic and rhetorical strategies. Moreover, the strategic use of vernacular language in regional tourism websites, particularly affective expressions tied to local identity, has received minimal systematic analysis. This gap is significant, given that regional portals frequently aim to balance cultural authenticity with broader accessibility, making them ideal sites for examining localized persuasive discourse. This context underscores the importance of investigating regional tourism websites as sites where global and local discursive strategies intersect.

2.6 Research Gap and Positioning of the Present Study

Synthesizing the literature reveals three key gaps. First, existing studies rarely integrate persuasive linguistic strategies into a coherent discourse-based model explaining how they collectively construct destination image. Second, regional government tourism websites remain underexplored compared to national or commercial platforms. Third, the persuasive role of vernacular affective language has not been systematically examined within digital tourism discourse. Positioned at the intersection of these gaps, the present study analyzes the Dolan Banyumas tourism website as a case of localized digital place branding. By examining how evaluative language, rhetorical appeals, narrative framing, and vernacular affective expressions interact in official promotional discourse, this study advances tourism discourse and applied linguistics while demonstrating how local cultural values can be embedded strategically in digital tourism promotion. Therefore, the study offers a more integrated and context-sensitive understanding of persuasive discourse in regional tourism promotion.

3. Research Method

3.1 Data Source and Data Collection

This study uses textual data from the Dolan Banyumas tourism website, the official digital platform managed by the Banyumas Regency Government for regional tourism promotion. Official tourism websites have been widely recognized as authoritative discursive spaces where institutional actors construct destination image and branding narratives (Li, Pearce, & Morrison, 2023). The Dolan Banyumas website was selected because it foregrounds localized persuasive language, making it suitable for examining culturally embedded tourism discourse.

The data consists of six promotional texts from various sections of the website, including homepage narratives, destination descriptions, cultural content, and calls-to-

action. The researchers systematically mapped the website structure, identified sections with explicit promotional intent, and manually extracted relevant textual materials. Visual elements such as images and layout were used to contextualize textual meaning and interpret persuasive alignment, but they were not subjected to independent multimodal analysis, in line with recent discourse-based studies of tourism websites that prioritize textual persuasion while acknowledging visual support (Hiippala & Bateman, 2020).

3.2 Analytical Procedure

The study employed qualitative discourse analysis to examine how persuasive language operates in digital tourism promotion. Discourse analysis is increasingly used in tourism studies to explore how language constructs meaning, identity, and destination image in online environments (Marine-Roig, 2021; Pizzo, 2021). The researchers coded the texts for key persuasive linguistic features, including evaluative lexis, affective expressions, modality, metaphors, and vernacular terms. These features were then grouped into broader rhetorical strategies such as emotional appeal, credibility construction, rational justification, and narrative framing.

The analysis was conducted across three interconnected levels. At the micro level, the study examined specific linguistic choices and affective expressions. At the meso level, these features were analysed as part of persuasive strategies and recurring rhetorical patterns. At the macro level, the study interpreted how these strategies function discursively to construct destination image dimensions such as authenticity, emotional attachment, and cultural distinctiveness in relation to digital place branding (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2021; Govers & Go, 2024). Through iterative comparison and synthesis, recurring patterns were consolidated into a discourse-based model of persuasive linguistic strategies in tourism website promotion. To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, the coding process involved iterative checking and peer debriefing among researchers to ensure consistency and interpretive reliability. Emerging categories and interpretations were continuously reviewed and refined to minimize subjectivity and strengthen analytical validity.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Emotional and Experiential Persuasion as the Core Strategy

The analysis showed that emotional appeal constitutes the primary persuasive strategy in the Dolan Banyumas tourism website. Promotional texts are dominated by positive evaluative lexis that foreground pleasure, serenity, freshness, and emotional satisfaction. Adjectives and descriptive phrases repeatedly emphasize natural beauty, calm atmosphere, and affective rewards, encouraging readers to associate Banyumas with emotional well-being rather than physical attractions. For example, phrases such as *“suasana yang sejuk dan menyenangkan”* and *“tempat yang cocok untuk melepas penat”* illustrate how emotional comfort is foregrounded as a key attraction.

Experiential persuasion is further enhanced through narrative positioning that places readers within the imagined travel experience. The frequent use of second-person address and inclusive expressions implicitly invites audiences to envision themselves enjoying the destinations. This linguistic positioning transforms the promotional text into an experiential simulation, allowing readers to emotionally pre-experience the destination before actual

visitation. For instance, expressions such as “*Anda dapat menikmati keindahan alam yang masih asri*” directly position the reader within the experience.

From a discourse perspective, this strategy aligns with recent tourism communication studies that emphasize affective engagement as a key determinant of destination attractiveness in digital environments (Koller, 2021; Pan & Ryan, 2023). Rather than relying on factual persuasion, the Dolan Banyumas website privileges emotional resonance as the central mechanism for influencing audience perception.

4.1.2 Reassurance, Safety, and Accessibility as Persuasive Support

Alongside emotional appeal, the website consistently deploys reassurance-oriented strategies to mitigate potential visitor uncertainty. Textual references to accessibility, infrastructure, facilities, and organized management function as implicit guarantees of comfort and safety. These elements are not presented through overt argumentation but are woven subtly into descriptive narratives. For example, phrases such as “*lokasi mudah dijangkau*” and “*tersedia fasilitas yang memadai*” signal accessibility and preparedness without disrupting the promotional tone.

This strategy reflects a pragmatic balance between desire and feasibility. While emotional appeal stimulates interest, reassurance strategies reduce perceived travel risk, a factor increasingly emphasized in post-pandemic tourism discourse (Zenker & Kock, 2020; Neuburger & Egger, 2021). By foregrounding accessibility without diminishing emotional appeal, the discourse constructs Banyumas as both inviting and manageable.

Importantly, reassurance functions discursively at the meso level by stabilizing emotional persuasion. The coexistence of affective attraction and rational reassurance strengthens persuasive coherence, ensuring that emotional desire is supported by perceived practicality.

4.1.3 Vernacular Affective Expressions and Cultural Embeddedness

A salient and distinctive finding of this study is the strategic use of vernacular affective expressions, particularly *ngangeni* and *mbetaih*. These terms encapsulate culturally specific emotional meanings longing, comfort, and familiarity that cannot be fully translated into standard Indonesian or English equivalents. For instance, the phrase “*suasana Banyumas yang ngangeni*” conveys a sense of emotional attachment that goes beyond simple enjoyment.

Rather than serving as decorative local color, these expressions operate as high-density affective signifiers. Their persuasive force lies in their symbolic function as markers of authenticity and emotional depth. By embedding vernacular language within official promotional discourse, the website bridges institutional authority and local cultural intimacy.

This finding extends recent research on authenticity and affect in tourism discourse, which argues that localized linguistic resources enhance emotional credibility and cultural legitimacy (Su et al., 2021; Giorgi & Vaccaro, 2022). In the Dolan Banyumas context, vernacular expressions function as a discursive shortcut to emotional attachment, reinforcing place identity while maintaining accessibility for broader audiences.

4.1.4 Intertextual and Narrative Framing of Destination Identity

The analysis also identifies narrative framing as a key persuasive mechanism. Promotional texts often construct Banyumas as a space of return, emotional renewal, and

cultural continuity. This framing implicitly connects tourism experience with memory, belonging, and personal restoration. For example, expressions such as “*tempat untuk kembali merasakan ketenangan*” highlight the theme of emotional return.

Intertextually, the discourse draws upon shared cultural knowledge and collective emotional schemas, positioning Banyumas as both a physical destination and an affective space. Such framing aligns with contemporary place-branding research that highlights storytelling as a central strategy in destination image construction (Pera et al., 2022; Tasci & Uslu, 2023).

4.1.5 A Multi-Level Discourse-Based Model of Persuasive Tourism Communication

Synthesizing these findings, this study proposes a three layer discourse based model of persuasive tourism communication:

1. Micro level: linguistic resources, including evaluative adjectives, affective expressions, modality, pronouns, and vernacular terms;
2. Meso level: rhetorical strategies such as emotional appeal, experiential narration, reassurance, and narrative framing;
3. Macro level: destination image construction, encompassing authenticity, emotional attachment, accessibility, and cultural distinctiveness.

Vernacular affective expressions play a pivotal mediating role within this model, connecting micro-level linguistic choices to macro-level place identity formation. This integrative model demonstrates how persuasion in digital tourism discourse emerges from the interaction of language, culture, and promotional intent.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that persuasive tourism discourse on digital platforms primarily operates through affective and experiential mechanisms, rather than informational persuasion alone. The dominance of emotional and experiential appeals on the Dolan Banyumas website reflects a broader shift in digital tourism communication, where destinations are marketed as emotional experiences and affective spaces instead of merely geographic locations. Evaluative lexis, second-person address, and experiential narratives work together to simulate pre-visit emotional engagement, allowing potential tourists to inhabit the destination before arrival imaginatively. In this respect, examples such as “*menenangkan*” and “*melepas penat*” illustrate how emotional experience is foregrounded in discourse. This supports recent studies emphasizing that emotional resonance is a central driver of destination image formation and travel intention in online environments (Koller, 2021; Pan & Ryan, 2023). Importantly, the Banyumas case demonstrates that emotional persuasion does not function in isolation but is discursively stabilized by reassurance-oriented language related to accessibility and comfort, thereby reducing perceived travel risk while maintaining affective appeal—a balance increasingly recognized as crucial in post-pandemic tourism communication (Neuburger & Egger, 2021; Tasci & Uslu, 2023).

A key theoretical contribution of this study lies in its analysis of vernacular affective expressions as strategic persuasive resources within official tourism discourse. The use of culturally embedded terms such as *ngangen* and *mbetaih* illustrates how localized

emotional language can function as high-impact affective markers that condense complex emotional meanings into culturally recognizable symbols. The finding that *ngangeni* functions as a marker of emotional authenticity further reinforces the role of affective lexis in shaping imagined experience. Rather than weakening communicative clarity, these expressions enhance emotional credibility and perceived authenticity by indexing local identity and collective cultural memory. This finding extends existing research on authenticity in tourism discourse, which has largely focused on visual symbolism and narrative storytelling (Su et al., 2021; Giorgi & Vaccaro, 2022), by foregrounding the role of vernacular affective lexis as a linguistic mechanism for authenticity construction. In this context, vernacular language mediates between institutional authority and local intimacy, enabling a government-managed tourism platform to communicate persuasively without adopting overly standardized or generic promotional discourse.

At a broader discursive level, the interaction between micro-level linguistic features, meso-level rhetorical strategies, and macro-level destination image functions reveals how place branding emerges as a multilayered semiotic process. Micro-level affective choices and vernacular expressions are strategically organized into meso-level persuasive strategies such as emotional appeal, reassurance, and narrative framing, which collectively contribute to macro-level constructions of authenticity, emotional attachment, and cultural distinctiveness. This integrative perspective advances current destination branding frameworks by demonstrating that affective language is not merely ornamental but constitutive of place identity in digital tourism promotion (Pera et al., 2022; Pan & Ryan, 2023). By articulating these relationships through a discourse-based analytical model, the study offers a transferable framework for analyzing how regional tourism destinations negotiate global visibility and local identity through language.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Dolan Banyumas tourism website achieves persuasion through an integrated use of affective language, experiential narration, reassurance strategies, and vernacular affective expressions. Together, these strategies construct a destination image that is emotionally resonant, accessible, and culturally distinctive, encouraging audiences to form personal and affective connections with Banyumas.

This study contributes theoretically by proposing a discourse-based model that links micro-level linguistic resources, meso-level rhetorical strategies, and macro-level destination image construction in digital tourism promotion. Methodologically, it offers a qualitative discourse-analytic framework that can be applied to the study of tourism websites and official promotional platforms. Practically, the findings highlight the strategic value of embedding local affective language into digital place branding, providing insights for regional tourism authorities seeking to promote destinations without losing cultural specificity.

However, this study is limited to a single regional tourism website and focuses primarily on textual analysis, which may not fully capture the multimodal and audience dimensions of digital communication. Future research could expand this discourse-based model by incorporating multimodal analysis and audience-response data to examine how visitors interpret vernacular affective language across different tourism contexts. Comparative studies across regions or countries would also provide a broader understanding of how local and global discursive strategies interact.

Overall, this study presents the role of language as a central semiotic resource in tourism promotion and offers a forward-looking contribution to discourse analysis and digital tourism communication by emphasizing the importance of culturally grounded persuasive strategies in an increasingly globalized digital landscape.

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MEET THE HERO WHO VISITS A LIBRARY CORNER TO ENHANCE SPELLING COMPETENCE: RURAL CONTEXT IMPERATIVES

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Abstract

Library learning resources have the potential to transform language competencies. This paper aims to investigate whether daily reading activities can substantially influence spelling competence. A qualitative research approach was administered for its efficiency in gaining insights into people's experiences within their social contexts. Encompassed in this qualitative approach was a research design-action research, with its characteristics of being able to address explicit challenges encountered within the context of rural education in some educational settings. Semi-structured interviews, with their open-ended nature, nurtured the gathering of rich data from the purposefully nominated five language teacher participants. Findings revealed that (i) one-on-one tutoring improves spelling, and (ii) collaborative learning spaces have a positive impact on language development. These findings denote proficient spelling as one of the critical skills, and when functionally portrayed, they have a characteristic to facilitate communication abilities, fluent writing, and academic performance. This study concludes that a shift in language teaching-learning approaches is not only necessary but also promising, with daily reading activities being a potential core practice.

Keywords: *Learning and teaching, spelling, competence, text comprehension, language learning.*

1. Introduction

When learners are efficient in the spelling aspect as one of the crucial language dynamics, comprehending texts then becomes an essential aspect of language development. Although language learning is dynamic, one becomes an affluent scholar if aspects like spelling, reading, and writing are mastered through extensive reading (Fakazli, 2021). For improved academic attainment, one needs to display competence in spelling as aided by reading resources accessible from the library (Vuzo, 2022). This fundamental language learning juncture is clear when learners are expected to engage in written texts. Glaring grammatical and spelling errors drive the content to lose its meaning, thereby depriving affected learners at achieving the intended learning outcome. Additionally, all subjects underpinning the prescribed curriculum have texts to be comprehended. This, therefore, becomes a wake-up call that assisting learners in this regard should not be solely regarded as

the task for teachers offering languages. Instead, all teachers need to ensure they prioritize maintaining subject content by ensuring that learners capture well the correct spelling in whatever text is comprehended (Elturki & Harmon, 2020).

Subsequently, it is argued by Mahwasane (2017) states that libraries as resource centers play an essential role in advancing spelling competence during the process of learning and teaching. As libraries are providers of wealthy resources, digital media, educational programs, and books, spelling, reading, and writing skills become enhanced. As phonemic awareness becomes grounded when these skills have been attained, learners perform better, not only in language-related subjects only but across the entire curriculum, considering that all the underpinning subjects offered have texts to be comprehended (Otuma et al., 2022). Therefore, as one of the strategies to curb the situation, the World Bank (2008) proposes that schools need to have access to a varying range of reading material. Libraries are therefore indebted to provide access to diverse reading materials. These may include newspapers, books, magazines, as well as online reading material, as noted by Madonsela (2015). It is observed that reading extensively as learners encounter words in context and get exposure to new and unfamiliar words, such a strategy is equated to enhanced spelling skills. If libraries sustain the provision of a wide range of programs and resources intended towards supporting practice and spelling instruction, spelling competence can advance. As opined by Mogha and Mubofu (2020), strong spelling skills throughout learner academic endeavours can be maintained if libraries could go beyond offering access to varying practices like collaborative learning spaces, multilingual resources, and spell-checking tools.

On noting that the main aim of this paper is to explore whether enforcing the administration of consistency for reading activities has any substantial influence on spelling competence, Wijaya, (2021) is of a similar opinion as they contend that well-equipped language learning abilities are underpinned by spelling competence. About the above-stated challenges in language learning, this inquiry, therefore, had a research question to be answered: To what substantial extent does imposing learners on daily reading activities influence spelling competence?

2. Literature Review

This is the section where a review of literature for purposes of achieving, segmenting, and critically analyzing arguments outlined by other scholars is done, per the studied problem. Concurrently, underpinning one's research with reviewing literature has an added advantage for the provision of grounded information for the problem inquired, as attested by Work (2022).

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Digital Spell-Checking Tools

Digital spell-checking tools are computer-based applications designed to assist users in identifying and correcting spelling, grammatical, and punctuation errors in written texts. These tools have become increasingly important in educational settings, particularly in higher education, where students are expected to demonstrate a high level of accuracy and proficiency in academic writing. By providing immediate feedback on language errors, spell-checking tools support learners in improving both the correctness and clarity of their written communication.

Advancements in educational technology have led to the widespread use of digital writing-support applications such as Microsoft Word, Grammarly, Ginger, and Hemingway Editor. Although these platforms differ in their features and operational mechanisms, they share a common objective: facilitating the detection and correction of language-related errors while promoting more effective writing practices (Francisco, 2020). As a result, they have become valuable resources for students seeking to enhance their language competence and overall writing quality.

The pedagogical value of digital spell-checking tools extends beyond simple error correction. These applications provide learners with opportunities to engage in self-directed learning by highlighting misspelled words, offering alternative word choices, and explaining grammatical inaccuracies. Such feedback encourages learners to reflect on their language use, develop greater awareness of linguistic conventions, and gradually internalize correct spelling patterns. Consequently, the use of spell-checking tools can contribute to vocabulary development, language accuracy, and writing confidence (Halim, 2020).

In contexts where educational resources may be limited, university libraries and computer laboratories often serve as important access points for digital learning technologies. Students who regularly utilize these facilities are able to benefit from software applications that support writing development and language learning (Pandey et al., 2018). Through consistent exposure to digital feedback and corrective mechanisms, learners can strengthen their spelling competence and improve their performance in language-related academic tasks.

Given the central role of written communication in higher education, digital spell-checking tools represent a significant technological resource for fostering spelling accuracy and academic literacy. Their capacity to provide immediate, individualized, and accessible feedback makes them particularly valuable for students seeking to develop effective writing skills and achieve greater success in academic and professional communication.

2.1.2 Spelling Competence

Spelling competence refers to an individual's ability to accurately produce and recognize the conventional written forms of words within a language. It is a fundamental component of literacy that contributes significantly to effective written communication and overall language proficiency. As a linguistic skill, spelling competence involves knowledge of orthographic patterns, phonological structures, morphological rules, and lexical representations that enable writers to encode words correctly in written texts (Treiman & Kessler, 2014).

Scholars have long recognized spelling as an essential element of writing development. According to Graham and Santangelo (2014), spelling proficiency supports the writing process by reducing the cognitive effort required to generate correct word forms, thereby allowing learners to focus more effectively on higher-order writing skills such as organization, coherence, and idea development. Students with strong spelling competence tend to produce written texts that are more accurate, comprehensible, and academically acceptable than those with persistent spelling difficulties.

Spelling competence is closely associated with orthographic knowledge, which refers to an individual's understanding of the conventions governing written language. Ehri (2014) argues that proficient spellers develop mental representations of words through repeated exposure to print, enabling them to recognize and reproduce correct spellings automatically. This automaticity facilitates fluent writing and contributes to the development of reading

and vocabulary skills. Consequently, spelling competence should not be viewed merely as the ability to memorize word forms but as a complex cognitive process involving the integration of phonological, morphological, and orthographic knowledge.

In second and foreign language learning contexts, spelling competence presents unique challenges. Learners often encounter difficulties arising from differences between the phonological and orthographic systems of their first language and the target language. English, for example, is characterized by a deep orthography in which the relationship between sounds and letters is often inconsistent. Such irregularities frequently result in spelling errors among learners of English as a second or foreign language (Cook, 2016). Therefore, developing spelling competence requires systematic exposure to written language, explicit instruction, and opportunities for continuous practice and feedback.

Recent developments in educational technology have provided additional support for the enhancement of spelling competence. Digital spell-checking tools, automated feedback systems, and computer-assisted language learning applications enable learners to identify spelling errors and receive immediate corrective feedback. Research suggests that such technologies can contribute positively to spelling development by promoting learner autonomy, increasing awareness of language conventions, and encouraging self-correction practices (Li & Hegelheimer, 2013). However, these tools are most effective when used as complementary learning resources rather than substitutes for explicit language instruction. Given its role in supporting writing accuracy, reading development, vocabulary acquisition, and academic communication, spelling competence remains a critical skill for students in higher education. The development of spelling competence not only enhances the quality of written work but also contributes to learners' confidence and effectiveness in academic and professional contexts. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence spelling competence, including the use of digital spell-checking tools, is essential for improving language learning outcomes and fostering academic literacy.

2.1.3 Interactive Spelling Games

It is important to note that communicative games have a significant impact on teaching and learning (Sheokarah & Pillay, 2021). Communicative games like spelling games create a fun collaborative learning environment while improving learners' confidence levels and motivation. Communicative games can reduce learning stress and improve enthusiasm in studying the so-called unfamiliar and foreign English language, hence its prescription of being declared as the learning medium language. This can be a fun way to learn and improve learner writing skills and pronunciation. As learners are permitted opportunities to interrogate some spelling online games, listening and simulation skills are enhanced because when words perceived are typed correctly, there are great chances to eliminate incorrect spelling (Dewi et al., 2017). In this type of game, learners type words under pressure, but at the same instance, they are permitted chances to press the "clue" button. Soon thereafter some related words are beamed on the screen. Although this might be regarded as a daunting and challenging activity. Pretorius and Spaul (2016) argue that most learners have benefitted from this exercise, and language development prospects were seen as eminent. Through excitements brought about by these language development games, FTENS could be observed strolling to the library most often to advance their spelling competence, interrogating the online learning gadgets even in the absence of their respective language teachers.

Additionally, with these free spelling websites acting as one-on-one tutoring for online computer programs, learners are advised to compile their spelling lists. This helps them to be creative, thus designing word games using the self-compile word cohort. With this learning strategy, spelling competence advances to its greatest heights as there is an emphasis on syllables and consonants (Abidin et al, 2017). This vocabulary growth resulting from the newly emergent English words with refined pronunciation is greatly adored and motivational, especially for English First Additional (FAL) learners with diverse home language constituencies. Engaging in learning activities like these is reported to be fun vocabulary games yet stimulating collaborative learning spaces not only for FTENS enrolled in English language-related modules but this cuts across all stages of learning and development (Maksum et al, 2021).

2.1.4 Collaborative Learning and Teaching Spaces

Support for teachers

Amalgamating resources and assorted strategies are essential as a support stance for teachers towards the production of learners identified to have advanced in their spelling competence. This means sustaining language teachers in this venture through the differentiation of strategies, professional development workshops, and configuration of the curriculum (Clemens & Kegel, 2021) is fundamental. Application of these strategies can be beneficial to counteract learner diversity with added support for those with difficulties in learning, such as struggling spellers. As teachers attend workshops on professional development strategies for effectively and efficiently conducting spelling lessons would then be a prerequisite. Following curriculum standards and the intended learning outcomes, workshops can also consider addressing factors such as spelling rules and phonics instruction for the literacy curriculum to be considered viable collaborative learning spaces (Aliyu & Danladi, 2018).

Henceforth, another valuable factor for consideration is the integration of technology into language learning. Educational apps focusing on spelling exercises should be considered fundamental to encourage technology integration as a supporting agent for spelling instruction (Barr, 2016). This goes without saying that there is a dire need for provision to access high-quality spelling resources and digital tools. In line with the previous alleged statement, Zariyah (2020) proposes that it is a crucial juncture that parents should be subsidized with resources and strategies that would help equip them to advance spelling competence within the youth as life-long learners. This study already has assumptions that when teachers are provided with the necessary support, spelling competence would be among learners, thereby having positive impacts on the overall literacy outcomes and excelled throughput rates in academic attainment (Sukmayadi & Yahya, 2020)

Theoretical framework

Underpinning this investigation is the Information Literacy Model (American Library Association (ALA), 1990). As this theory reinforces the use of libraries, embedded in it is the propagation of the internet and digital information, hence the digital era. ALA is renowned for its characteristic of endorsing yet developing literacy education. In line with this model, various guidelines interrelated to information literacy have been developed as means to improve spelling skills during the process of learning and teaching (Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, 2015; Information Literacy Framework for K-12

Education, 2018). The Information Literacy Model is embraced by essential components like identifying, assessing, evaluating, and using information.

Educational Implications of this model include and are not limited to functional dispatching of information literacy skills by language teachers to all cohorts of learners, irrespective of the phase or level they are enrolled for. Inclusively, the Information Literacy Model proposes a framework that helps to highlight how vital information literacy skills are in learning (Wahyudi & Suheri, 2021). When learners have become fully acquainted with these skills, they are likely to be enhanced across various language aspects like spelling competence, text comprehension, and vocabulary and ultimately become profound learners, not only in language learning but across all subjects that underpin the prescribed curriculum. Henceforth, acquiring information literacy skills is in line with promoting lifelong learning coupled with thinking in a manner that fosters critical analysis of whatever text is to be comprehended. Libraries, as resource centres, can assist the youth in becoming effective lifelong learners with enhanced language competencies.

3. Research Method

3.1 Approach

Jackson, Mazzei, Denzin, and Lincoln (2018) refer to research methodology as orderly and systemic approaches and methods that are carried out when conducting research with the intention of gathering credible information about the subject. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, which aided in attaining insight and a comprehensive understanding of participants as English language teachers faced challenges in augmenting learner-spelling competencies. Embedded in this qualitative inquiry is a research design termed Action Research. As opined by Clark et al (2020), action research is a process of improving educational practice, and the underlying methods involve action and evaluation to gather information and effect change in practice. Researchers opted for action research because it is based on problem-solving intended to benefit both the communities and researchers. One of the key advantages explored when we used this research design is that participants were empowered to an extent of directly involving them throughout the interview process. As participants vigorously engaged to identify causes and issues that led to lowered learner-spelling competencies, their responses also helped to generate solutions by suggesting intervention strategies to be implemented as means to address the problem faced by language teachers; by so doing, suggesting interventions and strategies feasible to address community needs.

3.2 Instrumentation

Contained in the interview schedule, authors portrayed semi-structured interview questions as data collection instruments to acquire insights from participants on their day-to-day experiences about the studied subject. Interview questions were open-ended to allow in-depth discussions between authors and participants (Hardani et al, 2020). For the discussions to have reached a level of robustness, there was a need to pose some follow-up questions to gather as much information as possible from participants about the subject. Primarily, these follow-up questions were not contained in the interview schedule. All questions that led to such heightened debates were centred around the spelling competence dynamics coupled with language development imperatives.

3.3 Sampling

Crossman (2020) defines purposeful sampling as a non-probability sampling that involves the selection of individuals or groups that are most appropriate for the research question. Another beauty of this sampling procedure is that the nominated participants acquired specific characteristics that were considered relevant to the aim of the study. Upon this notion, we then recruited individuals whom we felt were liable to provide rich and in-depth perceptions of the studied phenomenon, as opined by Andrade (2021). Five participants from a rural community-based institution were purposefully sampled for interviews. Scholars have identified some advantages of employing smaller samples for qualitative studies, which in turn have been noted to bring about depth and richness within the collected data. Smaller samples lead to the identification of themes and codes across various inquiries, which can lead to substantial insights, as argued by Young and Casey (2018). Additionally, the research design's flexibility and emergence of new questions, as insight by the trail of discussions, is often eminent when dealing with few participants as the identified study sample. For this adaptability, research considers findings as relevant and grounded. In accordance with these prerogatives, Begun et al. (2022) confirm that although the generalizability of the findings at times is limited by small sample sizes, valuable insights are attainable during the data-gathering processes. This cohort was considered relevant to make the study obtain rich data as they offered the English language at FTENS in a rurally located institution of higher learning. Participants were selected from a population of English teachers given their experience in language teaching intertwined with consistently submitted complaints of declining language competence with a special focus on spelling as this is one of the crucial factors towards refined and well-rounded academic writing expected from university students as aspiring future professionals.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

During the interview process recordings were done using audio. We ensured that we obtained consent from participants before engaging in the actual recording act. All participants willingly gave consent that they felt comfortable with being recorded for as long as the information they supplied would not have any adverse effect towards jeopardizing their jobs (Sugiyono, 2018). The time scheduled to administer the interview schedule could not materialize due to varying logistical factors; nevertheless, after we were ultimately done interviewing all participants, we started to transcribe all recorded data verbatim (Moore & Lompart, 2017). These are direct words from each interviewed participant with an equal combination of verbal and nonverbal communication. Thereafter, through thematic analysis, transcripts were analyzed, and this helped in the identification of themes as responses with similar patterns were gathered. During the entire process we remained neutral to avoid any biases likely to influence the processes of research. In addition to that, we ensured the use of pseudonyms to identify participant responses.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Bhandari (2023) outlines that in research, these are guiding principles and practices that researchers are expected to abide by as a code of conduct when engaging with participants to collect data. The primary aim for these regulations to be adhered to is consideration for scientific integrity and human dignity. When properly followed, such principles are put in place to ensure voluntary and informed participation. Adhering to ethical standards of conducting research, informed consent was received from participants.

They were constantly reminded of their right to withdraw anytime without any disadvantage and were also assured that their identities would be kept private. Considering these critical issues helped in attaining effective yet ethical interviews that resulted in obtaining rich data for the topic researched.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 One-on-one Tutoring

One-on-one tutoring can provide numerous benefits and substantial advantages for learners requiring extra help with spelling.

This finding is denoted by Participant S1 when arguing:

During language learning periods, as I tailor my instruction in line with the diverse needs and learning styles, I am opportune to assess their spelling abilities. Upon noting and identifying problematic areas that cause a lack of spelling enhancement, I provide the necessary feedback for my learners.

In line with this proposition, Participant S3 highlights:

To attend to learners with spelling difficulties, thus jeopardizing the grammatical context, I try my level best to implement strategies that are customized in a manner that includes a wide variety of techniques. To count a few, I can mention spelling games and word analysis. These prompt devices have indeed helped towards improved spelling aptitudes, thus catering to individual learner needs.

The same sentiments are captured from Participant S5 when mentioning that:

What I have vowed to do as a way of assisting and uplifting the declining spelling proficiencies in our learners is to focus solely on spelling activities. As I try not to disrupt the normal proceedings of the class environment, learners have drastically improved their spelling skills. Through the exchange and abrupt feedback, I allow my learners to correct spelling errors by offering the necessary guidance. This helps to motivate learners, leading to improved spelling exactness and fluency.

Extracting from perceptions by participants, one can denote that when one-on-one tutoring logistics are put in place, they are functional to the extent of creating platforms for individualized attention. This creates a positive ground for language teachers to modify their instruction to suit specific learner needs, concurrently allowing differing learning styles to be juxtaposed (Elturki & Harmon, 2020). As classroom activities have the endpoint of either formative or summative assessments, one-on-one consultations give leeway for teachers to have better opportunities to also assess learners' spelling abilities followed by application of the necessary feedback.

Additionally, as teachers are faced with the huge task of re-building phonemic awareness in this cohort of learners to close the identified gaps, learners get exposed to foundational strategies for enhanced spelling by manipulating individual sounds in words. This goes to say teachers are then expected to apply diverse learning and teaching activities intended towards developing phonemic awareness skills. When the learning environment is motivating, encouraging, and supportive, learner confidence is boosted, not only in language learning but across all subjects, buttressing the prescribed school curriculum (Tabroni et al,

2022). This is equated to academic excellence due to improved spelling skills and proficiencies. With regards to motivating schooling environments, long-term benefits attained are portrayed by confident lifelong learners with upgraded literacy skills that can help the growing youth to have the guts towards global competence as their academic goals would have been achieved through the attainment of essential language skills.

In line with the essence of engaging in the one-on-one strategies to assist in curbing the decline in learner-spelling proficiencies, below is what was shared by one of the participants when marking an essay assigned to FTENS as one of the continuous assessment tasks. This was an argumentative essay where learners were expected to share their lived experiences as FTENS at the university as an institution of higher learning. Glaring grammatical and spelling errors were alarming, let alone the use of informal language in an academic text. This was perceived by the participants as a lack of motivated and collaborative learning supposedly between learners themselves because this learner collaborated with a peer or pre-submission to the teacher, advice to self-edit and proofread would have been a prerequisite to eliminate the obvious linguistic errors.

Henceforth, in an educational setting, collaborative spaces where spelling competence is rated are of significant enrichment. In this manner learners get exposure to fostered interactions and engagements. As they share learning experiences within themselves, the outcome is enhanced literacy skills. Working together with learners leads to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and this is considered as invested in learning. With improved and refined language learning aptitudes, willingness to practice collaboratively leads to improved spelling skills as opined by Eden (2024).

4.2 Collaborative learning spaces

Collaborative learning spaces can have a positive impact on language and spelling development.

In accordance with this finding, when engagements were conducted through semi-structured interviews, Participant S5 argued:

In cases where collaborative learning spaces are promoted, there is functionality of cooperative learning as learners are seen to be working together either as pairs or groups with intentions of achieving common goals as tabled in the list of the intended learning outcomes for each specific subject offered. This strategy of permitting collaborative work has proved to work well for me because even those learners who initially displayed spelling difficulties are no longer the same as they were before. Learners in my class know that it is one of the top norms that learning from each other is fundamental for improved language proficiencies.

In support of the views above, Participant S2 echoed similar sentiments:

To break tensions and attitudes that are normally displayed by learners in my class, segregating those who emanate from dissimilar backgrounds, I allow prospects for individual exercises that are peer edited. I apply this strategy for sharing responsibilities among diverse learners, yet looking forward to support that is mutual and intended to enhance the declining language proficiency caused by grammatical spelling errors. This amazing strategy has not only brought learner diversity and contradictory language

abilities to the fore but has positively brought about togetherness among learners with varying dialects, linguistic constituencies, and spelling conventions. As learners are made aware of language diversity within themselves, they also become aware of their distinct linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

For collaborative learning spaces to inspire peer interaction, this paper already believes that prospects are engaging in meaningful conversations with core debates in language and spelling imperatives toward academic achievement. During this process learners get to know each other better through exchanging ideas, aimed towards a better understanding of the underlying spelling concepts with promoted language development. Another crucial aspect of collaborative learning spaces is fostered social learning experiences (Sutiani, 2021). Learners collaborate and imitate each other thus being influential by their improved spelling dynamics. When one gets to interact with the so-called proficient spellers and proficient language users, new and emergent vocabulary and spelling patterns are learned, leading to fluent learners who can effectively compile language structures and sentence construction, as speaking and writing are two inseparable critical aspects of language proficiency.

Henceforth, schooling environments that are supportive, inspiring, and non-judgmental have been reported by research to boost self-esteem among learners (Tohara, 2021). When learners have developed that sense of confidence in their schoolwork, they become future-ready scholars ready and willing to take risks in spelling competitions thus showcasing their level of expertise in language-related proficiency levels. These collaborative learning spaces not only foster that sense of belonging within learners but the uppermost that learners pride themselves with is that they consider themselves as valued, worthwhile human beings as supported by human rights in Chapter Two of the South African Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). If language teachers can efficiently harness collaborative learning benefits, there would be the creation of enhanced language proficiency and holistic literacy development.

The study findings are in line with the underpinning Information Literacy Model (American Library Association (1990) which stipulates reinforcement in the use of libraries as resource centres towards developing literacy education through the propagation of online learning resources. For learners to get exposure to digital information gadgets for language advancement is equated to global competence as required by the digital era. Therefore, institutions of higher education are concretized by this study to enroll in premium programs like Grammarly, which is accessible to all users, thereby leading to enhanced reading and writing skills. Fluent and efficient scholars are those who speak, read, and write fluently in diverse fields of specialisation.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of libraries as resource centers in supporting students' language development, particularly in enhancing spelling competence and overall literacy skills. The findings suggest that regular access to educational resources, including digital spell-checking tools and other language-support technologies, contributes positively to learners' ability to improve spelling accuracy and written communication.

The study further emphasizes the importance of inclusive instructional practices in fostering equitable learning opportunities. Language teachers play a critical role in creating

supportive learning environments through the implementation of collaborative learning strategies, differentiated instruction, and effective use of educational technologies. Such approaches can help ensure that all learners, regardless of their backgrounds or learning circumstances, have access to meaningful language-learning experiences.

Moreover, the findings underscore the value of positive collaboration among learners, teachers, educational institutions, and policymakers in promoting successful literacy outcomes. When these stakeholders work collectively to provide supportive and resource-rich learning environments, students are better positioned to develop strong spelling and language competencies that are essential for academic success.

Future research may explore the effectiveness of digital literacy interventions and spelling-support technologies across different educational contexts and learner populations. Comparative studies involving urban and rural institutions, as well as learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds, may provide deeper insights into the factors that influence spelling development and language proficiency. Such investigations could contribute to the design of more effective educational strategies aimed at improving literacy and academic achievement.

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A STYLISTIC-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF DICTION IN IMAM SHAFI'Ī'S *DA'IL AYYĀMA TAF'ALU MĀ TASYĀ'U* AND ITS MORAL EDUCATIONAL VALUES

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Abstract

This study examines the stylistics of diction in Imam Shafi'ī's poem *da'il ayyāma taf'alu mā tasyā'u* (leave the days to do as they will) through a semantic stylistic perspective. While previous studies have widely explored its moral teachings, limited attention has been given to the role of diction at the semantic level in constructing moral meaning. This qualitative study employs content analysis through documentary study and literature review. The analysis applies Syihabuddin Qalyubi's stylistic framework, particularly the semantic level (*mustawā al-dalālī*) focusing on lexical meaning (*dalālah al-lafẓ al-mu'jamī*) and its development through figurative stylistic elements at the imagistic level (*mustawā al-taṣwīrī*). The findings reveal that the lexical meaning develops into contextual meanings through stylistic devices such as metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and imagery, generating semantic effects that reinforce moral values, including patience, humility, resilience, and trust in God (*tawakkul*). The study also identifies moral values across personal, social, and metaphysical dimensions, highlighting the integration of linguistic analysis and moral education. This study contributes to Arabic stylistics by demonstrating how semantic diction systematically constructs moral meaning in classical Arabic poetry.

Keywords: Arabic poetry; Imam Shafi'ī; moral values; *mustawā al-dalālī*; stylistics.

1. Introduction

In the tradition of classical Arabic literature, poetry holds a significant position as a medium for expressing thoughts, emotions, as well as moral and religious teachings (Zahro et al., 2025). One of the prominent poets is Imam Shafi'ī, whose well known poem is *da'il ayyāma taf'alu mā tasyā'u* (leave the days to do as they will). Hasyim and Brilian (2023) state that this poem contains noble values and life lessons such as open mindedness, loyalty, integrity, generosity, and inner peace. In addition, Rosyidah (2024) argues that the poem reflects wisdom in facing life and conveys a strong religious nuance. These aspects make the poem particularly interesting to be examined through a stylistic approach, especially in terms of diction and semantic meaning in conveying moral messages.

Meaning in literary works is constructed through the use of language as the primary medium by which authors convey ideas, emotions, and values to readers. The use of

figurative language, whether consciously or unconsciously, can produce both aesthetic and semantic effects that enrich readers' understanding of literary texts (Ilmi, 2021). Therefore, literary studies require a scientific approach that not only focuses on content but also examines linguistic elements that contribute to the formation of meaning and aesthetic value. One relevant approach for analyzing the relationship between language and meaning in literature is stylistics, an interdisciplinary field used to analyze language style in literary works (Hasyim & Brilian, 2023). Through stylistic analysis, researchers can identify how language choices contribute to aesthetic effects and communicative meaning in literary texts.

From this perspective, stylistics becomes a relevant approach for examining Arabic poetry, which frequently employs figurative and symbolic language. Previous studies on Arabic stylistics and Imam Shafī'i's poetry, such as those by Idris and Abdurrohman (2025) and Hasyim and Brilian (2023), have mainly focused on phonological, morphological, and syntactic aspects of literary texts. Few studies have examined diction at the semantic level, leaving implicit moral meanings unexplored. In many cases, the meaning of Arabic poetry cannot be fully understood through literal translation alone, as literary meaning is often constructed through specific stylistic devices. Therefore, a deeper analysis of language use in literary texts is necessary (Ilmi, 2021). This condition indicates the need for a semantic stylistic analysis to uncover the implicit meanings embedded in the poem.

To address this gap, this study applies a semantic stylistic approach to analyze diction and reveal moral values in Imam Shafī'i's poem. The analysis focuses on *mustawā al-dalālī* (semantic level) to identify the characteristics and uniqueness of diction as well as the semantic effects that contribute to the expression of moral messages. This study aims to answer the following questions: (1) what are the characteristics of diction in the poem *da'il ayyāma taf'alu mā tasyā'u*, (2) how is semantic meaning constructed through diction in the poem, and (3) how are moral values represented through diction in the poem.

This study is expected to contribute to Arabic stylistics by applying Qalyubi's stylistic framework to the analysis of semantic diction. Furthermore, it is expected to provide insights into the relationship between language, meaning, and moral expression in Arabic literary works, as well as to support the development of moral education through literary learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Stylistics in Literary Studies

Stylistics is a highly interdisciplinary and eclectic field of study (Urbanová 2005, in Perveen & Farid, 2022). From this perspective, stylistics functions as a bridge between linguistic form and communicative function, mediating between grammatical structure and literary aesthetics (Ahmad & Ghafar, 2025). The primary focus of stylistics is to identify the distinctive features of language in literary works that contribute to their uniqueness, while also reflecting the author's identity and the aesthetic effects produced for the reader (Alshamiri & Murshed, 2025). In addition, stylistics aims to provide a deeper understanding and critical perspective on literary texts through the exploration of linguistic features, style, and textual function within specific contexts (Perveen & Farid, 2022).

In literary studies, stylistics is used to analyze various linguistic devices such as diction, sentence patterns, and rhetorical strategies, which not only enhance the form of a

text but also perform communicative functions and convey implicit meanings (Maulana et al., 2025). This analysis encompasses multiple linguistic levels, including phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis, semantics, and discourse, all of which interact in constructing the overall meaning of a text (Alshamiri & Murshed, 2025). For instance, sound patterns may reinforce the nuances of meaning shaped by word choice, resulting in both aesthetic effects and deeper contextual meanings. Therefore, stylistics is understood as an approach that positions language use as a central means in the construction of meaning and aesthetic effect in literary works (Januarti, 2019; Sopian, 2017; Aulia et al., 2025).

2.2 Syihabuddin Qalyubi's Theory of Stylistics

Building on this broader perspective, stylistic analysis becomes essential for achieving a deeper understanding of textual meaning (Fayez & Arya, 2024). Stylistics is considered capable of revealing how authors deliberately and systematically use language to construct meaning in their works (Leech & Short, 2024, in Sopian et al., 2025). Syihabuddin Qalyubi defines stylistics as a discipline grounded in specific principles, rules, and levels of analysis (Qalyubi, 2017). He systematizes Arabic stylistics into five analytical levels: *al-mustawā al-ṣawtī* (phonological level), *al-mustawā al-ṣarfī* (morphological level), *al-mustawā al-tarkībī* (syntactic level), *al-mustawā al-dalālī* (semantic level), and *al-mustawā al-taṣwīrī* (imagery level) (Harnida, 2022). Each level contributes to the construction of meaning in literary texts.

This framework demonstrates that sound, word formation, sentence structure, meaning, and imagery do not operate independently; rather, they interact and reinforce one another in producing aesthetic effects and deeper meaning. Therefore, this study adopts Qalyubi's model by focusing on the *mustawā al-dalālī* (semantic level), particularly on *dalālah al-lafẓ al-mu'jamī* (lexical meaning) and its development through the use of *majāz* (figurative language) at the *mustawā al-taṣwīrī* (imagery level), which together construct contextual meaning in the analyzed text.

2.3 Previous Research and Novelty of the Study

Several previous studies have examined Arabic poetry through stylistic and semantic analysis approaches. Hasyim & Brilian(2023) state that the poem *da'il ayyāma taf'alu mā tasyā'u* conveys moral values such as openness of heart, integrity, and inner peace. Maulana et al. (2025), using a hermeneutic-stylistic approach, identify character education values in the same poem, including *tawakkul* (trust in God), patience, perseverance, generosity, and the preservation of personal dignity. Meanwhile, Hajar et al. (2025), through semantic analysis, demonstrate that the use of verbs, nouns, and adjectives in Imam Shafi'i's poetry extends beyond literal meaning to convey moral and spiritual messages such as *tawakkul*, patience, sincerity, and awareness of the transience of worldly life.

However, these studies have not specifically examined diction at the semantic level within a systematic stylistic framework. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its focused analysis of diction at the *mustawā al-dalālī* (semantic level) based on Syihabuddin Qalyubi's stylistic theory. In addition, this study connects the findings to their relevance in moral education, thus moving beyond purely linguistic analysis to contribute to the field of educational studies.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative method with a content analysis approach to examine diction choices and semantic effects in the poem *da'il ayyāma taf'alu mā tasyā'u* by Imam Shafī'i. This approach is selected because it enables an in depth exploration of implicit meanings embedded in poetic diction, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods.

The object of this study is the text of the poem as the primary data source. This is supported by secondary data sources, including relevant journal articles on Arabic stylistics and semantic analysis of poetry, classical and contemporary references in Arabic stylistics and literary criticism, literature on moral education based on the thought of Al-Ghazali, and previous studies related to the poem. These supporting sources are selected based on their relevance, academic credibility, and publication in reputable journals or academic publishers.

Data collection techniques involve documentation study and literature review, namely close reading of the poem and supporting literature (Yakin & Al-Haq, 2023). The data collection process includes an in depth reading of the text to grasp its overall meaning, followed by a gradual translation into Indonesian by combining literal and interpretive translation to capture stylistic nuances and semantic context. This is followed by identifying diction with distinctive meanings, as well as recording and categorizing the data based on semantic features.

Data analysis is conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in Syihabuddin Qalyubi's stylistic framework and Al-Ghazali's theory of moral education. The analysis focuses on the *mustawā al-dalālī* (semantic level) to examine *dalālah al-lafz al-mu'jamī* (lexical meaning) and its development through figurative language, which contributes to contextual meaning. The stylistic findings are then mapped onto the three dimensions of moral education according to Al-Ghazali: (1) personal dimension, (2) social dimension, and (3) metaphysical dimension. Thus, each identified semantic pattern and effect is reinterpreted to reveal moral values across these dimensions.

The data analysis process includes coding relevant diction, categorizing it based on semantic and stylistic features, conducting interpretive analysis, presenting findings descriptively, and drawing conclusions. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applies four criteria: (1) credibility, achieved through data triangulation by comparing analytical findings with relevant literature, as well as peer discussion and expert validation; (2) transferability, ensured through detailed descriptions of the data and analytical procedures to allow applicability in similar contexts; (3) dependability, maintained through systematic and transparent analytical procedures; and (4) confirmability, achieved by documenting the entire analytical process and minimizing researcher bias through reflective interpretation.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the analysis of the poem *da'il ayyāma taf'alu mā tasyā'u*, the findings indicate that the diction employed reflects lexical meaning alongside various forms of deviation, including *majāz* (figurative expression), personification, metaphor, paradox, hyperbole, and metonymy, all of which collectively construct meaning through their semantic effects. This analysis is conducted using a stylistic approach based on Syihabuddin Qalyubi's framework, with a focus on the *mustawā al-dalālī* (semantic level) and its

interrelation with the *mustawā al-taṣwīrī* (imagery level). Furthermore, these linguistic findings are mapped onto moral educational values based on the theory of Al-Ghazali, encompassing the personal, social, and metaphysical dimensions.

Table 1.

Word choice

The following table presents an analysis of the diction in the poem, covering literal meaning, forms of deviation, and the meanings contained within.

Diction in the Poem	Literal Meaning	Figures of Speech	Meaning
(1A) <u>دع الأيام</u> <u>تفعل ما تشاء</u>	The days do	Personification	Time is depicted as if it possesses human like abilities.
(1B) <u>ولا تجزع</u> <u>لحادثة الليالي</u>	The events of the nights	Metonymy	The word "night" is used to symbolize a time of hardship or life's trials.
(1C) <u>فما لحوادث</u> <u>الدنيا بقاء</u>	Eternity or continuity	Emphasis of meaning	The world as something impermanent and ever changing.
(1D) <u>وكن رجلاً</u> <u>على الأهوال جلدًا</u>	Horror or something extremely frightening	Hyperbole	Difficulty is described as something extremely frightening.
(1E) <u>تستر</u> <u>بالسقاء فكل عيب</u>	To cover physically	Metaphor	Generosity is likened to a "cover" for human shortcomings.
(1F) <u>يغظيه – كما</u> <u>قيل – السقاء</u>	To physically cover something	Metaphor	A generous nature can cover up a person's shame.
(1G) <u>فإن شماتة</u> <u>الأعداء بلاء</u>	A calamity or trial	Emphasis of meaning	The enemies' joy at someone's suffering is a calamity.
(1H) <u>فما في النار</u> <u>للظمآن ماء</u>	Water for the thirsty in the fire	Paradox	It is impossible to expect kindness from a miser.
(1I) <u>إذا نزل القضاء</u> <u>ضاق الفضاء</u>	Space becomes narrow	Metaphor	When fate strikes, people feel as though they are crushed and have no room to escape.
(1J) <u>دع الأيام</u> <u>تغدر كل حين</u>	The days are treacherous	Personification	Time is depicted as an entity capable of bringing about change.

Table 2.

Moral education values

The following table presents an analysis of the verses, including moral values and their descriptions.

Poem	Moral Value	Description of the Value
(2A) <u>دع الأيام تفعل ما تشاء</u> <u>وطب نفساً إذا حكم القضاء</u>	Tawakal and sincerity	Describes the attitude of accepting Allah's decree with an open heart.

(2B) ولا تجزع لحادثة الليالي	Patience	Teaches the importance of patience and not losing hope in the face of life's difficulties.
(2C) فما لحواث الدنيا بقاء	Awareness of the transience of the world	Emphasizing that the world is temporary.
(2D) ولكن رجلاً على الأهوال جلداً	Resilience	Guiding individuals to be strong in the face of trials
(2E) وشيمتك السماحة والوفاء	Generosity and loyalty	Teaching the importance of generosity and loyalty in social relationships.
(2F) تستر بالسخاء فكل عيب يغطيه كما قيل السخاء	Generosity	Emphasizing that generosity can cover a person's shortcomings.
(2G) ولا تر للأعادي قط ذلاً	Preserving dignity	Reminding us not to show weakness to our enemies
(2H) ولا ترج السماحة من بخيل	Wise in social interactions	Teaching an understanding of human nature
(2I) ورزقك ليس ينقصه التأني	Contentment	Teaching that sustenance is not determined by anxiety or exhaustion.
(2J) إذا ما كنت ذا قلب قنوع	Contentment	Teaches that contentment of the heart is more important than material wealth.
(2K) وأرض الله واسعة ولكن إذا نزل القضاء ضاق الفضاء	Awareness of destiny	Reminding us that humans are limited in the face of Allah's destiny.
(2L) فما يغني عن الموت الدواء	Being aware of one's appointed time (death)	Reminding us that death cannot be rejected or avoided.

The analysis of the above findings is based on Syihabuddin Qalyubi's theory of stylistics at the *mustawā al-dalālī* (semantic) level to identify lexical meaning (*dalālah lafziyyah*) and contextual meaning in the poetry of Imam Shafi'i. Additionally, the *mustawā al-taṣwīrī* level (imagery level) was identified in the analysis data, contributing to the stylistic elements of the diction and verses.

4.1 Diction

Based on the analysis presented in the table above, the selected diction reflects *dalālah al-lafz al-mu'jamī* (lexical meaning) (Qalyubi, 2017), namely the basic meaning contained in the dictionary (Puspita & Ratini, 2024). Key lexical items, as listed in the table, such as الأيام , الليالي , بقاء , الأهوال , تستر , يغطيه , بلاء , serta verba maupun frasa seperti في النار initially carry lexical meanings which are then developed into contextual meanings through the *mustawā al-taṣwīrī* (imagery level) embedded in the verses.

For instance, the word الأيام (days), which literally refers to units of time, when combined with the verb تفعل (to act/do), portrays time as if it were capable of human action. In Arabic stylistics, this falls under *majāz* (figurative expression) at the *mustawā al-taṣwīrī*, specifically in the form of personification. At the level of *mustawā al-dalālī* (semantic level), this construction conveys the meaning that the course of life lies beyond human control and is entirely governed by God. This interpretation differs from the study by Hajar et al. (2025),

which views the expression as a reminder of the limited nature of time that should be used for good deeds and devotion to God. This difference indicates that a semantic stylistic approach does not merely reveal general moral meanings but also demonstrates how linguistic construction shapes the reader's perception of the relationship between humans and God. The semantic effect of this expression leads the reader to an awareness of human limitations and the importance of *tawakkul* (trust in God), aligning with the view that all power belongs to God and that human actions ultimately depend on Him (Amiruddin, 2021).

Similarly, the words الليالي (nights) and حادثة (event), which literally denote time and occurrence, are used metonymically in the poem, where "night" symbolizes periods of hardship and trials. This semantic shift intensifies the emotional tone and constructs a vivid imagery of difficult experiences.

The word بقاء (eternity) literally refers to something permanent and unchanging (Rosyidah, 2024). At the semantic level, however, it signifies the awareness of the transient nature of worldly life. Meanwhile, the word الأهوال (terrors) is presented hyperbolically to depict severe and frightening life challenges (Rosyidah, 2024), which in turn directs the reader toward adopting a stance of جلدأ (steadfastness and resilience). This aligns with Hajar et al. (2025), who interpret the term as encouraging individuals not to be overwhelmed by fear but to maintain hope and surrender to God. However, this study further demonstrates that the use of hyperbole at the stylistic level serves a more specific function, namely to intensify emotional pressure, thereby facilitating the internalization of perseverance and patience. Thus, the diction functions not only as a carrier of meaning but also as a means of shaping the reader's emotional and moral response.

The diction يغطي and تستر (to cover/conceal) are used metaphorically to represent generosity as a means of covering one's flaws. While these terms literally refer to physical acts of covering, within the poetic context they construct the idea that kindness can conceal human shortcomings in social interactions, thereby relating directly to moral values. This is consistent with Hajar et al. (2025), who interpret these terms as representing protection and the moral virtue of concealing others' faults. However, this study shows that metaphor functions not merely to convey moral messages but also as a stylistic strategy that softens their delivery, making them more readily accepted and internalized by readers. In this way, diction serves not only as a vehicle of meaning but also as a rhetorical tool that shapes social awareness and ethical attitudes.

Another example is the expression فما في النار للظمآن ماء, which constructs a paradox between fire and water to emphasize the impossibility of obtaining goodness from a miserly person. Here, the literal meaning of "water" shifts into a symbol of unattainable hope, reinforcing the moral message regarding misplaced expectations.

Overall, these examples demonstrate that lexical meaning at the *mustawā al-dalālī* is consistently developed through personification, metaphor, metonymy, paradox, and hyperbole at the *mustawā al-taṣwīrī*, resulting in contextual meanings that carry moral messages. This indicates that the interaction between semantic and imagery levels in Qalyubi's framework functions as a mechanism for constructing and conveying moral values.

4.2 Ethical Education Values

Based on the table, the moral values identified in this poem are classified into three dimensions in accordance with Al-Ghazali's framework of moral education: the personal, social, and metaphysical dimensions (Laili & Sofa, 2024). These values are interconnected

through diction at the semantic level and imagery, resulting in moral messages that are implicit and contextually constructed.

The first group, the personal dimension, concerns the relationship between humans and God, as noted by Sabila in Asy'arie et al. (2023). The values within this dimension include *tawakkul* (trust in God) and sincerity (2A), patience (2B), perseverance (2D), and *qana'ah* (contentment) (2I & 2J). These moral values are not expressed explicitly but are constructed through representations of life's uncertainty conveyed through personification, metaphor, and hyperbole. Semantically, this construction emphasizes human limitations in controlling life, ultimately guiding the formation of inner stability. Moreover, these values reflect the cultivation of key virtues, such as patience, courage, purity, and justice, which are regarded by Al-Ghazali as the foundation of moral character (Rahman, 2019). Thus, the moral values in this dimension do not appear as normative instructions but as outcomes of meaning constructed through language. This finding aligns with studies on *Al-Qaul Al-Jaliy*, which also emphasize sincerity and patience as core values in moral education (N. Aulia & Fattah, 2025), as well as moral values toward God as discussed in *Al-Barzanji* (Hayaturrohman et al., 2020). Accordingly, the poem reflects a classical ethical tradition that links personal virtue with spirituality and social responsibility.

The second group, the social dimension, relates to human interactions within society, governance, and interpersonal relations, as described by Suryadarma and Haq in Asy'arie et al. (2023). In this dimension, values such as generosity and loyalty (2E & 2F), maintaining personal dignity (2G), and wisdom in social interaction (2H) are constructed through metaphor and semantic relations that position moral actions as mechanisms for shaping social order. For example, the metaphor of generosity as a "cover" for human flaws suggests that moral values function protectively in maintaining social harmony. In addition, the use of paradox and semantic contrast in portraying human relationships reinforces the importance of understanding social character realistically. This demonstrates that poetic language not only represents moral values but also shapes perspectives on social ethics.

The third group, the metaphysical dimension, encompasses beliefs and fundamental principles related to faith (Asy'arie et al., 2023). This dimension is constructed through the use of metaphor and paradox related to destiny (2K), the transience of life (2C), and death (2L). Expressions such as the "narrowing of space" when confronted with destiny illustrate the human condition as limited before divine will. From a stylistic perspective, these devices reinforce theological dimensions by transforming abstract concepts into emotionally perceptible experiences. Thus, the values within the metaphysical dimension function not merely as spiritual teachings but as forms of awareness constructed through the structure of meaning.

4.3 The Relationship between Stylistics and Moral Education

This study demonstrates that moral values in the poem are not only conveyed through explicit messages but are also subtly encoded within linguistic structures and imagery. Unlike previous studies that tend to identify moral values thematically, this research shows that such values are constructed through semantic configurations and stylistic devices at the levels of *mustawā al-dalālī* (semantic level) and *mustawā al-taṣwīrī* (imagistic level).

These findings systematically explain how each stylistic element is mapped onto the dimensions of moral education according to Al-Ghazali, thereby clarifying the relationship between linguistic analysis and moral education. In this way, the study contributes to Arabic

stylistics by demonstrating the concrete interaction between the semantic and imagistic levels in the construction of moral educational values.

This is significant because it indicates that understanding moral values in literary texts cannot rely solely on thematic reading, but requires in depth linguistic analysis. Furthermore, these findings carry pedagogical implications for the teaching of Arabic literature, where stylistic analysis can be employed as an approach to instill moral values contextually. Therefore, this study not only enriches stylistic scholarship but also reinforces the role of semantic analysis as a methodological bridge between literary studies and moral education.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the diction in the poem *da'il ayyāma taf'alu mā tasyā'u* through the level of *mustawā al-dalālī* (semantic level) and to reveal the moral educational values contained within it based on Al-Ghazali's theory. The findings indicate that the poem, which is rich in figurative language, conveys meaning and intention in each stanza. The diction employed is predominantly lexical, or what is referred to as *dalālah al-lafz al-mu'jamī* at the semantic level. These lexical choices are further developed through stylistic devices that produce broader meanings and evoke emotional responses in the reader.

Furthermore, the poem encompasses comprehensive moral values in accordance with Al-Ghazali's framework of moral education, which includes personal, social, and metaphysical dimensions. This demonstrates that moral values in the poem are not only expressed explicitly but are also implicitly constructed through linguistic patterns and stylistic features. In this regard, the integration of Qalyubi's stylistic framework and Al-Ghazali's moral education theory illustrates how language functions as a medium for conveying moral messages.

This study contributes to Arabic stylistics by specifically focusing on the analysis of diction at the semantic level, an area that has received relatively limited attention in previous research, which has tended to emphasize thematic or general stylistic analysis. In addition, the findings suggest that classical Arabic poetry can serve as a valuable resource for moral education, where literary texts function as a medium for character formation.

However, this study has certain limitations, particularly in that it does not comprehensively capture the full range of stylistic patterns within literary works. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine a broader corpus of poetry and to incorporate comparative approaches or mixed methods in order to deepen the understanding of stylistic and moral dimensions in literary texts.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the continued relevance of Imam Shafi'i's poetry in contemporary contexts, particularly in discussions of ethics, spirituality, and education, and demonstrate that moral messages can be effectively conveyed through stylistic interaction.

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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF AI TOOLS ON EFL LEARNERS' COMMUNICATION AND AUTONOMY

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of AI tools on EFL learners' communication skills and learner autonomy across varying proficiency levels. Employing an exploratory mixed-methods design that combined a 15-item Likert-scale survey with open-ended questions, data were collected from 16 purposively selected EFL learners enrolled in an undergraduate English program at an Indonesian university. The small sample was deemed appropriate for qualitative exploration rather than statistical generalization. Grammarly was used primarily for writing correction and grammatical feedback; ChatGPT supported conversational practice and essay drafting; and Duolingo provided gamified vocabulary and pronunciation exercises. Participants reported improvements in grammar accuracy, vocabulary range, and writing confidence, with gains most pronounced among beginner and intermediate learners. Advanced learners, however, expressed frustration with idiomatic expressions and cultural nuances, identifying a ceiling effect in the utility of AI tools at higher proficiency levels. Regarding autonomy, participants described using the tools for self-directed error review and goal setting, yet several acknowledged a tendency toward passive dependency, accepting AI corrections without critical reflection. These findings suggest that AI tools can complement traditional instruction but require human oversight, blended feedback strategies, and teacher scaffolding to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness. This study contributes to emerging research on AI in EFL by foregrounding learner autonomy and contextual challenges as proficiency-dependent variables that prior single-level studies have not fully addressed.

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence in education; communication skills; EFL learners; learner autonomy.*

1. Introduction

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education has significantly transformed how learners acquire language skills, with AI tools, including chatbots, speech recognition systems, and language learning platforms, becoming essential components of English as Foreign Language (EFL) environments. Research consistently highlights three thematic benefits of these tools. In terms of learning outcomes, AI technologies provide immediate

feedback that enables real-time error correction and accuracy improvement (Jiang, 2022), while speech recognition features enhance pronunciation accuracy and listening comprehension (Huang, Hew, & Fryer, 2022). With respect to personalization and engagement, AI-driven platforms offer adaptive content and personalized recommendations that sustain learner motivation (Song & Song, 2023; Ma & Chen, 2024), and gamification elements such as streaks and rewards further reinforce engagement and a sense of progression (Luo, 2023). Regarding interactivity, AI-driven chatbots simulate real-life conversations in secure, non-judgmental environments (Han et al., 2023a), and tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly provide structured feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and style (Barrot, 2023). These benefits align with Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, which situates autonomy as central to intrinsic motivation, and reflect broader advances in natural language processing that have enhanced the usability of AI platforms.

Despite these benefits, AI tools face significant limitations that constrain their effectiveness in complex language learning contexts, particularly regarding cultural nuance, idiomatic language, and emotional responsiveness. Tafazoli (2024) cautions that excessive reliance on AI may undermine critical thinking and reduce opportunities for authentic language practice. Sohnui, Mukhlis, and Pendri (2025) and Jiang (2022) both note that AI systems fail to incorporate cultural idioms and context-specific expressions vital to global communication, while Huang et al. (2023) advocate for culturally diverse datasets and scenario-based simulations to address these gaps. Moreover, Kohnke and Moorhouse (2025) observe that AI lacks the emotional intelligence and deeper comprehension of learner needs that human instructors provide. These interrelated shortcomings highlight a critical need for balanced integration of AI and traditional teaching methods, a need that remains insufficiently addressed, particularly across varying learner proficiency levels, and that situates this study within broader debates on the pedagogical role of AI in education.

Few studies have examined how AI tools affect communication skills and learner autonomy across proficiency levels, particularly in ways that balance their documented benefits against cultural and contextual limitations. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how EFL learners at beginner and advanced levels engage with AI tools, providing insights for optimizing these technologies in personalized language education. By identifying opportunities for developers to enhance AI sensitivity to cultural and contextual nuances (Lewis, 2025; Sohnui, Mukhlis, & Pendri, 2025) and by foregrounding the importance of integrating AI tools with conventional teaching methods to foster critical thinking and authentic language practice, this study contributes both theoretical insights and practical strategies to the broader discourse on AI in language education.

Based on the above, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do EFL learners perceive AI tools' impact on their communication skills?
2. How do AI tools influence learner autonomy in language learning?

2. Literature Review

2.1 AI Tools in EFL Learning: An Overview

AI-powered platforms, principally Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Duolingo, have reshaped EFL pedagogy by delivering immediate feedback, personalized learning pathways, and interactive practice environments. Adaptive learning systems adjust content difficulty based on individual learners' progress, enabling tailored experiences that promote engagement

and retention (Ma & Chen, 2024), while automating routine tasks such as error correction and progress tracking, thereby allowing instructors to focus on higher-order pedagogical guidance (Jiang, 2022). These tools align with learners' intrinsic motivation through gamified and conversational features; Duolingo's leaderboards, streaks, and reward mechanics, for instance, make consistent practice more accessible for beginners and advanced learners alike (Luo, 2023; Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011).

Despite these strengths, AI tools share common limitations that constrain their pedagogical value, particularly their inability to handle cultural nuance, idiomatic language, and higher-order critical thinking. Grammarly identifies grammatical errors reliably yet cannot evaluate tonal appropriateness for specific audiences or rhetorical contexts (Song & Song, 2023). Similarly, AI systems lack the emotional intelligence and contextual sensitivity that characterize effective human instruction (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2025) and frequently fail to incorporate the cultural idioms and situation-specific expressions essential to global communication (Sohnui, Mukhlis, & Pendri, 2025). These shortcomings reinforce the case for hybrid models that combine AI efficiency with the contextual depth of human educators (Huang, Hew, & Fryer, 2022).

2.2 AI Tools and Communication Skills

Research converges on three dimensions through which AI tools strengthen EFL communication. In academic writing, consistent use of Grammarly has been shown to improve coherence, structure, and vocabulary choice, which is especially critical for non-native speakers in formal contexts (Song & Song, 2023). Detailed, context-specific feedback builds learners' writing confidence and deepens understanding of language usage beyond rote memorization (Jiang, 2022; Luo, 2023). While Grammarly demonstrably supports accuracy and surface-level correctness, it may not foster creativity or rhetorical awareness; its corrective logic privileges convention over voice, a limitation educators should account for when integrating it into writing curricula.

In oral communication, ChatGPT's simulated dialogues have produced significant gains in fluency, vocabulary use, and confidence by providing a judgment-free environment for language experimentation (Han et al., 2023b). Duolingo's speech recognition further advances pronunciation accuracy by detecting subtle phonetic errors and enabling learners to replicate complex phonetic distinctions (Huang, Hew, & Fryer, 2022; Song & Song, 2023). However, simulated interaction differs qualitatively from authentic discourse; AI interlocutors may not fully replicate the sociolinguistic unpredictability, register variation, or pragmatic negotiation that define real communicative encounters, and learners may develop fluency without the adaptive competence required in genuine cross-cultural exchanges.

2.3 AI Tools and Learner Autonomy

The autonomy-fostering potential of AI tools extends well beyond gamification. Adaptive platforms such as Duolingo enable learners to set objectives, monitor progress, and self-direct their learning pace, behaviors that operationalize the autonomy construct central to Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory. More recent work within motivational self-systems frameworks similarly emphasizes the role of self-regulation in sustaining long-term language engagement (Huang, Hew, & Fryer, 2022). Crucially, however, genuine autonomy requires metacognitive engagement, where learners must evaluate their own

understanding, identify gaps, and adjust strategies accordingly (Mohebbi, 2025). When AI tools provide only corrective output without prompting reflection, they risk producing surface compliance rather than deep self-regulation (Achuthan, 2025). Educators can scaffold deeper autonomy by embedding reflective journaling, error-analysis tasks, and learner-generated goal setting alongside AI feedback routines, thereby ensuring that technology amplifies rather than substitutes for independent thinking.

Gamification reinforces motivation through rewards and progression mechanics (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011; Luo, 2023), yet its benefits are bounded. Tafazoli (2024) warns that overreliance on AI rewards may cultivate passive learning, in which students await algorithmic correction rather than actively consolidating knowledge. Sohnui, Mukhlis, and Pendri (2025) further caution that gamified mechanics can overshadow substantive learning objectives. A balanced integration of AI-driven support and guided human instruction remains essential, as AI tools are structurally unable to provide the cultural, contextual, and critical dimensions that human educators can (Huang et al., 2023).

2.4 Research Gap and Novelty of the Present Study

Prior research has established the effectiveness of individual AI tools at specific proficiency levels, yet three gaps persist. Most studies examine a single tool or learner population, limiting cross-tool and cross-proficiency comparability. The simultaneous relationship between AI-driven communication development and learner autonomy remains underexplored within a single empirical frame. Crucially, no study has directly compared the effectiveness of AI tools across the full EFL proficiency spectrum, from beginner (A1–A2) to advanced (C1–C2), while accounting for both communication and autonomy outcomes. The present study addresses all three gaps through a mixed-methods design that examines Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Duolingo across varied proficiency levels, offering educators, developers, and policymakers a comparative account of AI's dual pedagogical impact.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a primarily qualitative design supplemented by quantitative data, reflecting the exploratory nature of the inquiry and the small purposive sample of 16 participants. Although the study incorporates Likert-scale survey items to identify preliminary perceptual trends, the sample size precludes generalizable statistical inference; quantitative data therefore serve an orienting function, providing a structured basis for the qualitative elaboration that follows. This approach is consistent with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) Explanatory Sequential Design, in which an initial phase of quantitative data collection and analysis is followed by a qualitative phase that explains and contextualizes the numerical patterns. Such a design is well-suited to educational research, where understanding the depth of learners' experiences is prioritized over statistical generalization (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The mixed-methods framework is justified here as exploratory: the quantitative strand maps broad perceptual tendencies across proficiency levels, while the qualitative strand, through open-ended survey responses, illuminates the mechanisms and meanings behind those tendencies. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) argue that integrating both strands within a single study enhances construct validity and produces richer, more credible findings than either method alone.

3.2 Participants

Sixteen EFL learners enrolled in an undergraduate English program at an Indonesian university participated in this study. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 26 years. Proficiency was distributed as follows: five beginners (A1–A2), five intermediate learners (B1–B2), and six advanced learners (C1–C2), as verified through self-reported CEFR placement aligned with institutional diagnostic scores. All participants had used at least one of the three focal AI tools, Grammarly, ChatGPT, or Duolingo, for at least 3 months prior to data collection. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure representation across the full proficiency spectrum and to enable cross-level comparison (Creswell, 2014). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were briefed on the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

3.3 Research Instruments

Two instruments were used: a Likert-scale survey and a set of open-ended questions. Both were embedded within a single online form and administered sequentially, generating complementary quantitative and qualitative data.

Likert-scale survey. The survey comprised 15 statements rated on a five-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), organized into three categories aligned with the research questions: (1) Communication Skills (e.g., “AI tools have improved my ability to express myself in English”); (2) Learner Autonomy (e.g., “AI tools motivate me to learn English independently”); and (3) Engagement and Motivation (e.g., “Using AI tools makes learning English more enjoyable”). The survey was selected for its capacity to generate standardized, comparable data across participants (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2012).

Open-ended questions. Four open-ended questions were designed to elicit rich accounts from participants with experience using AI tools. Two questions targeted communication skills, and two addressed autonomy, directly mirroring the study's research questions. This question-to-objective alignment follows best practice in qualitative instrument design (Patton, 2015) and ensures that responses yield data amenable to thematic analysis. Representative questions included: “Can you describe specific ways in which AI tools have influenced your communication skills?” and “In what ways, if any, have AI tools changed how independently you approach your language learning?” Open-ended formats allow participants to construct meaning without the constraints of predefined categories, producing narratives that surface contextual nuance unavailable through closed items (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected via Google Forms over a two-week period. The online format was chosen for its accessibility, scheduling flexibility, and ability to reach participants across geographic locations, advantages that are particularly relevant in post-pandemic Indonesian higher education contexts (Mailizar, Almanthari, Maulina, & Bruce, 2020). The combined form required approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participants were prompted to reflect on their most recent interactions with the focal AI tools before responding, grounding answers in recent, concrete experience. A limitation of this approach is the absence of face-to-face probing; follow-up clarification of ambiguous responses was not possible, potentially

constraining the depth of the qualitative data. Future studies should consider supplementing online instruments with semi-structured interviews to mitigate this constraint.

3.5 Data Analysis

This research analyses the Likert-scale responses as research data by using descriptive statistics, means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions to identify perceptual patterns across the three survey categories and proficiency levels. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the sample size of 16, inferential statistics were not employed; the descriptive findings serve as an orienting map for the qualitative analysis rather than as generalizable conclusions (Field, 2013). Results are presented in summary tables.

Furthermore, the open-ended responses were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework: familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. Coding was conducted manually by the primary researcher, with a second coder independently analyzing 30% of the data to establish inter-coder reliability; Cohen's kappa was calculated to assess agreement (target $\kappa \geq .70$). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. This process ensured that emergent themes such as enhanced fluency, metacognitive awareness, and technology dependency were grounded in participant data rather than researcher interpretation.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation and were advised of the study's purpose, data usage, and their unconditional right to withdraw. No personally identifiable information was retained; all data were anonymized using participant codes at the point of collection. Data are stored securely on password-protected institutional servers and will be deleted five years after publication, in accordance with institutional data governance policy.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 AI Tool Preferences and Usage Frequency

Figure 1.

AI tool preferences and usage frequency among EFL learners (N = 16).

What AI tools have you used before? You can pick more than one!

16 jawaban

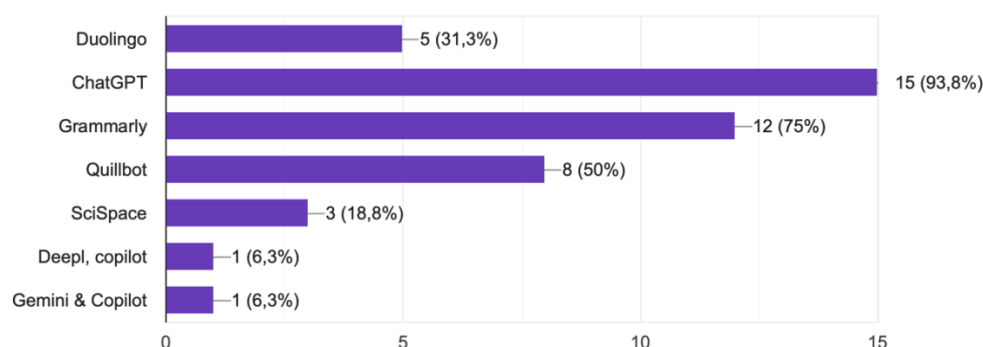
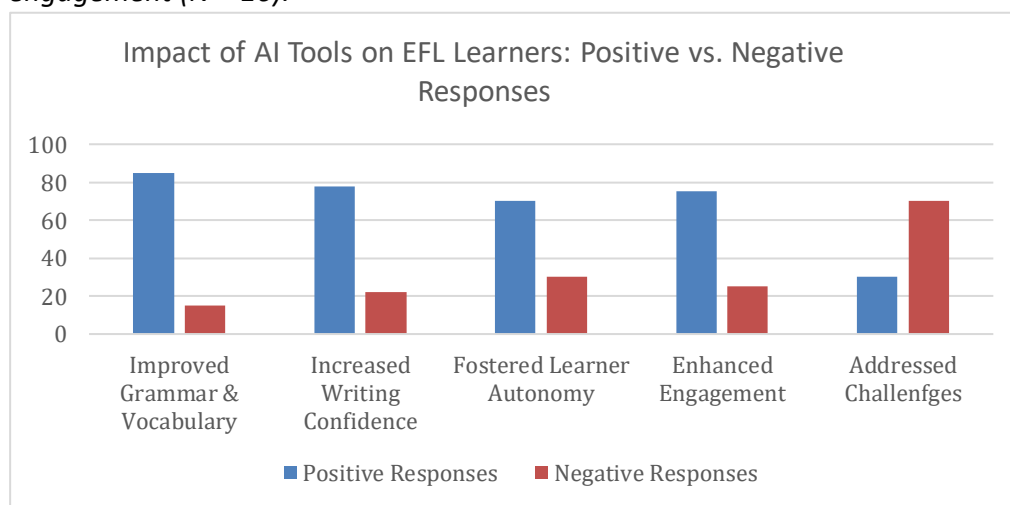


Figure 1 reveals a clear hierarchy of tool adoption. ChatGPT and Grammarly were the most commonly used, reported by 93.8% and 75% of participants, respectively, reflecting their broad applicability across writing, vocabulary, and conversational practice. QuillBot (50%) served a complementary paraphrasing function, while Duolingo (31.3%) appealed primarily to beginner learners through its gamified structure. Specialized tools such as SciSpace (18.8%), DeepL, Copilot, and Gemini (each 6.3%) attracted a narrower audience. The pattern potentially reflects learners' preference for tools offering immediate feedback rather than those structured around discrete exercises.

4.1.2 Learners' Perceptions of AI Impact

Figure 2.

Likert-scale responses on AI tools' perceived impact on communication skills, autonomy, and engagement (N = 16).



Three major themes emerged from the survey and open-ended responses: perceived improvements in communication skills, the development of learner autonomy, and proficiency-related differences in engagement and motivation. Together, these themes illuminate the multifaceted role of AI-powered language learning tools in shaping learners' experiences and perceptions of language development.

Communication Skills

Participants across all proficiency levels reported that AI-powered tools, particularly Grammarly and ChatGPT, contributed positively to their writing development by enhancing grammatical accuracy and expanding vocabulary repertoire. These perceived benefits were especially evident among beginner and intermediate learners, for whom real-time corrective feedback appeared to address foundational linguistic challenges. One beginner participant remarked:

"AI makes it easier for me to gain a lot of new vocabulary in writing. This helps me better in my writing tasks."

This perception reflects a broader trend identified in the survey findings, where fourteen of the sixteen participants (87.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that AI tools improved their written expression. The convergence between quantitative and qualitative data

suggests that learners generally perceive AI-assisted feedback as a valuable mechanism for strengthening linguistic accuracy and lexical development. Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted with caution due to the limited sample size and the reliance on self-reported perceptions. While participants reported noticeable improvements, the extent to which such gains are sustained over time or transferred to independent, unaided writing remains unclear.

Notably, advanced learners offered a more critical evaluation of AI-generated support. Although they acknowledged the usefulness of AI tools for correcting surface-level errors, they highlighted limitations in the tools' ability to account for contextual appropriateness, discourse conventions, and idiomatic language use. As one advanced learner explained:

"AI isn't good at constructing sentences contextually, especially in discourse or idiomatic expressions."

This observation points to an important distinction between linguistic accuracy and communicative competence. Whereas AI tools appear effective in supporting lower-level language skills such as grammar and vocabulary, they may be less capable of fostering the rhetorical, pragmatic, and contextual awareness required for advanced language use. The absence of similar concerns among beginner learners suggests that the perceived effectiveness of AI tools may vary according to proficiency level. As learners develop greater linguistic sophistication, they become more sensitive to the limitations of AI-generated language, revealing a potential ceiling effect in the pedagogical value of such tools.

Learner Autonomy

A second prominent theme concerned the influence of AI tools on learner autonomy. Participants frequently described these technologies as facilitating independent learning by enabling self-correction, personalized feedback, goal setting, and ongoing monitoring of learning progress. Rather than relying exclusively on teachers for feedback, learners reported using AI tools to identify weaknesses and revise their work autonomously. One intermediate learner characterized AI as a "guide or partner," illustrating the perception of technology as a supportive learning companion rather than a substitute for human instruction.

However, the findings also revealed a tension between autonomy enhancement and technological dependency. While AI tools encouraged self-directed learning, some participants expressed concern that frequent reliance on automated feedback reduced opportunities for critical reflection. One participant commented:

"Sometimes I find myself depending too much on AI instead of thinking critically about my mistakes."

This concern was echoed by four of the sixteen participants, indicating that the relationship between AI use and learner autonomy is not entirely straightforward. Rather than uniformly promoting independent learning, AI tools may simultaneously foster and constrain autonomy, depending on the manner in which learners engage with them. Learners who critically evaluate AI-generated feedback may develop greater metacognitive awareness and self-regulation, whereas those who accept suggestions uncritically may

become increasingly dependent on technological assistance. These findings suggest that the educational value of AI tools lies not merely in their availability but in learners' ability to engage with them reflectively and strategically.

Engagement and Motivation

The third theme concerned learner engagement and motivation. Participants identified immediate feedback and gamified learning features as key factors sustaining their interest and participation in language-learning activities. Applications such as Grammarly and ChatGPT were valued for providing instant responses to learner input, while Duolingo's reward systems, streaks, and progress indicators were frequently mentioned as sources of motivation.

These motivational benefits were particularly salient among beginner learners, who appreciated the low-pressure learning environment and the sense of accomplishment generated by incremental achievements. The combination of immediate feedback and gamification appeared to reduce anxiety while promoting sustained engagement with language-learning tasks. Such findings suggest that AI-powered tools can enhance motivational outcomes by making language learning more interactive, accessible, and rewarding.

In contrast, advanced learners tended to view gamified elements as less relevant to their learning objectives. Their motivation appeared to be driven more by opportunities for nuanced language practice, contextualized communication, and higher-order skill development than by reward-based mechanisms. This divergence indicates that learner engagement is influenced not only by technological features but also by proficiency level and learning goals. Consequently, the design and implementation of AI-assisted language-learning environments should account for the differing motivational needs of learners at various stages of language development.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that AI-powered language learning tools are perceived as valuable resources for improving communication skills, supporting learner autonomy, and enhancing motivation. However, their effectiveness is not uniform across proficiency levels, and their pedagogical benefits depend significantly on how learners engage with the feedback and learning opportunities they provide.

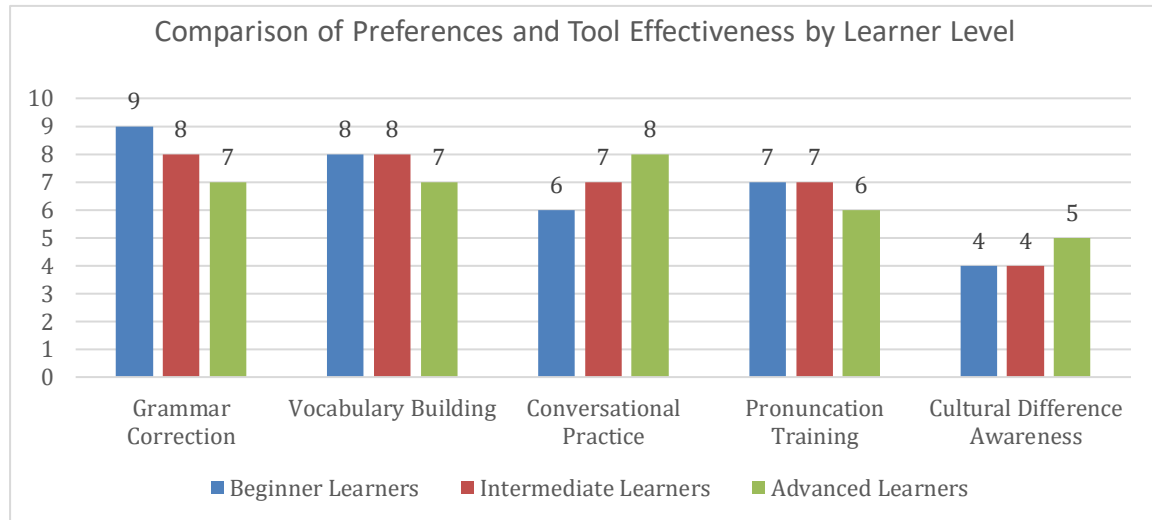
4.1.3 Challenges and Limitations of AI Tools

Participants identified three recurring limitations. First, occasional inaccuracies in AI-generated output undermined confidence: "It's not always relevant or correct; sometimes the answers are false." Second, advanced learners noted the tools' inability to handle cultural nuance or idiomatic meaning: "AI tools lack the human-like understanding needed for translating nuanced concepts." Third, some learners struggled with prompt formulation, indicating that effective AI use requires its own metalinguistic skill set: "Sometimes it's difficult to make specific prompts so that AI can help effectively." These challenges are not incidental; they reflect structural constraints of current natural language processing systems that pedagogical integration must acknowledge.

4.1.4 Variations by Proficiency Level

Figure 3.

Mean effectiveness ratings (0–10) across language-learning categories by proficiency group (A1–A2, B1–B2, C1–C2).



Beginners rated AI tools most favorably for grammar correction and vocabulary building, with Grammarly and Duolingo receiving the highest endorsements. Their engagement was primarily receptive: they relied on AI for correction rather than generation. Intermediate learners extended this to essay outlining and conversational scaffolding, though they began to register tool limitations in complex compositional tasks. Advanced learners reported the lowest ratings, particularly in Cultural Difference Awareness and Idiomatic Expression, two categories where AI tools were consistently described as insufficient. This convergence of quantitative ratings and qualitative critique across proficiency levels lends coherence to the findings despite the small sample size.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Communication, Autonomy, and Motivation: An Integrated Analysis

The present findings partially align with, but also complicate, established accounts of AI-enhanced language learning. Song and Song (2023) reported significant gains in coherence and structure among Grammarly users; the current participants echoed these gains in accuracy, though advanced learners' critiques suggest the benefit is uneven across proficiency levels, a nuance that Song and Song's (2023) single-level design could not capture. Similarly, while Luo (2023) and Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, and Nacke (2011) emphasize gamification as a generalized motivational scaffold, the present data indicate that its appeal diminishes substantially at advanced levels, where learners seek contextually rich feedback rather than reward-based progression.

The autonomy findings extend Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination framework in a productive direction. Although the theory posits autonomy as intrinsically motivating, the dependency accounts reported here suggest that perceived autonomy in AI-assisted contexts may be illusory: learners who accept corrections without critical reflection may be engaging in tool-directed rather than self-directed learning. More recent motivational frameworks, such as the Ideal L2 Self model (Dörnyei, 2009) and self-regulation theory

(Zimmerman, 2002), are better equipped to account for this distinction, foregrounding the metacognitive and volitional dimensions that AI interaction alone cannot develop. The implication is that using autonomy-supportive AI requires deliberate pedagogical scaffolding; access to technology is necessary but not sufficient.

The persistent limitations identified by advanced learners, idiomatic inaccuracy, cultural opacity, and the absence of rhetorical feedback, corroborate Sohnui, Mukhlis, and Pendri (2025) and Jiang (2022), but the present study adds proficiency as a moderating variable. Crucially, these limitations were not merely incidental frustrations; they constrained the type of communicative practice available at higher levels, effectively creating a proficiency ceiling for unaided AI use. This finding has direct implications for how AI tools are positioned in curricula: presenting them as universally applicable risks overstating their pedagogical value for advanced learners.

4.2.2 Implications for Practice

For educators, the findings suggest that AI tools should be integrated selectively and critically rather than broadly. At beginner and intermediate levels, tools such as Grammarly and ChatGPT can productively scaffold accuracy and confidence when paired with reflection tasks that prompt learners to evaluate, rather than simply accept, AI-generated feedback. At advanced levels, AI is most appropriately positioned as a first-draft resource, with human feedback retained for rhetorical, cultural, and pragmatic dimensions. Across all levels, educators should design activities that make the limitations of AI visible, for instance, by comparing AI output with expert human feedback to counter passive dependency.

For developers, the proficiency-differentiated ratings in Figure 3 point to clear design priorities: culturally diverse training datasets, scenario-based simulations for professional and intercultural communication, and advanced-level features that move beyond surface correction toward discourse-level feedback (Huang, Hew, & Fryer, 2022; Huang et al., 2023). The gap between beginner satisfaction and advanced dissatisfaction represents both a pedagogical problem and a product opportunity.

5. Conclusion

This exploratory study examined how 16 EFL learners with varying proficiency levels perceived the impact of Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Duolingo on their communication skills and learner autonomy. Given the small purposive sample, the following observations are offered as preliminary rather than generalizable. Participants reported improvements in grammar accuracy, vocabulary range, and writing confidence, with gains most pronounced among beginner and intermediate learners who benefited from real-time corrective feedback and structured practice opportunities. Advanced learners, by contrast, reported a ceiling effect: while AI tools supported surface-level accuracy, they were perceived as inadequate for contextually sensitive tasks involving cultural nuance, idiomatic expression, and discourse-level coherence. Regarding autonomy, participants described the tools as enabling self-directed review and goal setting, yet several also acknowledged a tendency toward passive dependency, accepting AI corrections without critical reflection, suggesting that autonomy-supporting and autonomy-undermining effects may coexist within the same learner experience.

A recurring theme across proficiency levels was the bounded utility of AI tools: effective as technical scaffolds, insufficient as substitutes for human instruction. A hybrid approach in which AI handles preliminary correction and human educators provide contextual, cultural, and rhetorical guidance may offer a more productive balance than either resource alone (Huang, Hew, & Fryer, 2022; Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2025). This conclusion extends prior work by identifying proficiency level as a moderating variable that prior single-level studies could not capture.

For educators. AI tools should be embedded within critically reflective pedagogical tasks rather than positioned as independent correction utilities. Activities that require learners to evaluate, question, and selectively apply AI feedback rather than passively accept it are more likely to build the metacognitive and rhetorical competencies that current tools cannot develop on their own.

For developers. The consistently low ratings from advanced learners in the cultural and idiomatic categories indicate a clear design gap. Incorporating localized language datasets, culturally diverse scenario-based simulations, and discourse-level feedback mechanisms would extend the tool's utility beyond beginner and intermediate proficiency (Lewis, 2025; Sohnui, Mukhlis, & Pendri, 2025).

For policymakers. Institutional frameworks for AI integration in language education should address equitable access, data privacy, and academic integrity. Guidelines should avoid one-size-fits-all mandates and instead support differentiated, context-sensitive adoption that accounts for learner proficiency and instructional context.

The primary limitation of this study is its small purposive sample drawn from a single institutional context, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The cross-sectional survey design also captures perceptions at one point in time, precluding conclusions about sustained learning outcomes. Four directions for future research follow from these constraints: (1) longitudinal designs to track whether AI-reported gains translate into durable, unaided language performance; (2) investigation of culturally adaptive AI systems trained on diverse, localized datasets to determine whether enhanced sensitivity narrows the advanced-learner gap; (3) exploration of multimodal and voice-interactive platforms for pronunciation and real-time conversation training; and (4) replication across varied EFL contexts and cultural settings to build a more generalizable evidence base.

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CLIMATE STRUGGLE AND IDEOLOGY IN MACRON'S SPEECHES (2024–2025): AN ECO-CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study investigates how climate struggle and ecological ideology are constructed in four speeches delivered by Emmanuel Macron (2024–2025) using an eco-critical discourse analysis framework within Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model, Halliday & Matthiessen's (1994) ideational metafunction, Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic model, and Corbett's (2006) environmental ideology. The global environmental crisis is one of the greatest challenges facing humanity today. Despite the growing body of critical discourse studies on climate communication, little attention has been paid to how French leadership constructs ecological ideology in international forums. This research employs a qualitative approach, with the research data comprising the discourse on the fight against climate change in Emmanuel Macron's speeches. The results showed that the climate struggle is dominated by material processes, with France and Western institutions positioned as the primary agents of global climate action. The ideology identified across the four speeches is conservationism, wherein nature is valued for its benefits to humanity rather than for its intrinsic value. Yet, through the eco-linguistic lens of ecosophy, Macron's discourse occurs as ambivalent, which reflects a sincere ecological commitment that nonetheless remains rooted in a neoliberal framework. Thus, it prioritizes private financing, market mechanisms, and technocratic governance.

Keywords: *Critical discourse analysis; ecolinguistics; environmental ideology; climate diplomacy; Macron.*

1. Introduction

Contemporary ecological conditions indicate an escalating planetary crisis, with conditions that have long permitted human life to flourish now under severe threat. Preceding studies point out that the Earth's natural processes are encountering a sequence of major changes, and these changes have the capacity to make it more difficult for people to survive in the future (Albert et al., 2023; Grumbach & Hamant, 2020; Martin et al., 2017). Indeed, for several years now, scientists have been predicting and warning of major disasters that could endanger the survival of humanity (Lidicker, 2020). Climate change has consequently occurred as the most critically debated issue of our time. Reflecting on the report by the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (2026), there has been an average anomaly in global ground temperatures from 1850 to 2024, where global

temperatures have gone through a significant transformation over time. The peak was reported in 2023 to 2024, when temperature anomalies passed 1.2°C above normal. Consequently, the global warming of today is a reality that is constantly worsening due to human activity. This situation is aggravated by eight more threats to the environment, including marine acidification, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, and chemical pollution (Rockström et al., 2009).

France addresses this issue with the utmost seriousness, as reflected in the high levels of public awareness and concern surrounding climate change when compared to the average European citizen. Proof of this was recorded in a survey conducted by YouGov for the European Investment Bank (EIB) (2018), which found that 82% of French citizens stated that they were concerned or very concerned about climate change. As president, Emmanuel Macron is one of the key figures in the fight against climate change. Macron has been successful in formulating and implementing climate policies in order to address the urgency of climate change felt by the French public.

Speeches and appeals have frequently functioned as essential instruments utilised by Macron to signify his commitment to the issue, as witnessed during several international visits and forums in 2024–2025, where he addressed the global climate crisis. A speech is one form of discourse text, as discourse itself can manifest in spoken and written forms. In order to analyze discourse, Fairclough (1992) outlines three stages of analysis: text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. Fairclough (1992) also points out that linguistic choices within a discourse contribute to disclosing the social background and identity of a speaker. Van Dijk (1998) further supported this idea by emphasizing that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) brings perspectives on discursive practices such as hegemony, domination, inequality, and discrimination. In addition, Stibbe (2015) clarifies that in ecolinguistics, language operates as an instrument to awaken collective consciousness and motivate more responsible behaviour towards nature. The framing of environmental issues in various international forums can affect the way global actors perceive responsibilities and potential solutions. Therefore, it is important to analyze discursive practices in order to grasp how political, economic and moral interests are mutually related and influence the direction of discussions on climate change. In this context, the linguistic choices made by Macron in various international forums between 2024 and 2025 can be considered ecological discourse that contributes to building a global narrative on the urgency of addressing the climate crisis.

Several previous studies have examined ecological issues and climate change using discourse analysis and ecological approaches, such as in environmental communication (Agbeleoba et al., 2025; Zhang & Jocuns, 2023), public policy (Christensen & Bentsen, 2024), international relations (Walewicz, 2022; Wang et al., 2023), and literature (Gong, 2023; Sadi et al., 2024). Furthermore, various studies have been conducted to cover a number of aspects by applying diverse methodologies and theoretical frameworks, including Fairclough's model (Leung, 2020; Saragih et al., 2026; Naz et al., 2022), van Dijk's model (Wang & Zhao, 2023; Yuliastutik, 2024), and the history-of-discourse (DHA) approach (Leipold et al., 2019; Telesiené & Hadler, 2023). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that climate discourse can be productively examined across disciplines. However, most existing studies apply either CDA or ecolinguistics in isolation, without integrating both within a unified analytical framework. In this regard, there are no studies that do engage with political speeches tend to focus on media representation or policy outcomes, hence leave the ideological dimension of ecological discourse in official presidential speeches largely unexamined. Moreover, no study has yet applied an ecocritics which mix Fairclough's

CDA, Halliday's ideational metafunction, Stibbe's ecolinguistics, and Corbett's environmental ideology to analyse how a sitting head of state constructs the climate struggle and ecological ideology in international forums. This gap is particularly evident given the growing role of Global leaders in building the climate narrative in the post-Paris Agreement era (Eckersley, 2020; Parker et al., 2017). To address this issue, this study analyzes 4 speeches by Emmanuel Macron at international forums during 2024–2025. This study addresses the following research questions: (1) How is the struggle against climate change represented in Macron's speeches? (2) What environmental ideology underpins these representations?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) originated from the work of experts in linguistics at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s. In their work, they paid attention to the use of language within social institutions and the relationship between language, power and ideology (Wodak, 1995; Hodge & Kress, 1979; Fowler et al., 1979). It was heavily affected by Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, which is known for providing well-defined linguistic categories to break down the relationship between discourse and social meaning (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Fairclough (1992) states that Critical Discourse Analysis refers to itself as a discipline that separates critical approaches from non-critical ones. In this regard, Fairclough (1992) constructs a framework that separates three dimensions within every piece of communication, which are: (1) text, whether it be how discourse is produced, an analysis of the speaker's personal experiences, or their knowledge whilst taking their beliefs into consideration; (2) discourse practice, wherein the speaker is aware of their own reality and identity; (3) sociocultural practice, where social and cultural relations are assessed in terms of how they impact the discourse produced. This three-part framework has a profound impact on the way environmental research is analysed. As discussed by Wang & Huan (2023) in their critical discourse analysis of climate change negotiations across various political institutions, the CDA approach is helpful in disclosing the narratives that support or challenge ecological modernisation.

2.2 Systemic Functional Linguistics

In its capacity as a social system of signs, language can be used to construct meaning within the context of social life (Banks, 2024; Kusmanto et al., 2023). Hence, the way in which an individual chooses to use language will yield specific meanings in accordance with the situation at hand. According to the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, language can be conceived as an active agent for expressing experience, forging relationships, and composing coherent messages (Riyanto & Ardianto, 2023). These three major functions are known as the meta-functions, which encompass the ideational, interpersonal, and textual aspects, and always work together in every instance of language use. Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) explains that:

- a. The ideational aspect pertains to the way language represents human experience of the world, whether physical or mental. Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) states that rules of grammar do not limit themselves to labelling experience, but actively help to shape that experience into a form of understanding. Thus, language actively constructs reality as understood by humans. Furthermore, this meaning is also embodied in structures involving process, participant, and circumstance (Webster, 2019).

- b. The interpersonal aspect works to forge a relationship between the speaker and the hearer in an exchange of information, goods, and services (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Thus, in any exchange, there is a giver and a receiver. The grammatical forms that convey interpersonal meaning are the elements of Mood, which consist of Subject and Finite. Furthermore, modality is also a prominent feature in interpersonal meaning (Zhou, 2024). It is because this feature conveys the speaker's attitude towards the proposition being conveyed, whether through modal adverbs, modal auxiliary verbs, or intonation.
- c. The textual aspect concerns the way a message is compiled to form a complete and coherent text (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). According to Webster (2019), cohesion pertains to the unity between sentences that is produced by connecting elements (cohesives), which are not confined to a single clause or sentence but can transcend such boundaries. Meanwhile, Morris & Hirst (1991) explain that coherence relates to the connection between the text and the surrounding situational context. Despite that, Potter (2016) explains that the information structure within a clause consists of two elements: Given Information and New Information, the function of which is to construct the information structure within the discourse.

This research concentrates on the ideational aspect, as it is suitable for conveying a range of experiences, both external and internal. At this point, Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) organises experiential reality into six recognisable process types, each accompanied by distinct participant roles, which are: (1) material processes, or processes of physical action involving an Actor and a Goal; (2) mental processes, or processes of sensing (perception, reaction, cognition) involving a Senser and a Phenomenon; (3) relational processes, or processes of being, divided into attributive (Carrier and Attribute) and identificative (Identified and Identifier); (4) behavioural processes, or processes of physiological activity primarily involving a Behaver; (5) existential processes, or processes expressing existence involving an Existent; and (6) verbal processes, or processes of information exchange involving a Sayer, a Receiver, and a Verbiage. In terms of practical application, this classification system is useful for identifying patterns of meaning-making through specific configurations of participants. Previous studies have found that the choice of process type carries systematic ideological connotations. In political discourse, the dominance of material processes positions actors as active and assertive, whereas a greater reliance on relational or existential processes makes actors and accountability less distinct (Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2023; Kashif et al., 2022). This pattern takes on ecological implications when applied to environmental texts, as the attribution of agency to human or non-human participants yields profoundly different relationships between humans and nature (Luan, et al., 2024).

2.3 Ecology and Environmental Ideology

Stibbe (2015) points out that ecolinguistics leverages various linguistic theoretical frameworks as instruments to study linguistic patterns, with the objective of disclosing the values and beliefs that determine the way humans perceive and live their lives. Its purpose is to open up space for change regarding these beliefs. Furthermore, Nesbitt-Larking (2017) perceives narratives embedded within a discourse as representations of ideology, referring to a belief system embraced by a particular group regarding the nature of the world. It pertains to past conditions, present realities, and the ideal vision that needs to be realized in

the future. This belief system does not end at the abstract level, but deepens into the way people understand and experience their daily lives (Ewick & Silbey, 1994). Hence, when employing an eco-linguistic analytical framework, the research will not focus so much on the truth of an ideology, instead focusing on assessing the ecological impact of that ideology. At this point, Stibbe (2015) classifies discourse into three types from an ecolinguistic perspective, which are: (1) beneficial discourse, or discourse that is beneficial to the ecosystem; (2) ambivalent discourse, or discourse that is ambivalent or has dual effects; and (3) destructive discourse, or discourse that can destroy the ecosystem. In practical analysis, this classification is utilised to identify the direction of the ecological impacts produced by the discourse. There is a growing body of research on ecological discourse analysis which confirms that this three-track classification has been the main evaluation method in this field. This method is applied to various types of texts, such as political speeches, media texts, and policy documents. In recent studies, the issue of climate change has remained the most prominent thematic focus (Song et al., 2025). In political discourse, the ecological impact of this classification system is explained by Laurie & Thompson (2025), who argue that the application of critical ecolinguistics to government energy policy reveals that the linguistic normalisation of fossil fuels represents a damaging form of discourse, despite being framed rhetorically as a pragmatic necessity. In its analytical practice, this classification system is employed to identify the direction of the ecological impacts produced by a particular discourse.

In this context, the researcher argues that the ideology constructed by a discourse is the primary determinant of whether that discourse is beneficial, ambivalent, or destructive to the ecosystem. In this regard, Corbett (2006) maps out a spectrum of environmental ideologies rooted in the thinking of Rodman (1983), Fox (1996), and Hay (2002). However, Corbett (2006) acknowledges that the placement of ideologies on this spectrum is subjective. Consequently, the assessment of a discourse's ecological impact always involves the analyst's own interpretation. Therefore, Corbett (2006) divides his ideological model into: (1) anthropocentrism, where humans view themselves as the most important element of nature; (2) ecocentrism, where all elements in the world are seen as interdependent and equal. Yet, this model has more detailed extensions between these two poles.

Thus, Corbett (2006) explains that within the anthropocentric model, there are several ideological levels, including: (1) conservationism, which is human-centred and acknowledges that resources must be used wisely to ensure their sustainability for the sake of humanity itself; (2) preservationism, which incorporates non-utilitarian reasons such as aesthetic, scientific, and religious values for conserving nature; (3) unbridled instrumentalism, which holds that nature exists solely to be exploited for the benefit of present-day humans, without regard for future generations. On the other hand, within the ecocentric model, Corbett (2006) identifies at least two ideological variants, namely: (1) an ideology based on ethics and values that recognises the intrinsic value of non-human beings and inanimate objects in nature, as well as their right to exist; (2) ecological sensibility, which emphasises relationships, systems, and individuals through a non-interventionist ethic, and the use of nature whilst considering criteria such as diversity, complexity, integrity, harmony, and ecological stability. In this case, the struggle between human-centered and nature-centered perspectives has indeed influenced the narrative of climate change in politics. It has been proven by Doudaki & Carpentier (2023) through their analysis of various environmental groups, where the conflict between those who favor human interests and those who prioritize the balance of nature has indeed shaped the narrative of the climate

change issue. It starts with how the narrative is constructed, how it is debated, and extends to how it can become more polarised or extreme in the political arena.

3. Research Method

This research employs a qualitative approach, with the research data comprising the discourse on the fight against climate change in Emmanuel Macron's speeches. Qualitative methods are a research approach that seeks to comprehend social and cultural phenomena from the perspective of those involved, through the collection of non-numerical data to probe their meanings, experiences, and outlooks in specific situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The data for this study consists of speech texts delivered by Emmanuel Macron, President of France, addressing the issue of climate change in international forums during the 2024–2025 period. At this point, it selected because it encompasses several moments in global climate governance. Macron's speeches were collected from official transcripts published on the French Presidency website, and news footage that is available through website platforms. The researcher also used several criteria in collecting data as follows: (1) the speech was delivered by Emmanuel Macron within the 2024–2025 period; (2) the speech explicitly addressed climate change as a central theme; and (3) the speech was delivered in an international forum. Hence, texts that did not meet these three criteria were excluded by researcher. Thus, this selection process follows the principles of purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, data sources are chosen based on their relevance to the research questions instead of statistical representativeness (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Thus, this research relied on the researcher as the main instrument. In the qualitative research process, the researcher took an active part as the main instrument for processing and interpreting the data, instead of being a passive observer (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The analysis was then conducted in three stages: (1) a discourse analysis based on Fairclough's CDA model (1992) to determine the way in which the speech text was produced and positioned within the political and institutional discourse; (2) text analysis using Halliday's (2014) ideational metafunction to identify the grammatical representation of actors, actions, and contexts of climate change; (3) an ecological evaluation using Stibbe's (2015) framework and Corbett's (2006) environmental ideology spectrum to assess the ecological assumptions embedded in the discourse and identify the ideological orientation of Macron's climate discourse. To assure the reliability and validity of the findings, this study employed theoretical triangulation, which refers to the use of two or more distinct theoretical frameworks to analyse the same data or phenomenon (Arianto, 2023). This approach involves cross-referencing the interpretative outcomes of one theoretical framework against another. Hence, the consistent findings across various theories can strengthen the validity of the research results and reduce the potential for theoretical bias.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Representation of the Climate Struggle in President Macron's Speeches

Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework underlies the analysis of Macron's speeches. In the textual dimension, the analysis focuses on linguistic choices such as vocabulary, grammar and structure in order to establish authority and position oneself within social relations. Then, in the discourse practice dimension, the analysis considers the way in which the text is produced in accordance with institutional norms and the speaker's awareness of their role and identity. In the sociocultural dimension, the analysis identifies

the way in which the discourse maintains existing power relations and forms of ideology. These 3 dimensions are applied sequentially to the (4) speeches to be analysed below:

In speech (1), as a text, Macron preferred to use scientific terminology, such as 'carbon sinks', 'additionality' and 'bioeconomy', to strengthen France's credibility and authority as a global power with a thorough understanding of environmental issues. Fairclough (1992) explains that at the textual level, discourse analysis attends to the linguistic choices through which a speaker constructs authority and positions themselves within social relations. The structure of the speech is also arranged very systematically through numbering, for example, '*Deuxième élément*', '*Troisième point*', and '*Quatrième point*'. Furthermore, the use of pronouns, such as 'nous/on', is employed to foster solidarity, and 'la France' to affirm national identity. Thus, this points to the fact that the language is designed to position France on the global diplomatic stage. As discourse practice, Macron is building France's image as a responsible partner, competent in science and generous. The content of the speech also refers to statements made by other leaders and previous bilateral agreements. Hence, the speech is grounded in an existing network of international legitimacy. At this point, France's position appears consistent and collaborative, instead of being motivated solely by self-interest. However, as socio-cultural practice, Macron's statement that France would provide an additional 500 million euros in financial support attaches conditions to the financial aid. This indirectly positions France as the global steward of environmental finance and perpetuates the structural inequalities between developed and developing nations. Therefore, the repeated emphasis on "*argent privé*" and "*analyse coût-bénéfice*" reflects an environmental ideology rooted in neoliberalism. In this case, forest conservation is treated as a financial and governance issue, instead of an issue of justice for indigenous peoples or post-colonial justice.

In speech (2), as a text, Macron also uses scientific and institutional terms such as 'budgets carbonés', '*neutralité carbone 2050*', 'NDC', and 'Global Methane Pledge' to build France's image as a climate-responsible nation. His initial statement, '*la France, depuis 2017, respecte ses budgets carbonés*' depicts as a self-justifying claim that morally positions France above other countries that have not yet fulfilled their commitments. As discourse practice, the structure of the speech (2) is also linear and organized, reflecting the bureaucratic logic of French policy, which asserts its identity as the rule-setter in global climate governance. However, the dominant use of the pronoun 'nous/on' creates a collective equality, as if all countries have the same responsibility and capacity to face the climate crisis. As socio-cultural practice, this speech reproduces hegemonic power relations. It asserts that the European Union is "*le premier bailleur international*" with 28 billion euros, and France alone mobilized 7.7 billion euros. This situation positions Western countries as the primary source of finance, controlling the agenda, terms, and direction of the global climate transition. This framing ideologically legitimizes the financial dominance of Northern countries over the Global South. Calls for "*finance privée*" and reform of the World Bank and IMF further reinforce green neoliberal ideology, where solutions to the climate crisis are delegated to market mechanisms and Western financial institutions, rather than to structural justice or the recognition of developed countries' ecological debt to developing countries. However, the speech's closing defense of science as the foundation of policy, when read within the geopolitical context of the COP, depicts as a rejection of the positions of developing countries, who often question whether Western science truly reflects climate justice for them.

In speech (3), as a text, Macron opened his speech with a train metaphor, the phrase "stopper a train that était parti à pleine vitesse" to describe the climate crisis. This choice of words serves to construct a narrative that the international community has managed to avert disaster thanks to collective leadership, with France as one of its main drivers. Yet, when Macron cited the perspective of developing countries, he said, "vous rouvrez chez vous des centrales à charbon... et vous venez nous donner des leçons". This can be seen as a strategy of discursive polyphony, where the voices of the South are presented, but remain within a narrative frame controlled by speakers from the North. As discourse practice, the speech's structure is divided into three discussion categories: methane, coal, and financing, which reflects a distinctive technocratic style of discourse. In this style, the complexity of the climate crisis is reduced to a list of technically manageable issues. Thus, as socio-cultural practice, the speech acknowledged the geopolitical tensions between the North and the South. The statement that rich countries should not ask developing countries to choose between climate and development is an acknowledgment. However, this statement is immediately followed by the proposal of market-based solutions such as JETP, biodiversity credits, and the mobilization of "finance privée," all of which remain centered on Western financial architecture. It reflects a critique of the system that is recognized and then absorbed into that same system. In this regard, the framing of the 4Ps Pact as a solution for global reconciliation, formulated as "bousculant ceux qui voudraient opposer un sud global à un nord égoïste," ideologically asserts that there is no structural contradiction between the interests of the North and the South. This claim obscures the reality of historical imbalances in responsibility for carbon emissions.

In speech (4), as a text, Macron's speech began with diplomatic greetings, from the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia to the President of the World Bank. These greetings served as a hierarchy of power, indicating with whom France felt the need to build strategic alliances. Macron then used various quantitative data such as "9 cases on 10," "12 million hectares," "60% of resources," "one person on four," and "200 million hours." This function was to establish Macron's authority as an actor who speaks based on science and data. The speech was structured in five parts, namely "premier chantier" to "cinquième chantier." Thus, as discourse practice, Macron is building France's identity as both a technical and moral leader. This is evident when Macron mentions the AfD's investment of over \$10 billion and the national plan to reduce water consumption by 10%. The context of this speech is made clear: it was delivered in Riyadh in the presence of Mohammed bin Salman. Protocol-wise, this situation placed Macron in the position of a guest. However, through his discourse, Macron maintained his position as a global figurehead. He repeatedly praised his host, for example with the phrases "sa vision très claire" and "votre accueil chaleureux," as a strategy of temporary diplomatic subordination, while maintaining discursive dominance through ownership of proposals and agendas. This speech demonstrates the power of the New Water Coalition. In this regard, the New Water Coalition's proposal, which positions France, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, and the World Bank as the primary drivers, asserts that solutions to the global water crisis must go through large-capital actors. The proposed solution also does not involve structural redistribution or the recognition of rich countries' ecological debt to poor ones. The repeated emphasis on "finance privée," desalination technology, and market mechanisms reflects green neoliberal ideology.

Looking at his four speeches, the researcher found that Macron consistently used the vocabulary of science, solidarity, data, and justice as instruments capable of establishing France's moral authority and reproducing Western financial dominance in global

environmental governance. As Fairclough (1992) emphasized, discourse is never ideologically neutral. This can be seen in Macron's speeches, which depicts how climate diplomacy operates as an arena where power is actively legitimized through language. In his various speeches, Macron also framed the environmental crisis as if it could be solved solely by relying on market mechanisms, private investment, and technical and bureaucratic governance systems. This recurring pattern of discourse indicates the existence of a regular and interconnected ideological framework. However, it is not limited to one speech or one particular event, instead it serves as a foundation for thinking that underlies Macron's entire approach to environmental issues.

Based on the ideational analysis guided by Halliday's (2014) ideational metafunction, material processes were the most dominant type of process across the 4 speeches (see Table 1), occurring 39 times and constituting 45.35% of the total data. These findings are consistent with the nature of political speeches presented at international climate conferences.

Table 1.

Types of Process

No.	Types of Process	S1	S2	S3	S4
1.	Material	7	10	10	12
2.	Mental	1	1	1	2
3.	Behavioral	0	0	0	0
4.	Verbal	0	0	0	
5.	Relational	4	5	9	6
6.	Existential	0	1	1	0
TOTAL		21	21	22	22

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), the material process describes actions and events that occur in the real world, namely linking an actor with a concrete action directed towards a specific goal. The dominance of this material process is consistent with the practical demands of international climate diplomacy, where speakers are expected to demonstrate concrete commitments, instead of just expressing positions. Previous research on political discourse confirms that the dominance of the material process positions actors as active, decisive, and responsible parties (Muldoon et al., 2025; My Nhat & Thu Hien, 2023). The tendency to employ action-oriented representations reinforces political legitimacy through commitment. In this regard, France is linguistically positioned as the primary driver of environmental change, so that its promises carry the weight of physical inevitability, instead of being the result of dependence on the political situation. In this process, there is an actor who performs an action directed at a specific goal (see Table 2 & Table 3).

Table 2.

Process of Macron's Speech (1)

<i>l'accord de Paris</i>	<i>a posé</i>	<i>nos objectifs communs fondés sur la science</i>	<i>très clairement</i>
The Paris Agreement	has set / laid down	our common objectives based on science	very clearly
Actor	Pr: Material	Goal	Circum: Manner

In Table 2, the Paris Agreement is positioned as the 'Actor'. This means that blame or responsibility is no longer attributed to individual nations, but instead to international law as a whole. Consequently, no single country is truly accountable for concrete action. France, too, can avoid scrutiny whilst still praising itself for the progress achieved collectively.

Table 3.

Process of Macron's Speech (3)

<i>on</i>	<i>va porter</i>	<i>nos trajectoires 2035</i>	<i>à Belém</i>
we (Europeans)	will carry / present	our 2035 trajectories	in Belém
Actor	Pr: Material	Goal	Circum: Place

In Table 3, Macron uses the word 'on' to refer to 'we Europeans'. With this choice of words, he elevates Europe's position as a leader, whilst simultaneously sidelining developing countries (the Global South) from an active role. This pattern indicates that simple choices of pronouns can reveal who is considered important and who is overlooked in the global power structure. Then, the most dominant type of participant in the 4 speeches was the Actor, with a total of 36 occurrences, or 29.75% (see Table 4). In the data, this finding mirrors the dominance of material processes, which is because the Actor is the participant role most connected to material processes

Table 4.

Types of Participants

No.	Types of Participants	S1	S2	S3	S4
1.	Actor	8	9	9	10
2.	Goal	7	8	8	9
3.	Sensor	1	1	1	2
4.	Phenomenon	1	1	1	2
5.	Carrier	3	4	5	3
6.	Attribute	3	4	6	4
7.	Identified	0	0	1	1
8.	Identifier	0	0	1	1
9.	Existent	0	1	1	0
TOTAL		25	30	32	34

According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), Actor in a sentence is the party that initiates or performs the action, where Actor is the centre of control and power within a clause. Based on Macron's speeches, this Actor role is consistently filled by pronoun "nous/on" and Western institutions, such as France, the French Development Agency (AFD), the European Union, the TFFF, and the Water Finance Coalition (see Table 5 & 6).

Table 5.

Process of Macron's Speech (2)

<i>la France</i>	<i>respecte</i>	<i>ses budgets carbone</i>	<i>depuis 2017</i>
France	respects	its carbon budgets	since 2017
Actor	Pr: Material	Goal	Circum: Time

In Table 5, the structure of the sentence makes France appear to be a country that strictly complies with the carbon budget. The use of 'depuis 2017' supports the impression that this claim is an ongoing reality, not just speculation.

Table 6.

Process of Macron's Speech (4)

<i>l'Agence Française de Développement</i>	<i>a engagé</i>	<i>plus de 10 milliards de dollars</i>	<i>dans le secteur de l'eau, déjà</i>
the French Development Agency	has committed	more than 10 billion dollars	in the water sector, already
Actor	Pr: Material	Goal	Circum: Place

In Table 6, the AFD is classified as an Actor in the funding commitment process. There is a specific target amount, which is 'plus de 10 milliards de dollars'. With this figure, the AFD's actions feel substantial and measurable, instead of just meaningless promises.

Looking at Table 5 and Table 6, the pattern is always the same, where the control over environmental governance is placed in Western institutions. Meanwhile, nature and the recipients of aid or commitments only serve as objects, where they are the ones being controlled. Nevertheless, this structure constructs reality as illustrated by Wang's (2026), in which Western leadership is presented as the central and unavoidable focal point of global climate action. Hence, this unequal division of roles makes environmental governance appear to be the exclusive privilege of Western.

Nevertheless, the most prevalent type of circumstance in the four speeches was the Circumstance of Location, with a total of 22 occurrences, or 28.57% (see Table 7). Location circumstants in this data cover two aspects: (1) place, such as the expressions "in Belém", "in these primary forests", and "in the water sector"; (2) and time, such as "since 2017", "by 2030", "next December", "every year", "aujourd'hui", and so on.

Table 7.

Types of Circumstances

No.	Types of Circumstances	S1	S2	S3	S4
1.	Location (Place/Time)	5	6	5	6
2.	Extent	4	4	3	7
3.	Manner	2	3	3	4
4.	Cause	1	2	3	4
5.	Condition	0	0	1	2
6.	Accompaniment	0	1	1	1
7.	Matter	3	3	2	1
TOTAL		15	19	18	25

The dominance of locational circumstances is generally linked to time. This reflects an important strategy in political discourse. This strategy involves anchoring commitments and claims to specific, verifiable spatial and temporal coordinates. For example, in Table 8 & 9:

Table 8.

Process of Macron's Speech

<i>les trois quarts de la biodiversité sont terrestres</i>		<i>dans ces forêts primaires</i>	<i>aujourd'hui</i>
three quarters of terrestrial are biodiversity		in these primary forests	today
Carrier	Pr: Relational	Circum: Place	Circum: Time

In Table 8, there is a relational process that assigns statistical properties to biodiversity. In other words, nature is defined on the basis of figures that can be measured and known to humans. Nature is considered in terms of what it provides for humans, instead of what nature itself does or experiences.

Table 9.

Process of Macron's Speech

<i>une personne sur deux</i>	<i>connaît</i>	<i>au moins un mois de pénurie d'eau</i>	<i>chaque année</i>
One in two people	experiences	at least one month of water shortage	every year
Sensor	Pr: Mental	Phenomenon	Circum: Time

In Table 9, the human experience of water scarcity is depicted as a mental process. In other words, the focus is on people's feelings and suffering, instead of the causes or solutions to the water scarcity itself.

In this case, Macron's four speeches on ecological issues indicate that the language used in these addresses functions as an ideological mechanism forming the international audience's perspective on environmental realities. Based on Halliday's ideational metafunction framework, the analysis found that the choice of words and sentence structures in these speeches are consistently used to construct a distinctive experiential world. There are three main characteristics of this constructed experiential world, they are: (1) this world is ruled by concrete actions, where political commitments and promises are always paired with numerical targets and specific deadlines; (2) this world centres on reality that can be proven scientifically, as reflected in the frequent use of data, figures, and references to science-based mechanisms; (3) this world is filled with urgent calls for collective responsibility, where climate and water crises are depicted as collective problems that require urgent action from all parties, especially developed countries and multilateral institutions. As Kenzhekanova (2015) points out, the construction of reality in political discourse is shaped through systematic linguistic strategies, whereby language is used not only to convey information, but also to shape the audience's way of thinking. The representation of experience, constructed through the selection of processes, participants and descriptions, reflects an effort to assert a particular perspective as something rational and widely acceptable.

4.2 Ideology in President Macron's Speeches (2024–2025)

Corbett (2006) divides environmental ideologies into two opposing poles: (1) anthropocentrism; and (2) ecocentrism, both of which are further subdivided into several schools of thought. In this study, the researcher found that Macron's speech texts tend to align with the anthropocentric pole which is conservationism and preservationist. To validate

the results, the researcher also utilised the theoretical framework of Stibbe (2015) to complement Corbett's perspective. Stibbe (2015) classifies discourse into three types, which are: (1) beneficial; (2) ambivalent; (3) or harmful, based on the actual impact of the discourse on the ecosystem. These two theoretical frameworks will be applied concurrently in the analysis below:

In President Macron's speech (1), the ideology that stands out is conservationism. The reason for this is that Macron mentioned forests as:

"Je ne vais pas les répéter si ce n'est pour insister sur l'importance des forêts primaires à la fois dans la bataille pour la réduction de nos émissions parce que ce sont les puits aujourd'hui les plus efficaces de carbone terrestre et qui viennent compléter ce que mangroves et les fonds marins font. Ce sont, en plus, les plus grandes réserves de carbone irrécupérables, ce qui fait qu'à chaque fois qu'on les détruit, on recule dans notre effort de décarbonation. Ce sont des réserves les plus importantes de la biodiversité, 75% de la biodiversité terrestre est dans ces forêts primaires. Ce sont aussi des lieux, des écosystèmes de vie et d'habitat pour beaucoup de peuples autochtones."

In other words, Macron believes that nature is a resource that yields concrete benefits for humanity. On several occasions, Macron has spoken about the importance of preserving forests. He believes that forests are integral to reaching climate targets and securing economic prosperity. Reflecting on the speech (1), from an eco-critical perspective, it can be deemed as ambivalent discourse. This is because the researcher found that Macron's statement contained a positive ecological aspect. He stated that:

"Mais en même temps, préserver les forêts existantes est essentiel, à la fois en Amazonie, Président Petro en a parlé à l'instant, que nous avons un partage quelques-uns autour de cette table. Dans le bassin du fleuve Congo, le Président Tshisekedi l'a dit tout à l'heure, et je salue tous les pays aussi qui contribuent à cet effort, mais également en Asie du Sud-Est, l'envoyé spécial de l'Indonésie l'a dit, et je vois mon frère de Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée de l'autre côté de la table, qui participe de cet effort. Donc on doit vraiment s'assurer de cet effort complet."

Macron called on his audience to push for an end to deforestation and the conservation of primary forests in three global forest systems: the Amazon, the Congo Basin and Southeast Asia. Not only that, but Macron also committed to securing funding through to 2030 and forging international political solidarity around forest protection. This can be seen through:

"La France, au-delà du soutien politique, apportera un soutien financier en plus de ce que nous avons commencé avec le Président Lula. Il y a quelques mois, nous avons pris l'engagement d'un milliard d'euros sur l'Amazonie ensemble. L'Agence française de développement a déjà décaissé 400 millions d'euros sur ce milliard pour financer la préservation de la forêt et de la bioéconomie. Donc, sur la base des conditions et des hypothèses que je viens d'évoquer, la France apportera d'ici 2030 un soutien supplémentaire de 500 millions d'euros qui pourraient être contribué à la TFFF."

Hence, as a state actor, Macron prioritizes environmental protection and global interests. Therefore, the discourse that has ensued reproduces the notion that environmental sustainability can be achieved through technocratic management and international coordination, without fully abandoning an approach that treats nature as a commodity.

In President Macron's (2) speech, the ideologies that stand out are conservationism and preservationism. These two ideologies coexist, though with differing levels of impact. In this context, conservationism is still the dominant ideology. He mentions forests and oceans as:

“Des puits de carbone irrécupérables pour nos forêts primaires et nos océans, parce que ces deux combats sont des combats pour préserver notre biodiversité. Je rappelle que les trois quarts de la biodiversité terrestre aujourd'hui sont dans ces forêts primaires qu'on a des réserves de biodiversité extraordinaires dans nos océans.”

In other words, forests and oceans are considered valuable not for their intrinsic worth, but for their capacity to capture carbon and provide a reserve of biodiversity that benefits humanity. Reflecting on the speech (2), it can be said that from an eco-critical perspective, this speech also falls within the scope of ambivalent discourse. The speech contains a positive ecological dimension, as Macron has increased the scope of his commitments to go beyond forests to include the oceans, methane, fossil fuels and climate justice. As he stated:

“Nous devons continuer résolument à nous engager sur la sortie progressive des énergies fossiles... fixons des objectifs contraignants sur le méthane... on va mieux protéger notre haute mer... je vous invite au maximum à rejoindre l'initiative de moratoire sur le deep sea mining.”

In this situation, Macron is pushing for the gradual phase-out of fossil fuels, imposing binding methane targets, strengthening the protection of the high seas through the implementation of the BBNJ agreement, and calling on countries to join a moratorium on deep-sea mining. These commitments mirror the more systemic ecological awareness of state actors. The researcher then noticed the recurrence of phrases expressing belonging, such as *nos forêts*, *nos océans*, *notre biodiversité*, throughout the speech. At this point, it reflects the fact that nature is still treated as belonging to humans and requiring management, instead of being seen as an existence with its own inherent rights.

In President Macron's (3) speech, the ideologies that appeared were conservationism and preservationism. In this regard, conservationism can be seen in the way Macron defined biodiversity as an active solution to the climate crisis. Macron stated:

“Notre biodiversité est une des solutions aux émissions, parce que des mangroves aux forêts primaires et à nos océans, ce sont des puits de carbone, parce que ce sont aussi des sources d'innovation naturelle qui nous permettent justement de réduire les émissions et parce que ce sont des leviers aussi d'adaptation au changement climatique.”

In other words, Macron positions nature as a manifestation of efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. However, the researcher considers that Macron regards nature in terms of what it can provide to humanity, rather than for its intrinsic value. The presence of

preservationism in this speech is also apparent in Macron's acknowledgement of the important role of indigenous peoples and local communities. Therefore, in speech (3) Macron positions them as key actors in conservation policy who are deserving of compensation for their efforts. In this regard, Macron states that:

“accompagner les pays, mais aussi avec les peuples autochtones, les collectivités locales qui sont essentielles dans cette dynamique, pour qu'elles aient la rémunération d'une politique de préservation.”

This statement indicates that discussions regarding rights are appearing in Macron's discourse. In his two previous speeches, there was no mention of rights. Reflecting on speech (3), when viewed from an eco-critical perspective, this speech still falls under the category of ambivalent discourse. On one hand, the speech contains a positive ecological dimension, as Macron acknowledges the climate-biodiversity nexus as a foundation that cannot be overlooked. Macron states:

“Ce nexus, si je puis dire, climat-biodiversité, est absolument fondamental si on veut réussir. Là, le cœur de la bataille, c'est évidemment toutes les politiques de reforestation, mais c'est aussi les politiques de conservation des forêts primaires et des mangroves.”

In this regard, Macron speaks up by raising the fact that primary forests hold more than ¾ of the world's biodiversity and 14% of irrecoverable carbon. Thus, in his speech, Macron perceives this destruction as a major setback in global decarbonization efforts. Macron also criticizes the existence of climate injustice between wealthy nations and developing countries, where he highlights the hypocrisy of developed nations that are reopening coal power plants while lecturing developing countries:

“vous rouvrez chez vous des centrales à charbon parce que vous n'avez plus le gaz russe et vous venez nous donner des leçons.”

This statement reflects Macron's political awareness of the principle of justice within the ecological discourse. Consequently, as a state actor, the speech (3) effectively integrates the issues of climate change, biodiversity, development justice and the role of indigenous peoples within a coherent frame.

In President Macron's (4) speech, the ideologies that emerge are conservationism and preservationism. This is evident in the way Macron defines water as a basic right for all of humanity. Macron states that:

“l'accès à l'eau est normalement un droit fondamental... L'accès, la gestion de l'eau, doit être traité comme un bien commun.”

Macron's statement positions water as a fundamental right and a *bien commun* that cannot be fully controlled by national or private interests. His acknowledgment reflects traces of an ideology that prioritizes environmental ethics and values. However, the researcher observes that this rights-based framing is followed by economic logic, giving rise to a conservationist rationale. Macron states:

“Pour un dollar investi dans la résilience hydrique, ce sont quatre dollars d'économies qui sont réalisées... c'est un investissement très rentable.”

In this case, his argument for water protection is justified not because water is regarded as an inherent right, but because it is capable of generating quantifiable financial returns or being traded for profit. Reflecting on speech (4), when viewed from an eco-critical perspective, this speech still falls under the category of ambivalent discourse. It is true that the speech contains a positive ecological dimension, as Macron connects the water crisis with land degradation, forest conversion, and the loss of biodiversity as one interconnected system. Macron states that:

“Dans 9 cas sur 10, les enjeux d'adaptation sont liés à l'eau... Chaque année, 12 millions d'hectares de terres sont dégradés. Lorsque ces terres ne sont plus exploitables, elles perdent leur capacité à nous nourrir, forcent la conversion des forêts en terres agricoles et renforcent les grandes crises du climat et de la biodiversité.”

However, the researcher also identifies a bias that prevents this discourse from being fully classified as beneficial. The solutions proposed are highly technical and economic in nature, encompassing desalination, water recycling, financial consortiums, and private sector mobilization, as seen in:

“nous avons besoin... de la New Water Coalition... pour précisément apporter des solutions concrètes à tous... mobiliser les financements au plus vite pour développer ces solutions.”

At this point, desalination is a process that carries both advantages and benefits. However, the technology produced has the potential to cause serious ecological impacts on waste and marine ecosystems. In this case, it is not addressed at all in the speech.

In all four speeches, the perspective of conservatism continues to be the most prominent. However, there are also some passages that reflect a preservationist perspective, even though these appear only in specific places. This suggests that the ideology employed by Macron is not consistent or fixed, but instead is a mixture or hybrid.

5. Conclusion

Based on research conducted by the researcher, President Macron's four environmental speeches (2024–2025) employ material processes, actors and locations to reflect a discursive strategy that positions developed nations as the primary agents of climate action. In this context, the ideology of conservationism is employed to frame nature as a resource of value primarily due to its benefits for human well-being and survival. This implies that environmental conservation is promoted not for nature's own sake, but for the ecosystem services that nature can provide to humanity. This ideology drives Macron to integrate environmental arguments into the logic of development and economic growth. The speech also falls within an ambivalent discourse, in which Macron demonstrates a sincere ecological commitment, such as recognition of the right to water, protection of tropical forests, and concern for the vulnerability of developing nations, yet the solutions offered remain rooted in a neoliberal framework emphasising private financing, market mechanisms, and technocratic governance. Macron also acknowledged the structural inequalities between the North and the South, yet this acknowledgement was not followed by demands for redistribution or ecological debt. Instead, these inequalities were reframed as technical problems that could be resolved through efficiency, investment, and institutional reform. This study contributes to the field of eco-linguistic discourse analysis

through presenting how a neoliberal environmental ideology is sustained through the dominance of material processes within language. These findings remind us that narratives on climate change within global political discourse should be more oriented towards justice. Consequently, future research could compare the speeches of world leaders from various countries to identify ideological differences amongst them.

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LEARNING ARABIC QAWĀ'ID THROUGH INSTAGRAM: A MULTIMEDIA LEARNING PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study investigated the use of the Instagram account @arabfaham as a medium for learning Arabic grammar (qawā'id) from the perspective of the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. It aimed to examine how multimedia-based content can address learners' difficulties in understanding qawā'id, which are often perceived as abstract and theoretical. A descriptive qualitative method was used to analyze the presentation of instructional content and user responses. Data were collected through documentation of selected Instagram Reels focusing on muftada' and khabar, as well as online interviews with users. The findings showed that the content was mainly delivered through interactive quizzes combining Arabic text and visual elements, which supported active cognitive processing. User interactions indicated a high level of engagement, particularly through answering questions and participating in discussions in the comment section. Furthermore, the content reflected key principles of multimedia learning, including dual channel, limited capacity, active processing, contiguity, segmenting, and personalization. These studies contributed to the growing body of research on digital language learning by demonstrating that Instagram can serve not only as a content delivery platform but also as an interactive learning environment that enhances learners' understanding and practical application of Arabic grammatical structures.

Keywords: *Arabic grammar learning; cognitive theory of multimedia learning; instagram; interactive learning; qawaid; social media learning*

1. Introduction

The development of science in the modern era is marked by rapid technological advancements, particularly in the widespread use of social media. Today, social media not only functions as a means of communication but has also been utilized as an alternative learning medium (Eliya Qori'ah et al., 2023). In the field of education, media plays an important role in helping achieve learning objectives. The fundamental principle in using media is that it should facilitate the learning process and enhance learners' understanding the material. Therefore, the use of media should be viewed from the perspective of general learning needs (Furoidah, 2020).

One social media platform that has great potential to be used as a learning medium is Instagram (Laily et al., 2022). Its features, such as feeds, stories, and reels, enable the delivery of learning content in a visual, concise, and interactive manner. Recent studies have shown that Instagram can enhance user engagement through visual and interactive content strategies that support digital Arabic language learning (Habibi et al., 2024). In addition, Instagram allows learners to access learning materials flexibly anytime and anywhere, which support self-directed learning. Its interactive features, such as comments and polls, also encourage active participation and immediate feedback during the learning process.

In Arabic language learning, language skills are interconnected, requiring not only vocabulary mastery but also an understanding of grammatical structures (*qawā'id*) within context. Therefore, learning Arabic, including *qawā'id* (grammar), requires an approach that is not only theoretical but also contextual and practical (Aulia et al., 2025). In general, learning Arabic encompasses three main components: the sound system (*aṣwāt*), vocabulary (*mufradāt*), and grammar or *qawā'id* (which includes *naḥw* and *ṣarf*). Among these, *qawā'id* plays a fundamental role in developing grammatical competence. This is in line with Chomsky (1965), who states that language is a system of rules that enables speakers to produce an unlimited number of sentences. Thus, mastery of *qawā'id* is essential for constructing grammatically correct sentences and understanding text accurately (Aulia & Baroroh, 2024).

However, *qawā'id* is often considered difficult due to the complexity of relationships between words in Arabic, making it challenging for learners to apply them effectively in both spoken and written forms (Mulyani, 2020). Previous studies show that learners continue to face difficulties in mastering *qawā'id* (Huda, 2020). In addition, the large amount of theoretical material and limited understanding of grammatical rules further hinder learners' comprehension and application (Farouq & Al-Mudzakaroh, 2018). Furthermore, teaching methods that rely heavily on memorization make it difficult for learners to apply *qawā'id* in daily language use (Ridlo, 2022).

In this context, Instagram can be an effective solution, as it provides visual and interactive features such as feed, reels, and stories, which can be used to present sentence examples, *i'rāb* exercises, and quizzes in a creative and engaging way. This condition aligns with the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning proposed by Mayer (2001), which states that the learning process becomes more effective when information is delivered through a combination of verbal elements (words) and visual elements (images), rather than using text alone. Thus, the use of Instagram @arabfaham as a medium for learning *qawā'id* may help learners better understand and apply Arabic grammatical rules more easily and in accordance with real communication contexts (Jamil & Agung, 2022).

Although previous studies have explored the use of Instagram in Arabic language learning, most of them focus on general language skills, learning needs, and vocabulary acquisition rather than grammatical competence (Laily et al., 2022). Studies have shown that Instagram supports language acquisition and learner engagement; however, these investigations primarily emphasize psycholinguistic factors and vocabulary development rather than the teaching of *qawā'id* (Adira et al., 2024). Furthermore, content analysis studies indicate that vocabulary-based materials dominate Arabic learning content on Instagram, while grammar receives less attention (Habibi et al., 2024). This study seeks to fill

that gap by analyzing how Instagram content facilitates the learning of *qawā'id* and how learners respond to such instructional practices.

While previous studies have examined Instagram as a medium for Arabic learning and even explored its use in grammar instruction, they largely focus on content delivery and engagement without analyzing the integration of multimedia learning principles or learners' cognitive responses (Huda, 2025). In addition, social media has been widely recognized as a learning environment that supports interaction and engagement; however, its role in facilitating deeper cognitive processing in grammar learning remains underexplored (Tess, 2013). This study, therefore, offers a novel contribution by examining how Instagram-based *qawā'id* content aligns with the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning and how users cognitively and interactively respond to such instructional design.

Based on this background, this study focuses on the utilization of the Instagram account @arabfaham as a medium for learning Arabic *qawā'id* from the perspective of the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. Specifically, this study aims to (1) describe how *qawā'id* materials are presented in the content of the @arabfaham Instagram account and (2) analyze users' responses to such content. This study contributes to the development of digital-based Arabic language learning by highlighting the integration of multimedia principles in grammar instruction through social media.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Instagram as a Medium for Learning Arabic

Various studies have demonstrated that Instagram holds considerable potential as a medium for learning Arabic; however, these studies emphasize different dimensions of its effectiveness. While Wijaya and Rismawati (2023) highlight the platform's ability to attract students' attention, enhance motivation, and reduce boredom, Jundi et al. (2023) focus more on the nature of the content itself, noting that Arabic learning materials on Instagram are typically presented through short videos, visual illustrations, and interactive quizzes. This contrast suggests that Instagram functions not only as an affective tool that increases engagement but also as a cognitive tool that structures learning content in accessible ways.

Similarly, Pamungkas et al. (2024) found that social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube contribute to improving students' understanding and expanding vocabulary (*mufradāt*). However, their findings emphasize learning outcomes, whereas Rahman et al. (2025) underline the flexibility and interactivity of content delivery. When viewed together, these studies indicate that Instagram's effectiveness lies in the interplay between its technological affordances (flexibility and interactivity) and its pedagogical impact (comprehension and vocabulary acquisition).

From a broader perspective, international research also supports these findings. For instance, studies on digital learning environments show that multimedia-based platforms can enhance learner engagement and comprehension by presenting information in multimodal formats (Al-Jarf, 2022). In line with this, Maulidiya and Sopian (2025) argue that video-based platforms enable clearer explanation of complex concepts and increase student participation. Therefore, Instagram's combination of visual, textual, and interactive elements positions it as a potentially effective medium for Arabic language learning, particularly for learners in the digital era.

2.2 Learning Arabic *Qawā'id* through Social Media

In the specific context of learning Arabic *qawā'id*, social media platforms also demonstrate promising potential, although different studies highlight varying contributing factors. Fuadah (2020) emphasizes the role of Instagram features—such as feeds, stories, polls, and quizzes—in enhancing learners' reading (*mahārah al-qirā'ah*) and writing (*mahārah al-kitābah*) skills. In contrast, Dalimunthe and Yulia (2023) focus on the use of audio-visual media (e.g., TikTok) to improve learners' interest and comprehension of *nahw* and *ṣarf*. While these studies examine different platforms, they collectively suggest that visually enriched and interactive media play a crucial role in facilitating the understanding of abstract grammatical concepts.

However, the effectiveness of social media in learning *qawā'id* is not solely determined by content format. Sujefri and Habibah (2023) argue that both external factors (such as the integration of the four language skills) and internal factors (including motivation, interest, and digital literacy) significantly influence learning outcomes. This perspective adds a more holistic dimension, indicating that well-designed content alone is insufficient without considering learner readiness and engagement.

Agustina et al. (2024) further reinforce the importance of instructional design by noting that Instagram's popularity in Arabic learning stems from its ability to present abstract material in a more concrete, visual, and interactive manner. When synthesizing these findings, it becomes evident that effective *qawā'id* learning through social media depends on the alignment between content design, platform characteristics, and learner factors. Thus, social media should not merely be seen as a delivery tool, but as an integrated learning environment that requires careful pedagogical planning.

2.3 Mayer's Multimedia Learning Theory in Arabic Language Learning

Mayer's Multimedia Learning Theory provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding how Instagram-based learning content can support Arabic language acquisition. According to Richard E. Mayer (2001), learning is more effective when information is presented through a combination of verbal and visual elements, as learners process information through dual channels with limited cognitive capacity. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for learning *qawā'id*, which often involves abstract and complex rules.

While previous studies have shown the practical benefits of Instagram in enhancing motivation and comprehension, they rarely explicitly connect these outcomes to underlying cognitive theories. Mayer's principles—such as coherence, signaling, and redundancy—offer a lens to critically evaluate whether Instagram content is designed in a way that optimizes cognitive processing. For example, content that is overly dense or lacks clear visual emphasis may increase cognitive load, thereby reducing learning effectiveness.

Furthermore, international studies on multimedia learning confirm that well-structured integration of text, images, and audio can significantly improve comprehension and retention (Moreno & Mayer, 2007). In this context, analyzing Instagram content—such as that found on the account @arabfaham—through Mayer's theoretical framework allows for a deeper evaluation beyond surface-level engagement. It enables an assessment of whether the content not only attracts learners but also facilitates meaningful understanding of *qawā'id*.

Thus, this study addresses a gap in the literature by linking the practical use of Instagram as a learning medium with a well-established cognitive theory, providing a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness in Arabic grammar learning.

3. Research Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method aimed at providing a comprehensive description of the use of Instagram as a medium for learning Arabic qawā'id. Qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena holistically and describe them in words within a scientific context. This method is chosen because the issues examined are contextual in nature, relating to behavior, meaning, and user responses to digital learning media. The phenomena studied include how qawā'id materials are presented on the Instagram account @arabfaham and users' responses to the content. The study focuses on two forms of analysis: content analysis to examine how the materials are presented, and user response analysis to understand learners' interactions and reactions.

The data sources in this study consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through documentation of the Instagram account @arabfaham and through online interviews with users or Arabic learners who follow the account. A total of four participants were involved in the interviews. The participants were recruited through Instagram messages and selected based on their willingness to participate and their experience interacting with the @arabfaham account, such as viewing, liking, or commenting on its content. Documentation was conducted to examine how qawā'id materials are presented in the @arabfaham Instagram content, as well as user interactions, including the number of views, likes, and comments. The results of this documentation then served as the basis for developing the interview guidelines, ensuring that the questions were aligned with the characteristics of the qawā'id content presented on the account.

Interviews were conducted online via WhatsApp to gather Users' responses regarding their experiences and engagement with the qawā'id learning content, as well as to understand how learners' comprehension of qawā'id developed after utilizing the @arabfaham Instagram account. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by not disclosing participants' identities in the research report. Secondary data were obtained from literature and previous studies relevant to the use of social media and content analysis in Arabic language learning.

The next stage, after determining the data sources, was selecting the content to be analyzed based on qawā'id materials and the year of upload, with a focus on *mubtada'* and *khabar* as the fundamental structure of Arabic sentences. To maintain relevance, the analysis focused on videos with the highest number of views within the past year, as content with the greatest reach is considered to best represent the effectiveness of the presentation strategies used. The combination of documentation data, interviews, and content selection based on view count is expected to provide a comprehensive and contextual overview of the use of Instagram as a medium for learning qawā'id, from both the perspective of content creators and learners.

The next stage involved data analysis. This process employed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes three main steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selects and simplifies

data from documentation and interviews to focus more on the presentation and user responses to qawā'id content on the @arabfaham Instagram account. The simplified data are then presented in the form of descriptive narratives and tables to clarify the relationship between content, presentation, and user responses. The final stage is drawing conclusions by integrating the results of content analysis and user response analysis to address the research questions.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study employed data triangulation and methodological transparency. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing findings from documentation and interview data to ensure consistency and credibility. Methodological transparency was maintained by clearly describing the procedures of data collection, participant selection, and data analysis, allowing the research process to be systematically understood and evaluated. The entire analysis process was carried out continuously throughout the study until valid and comprehensive conclusions were obtained.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Presentation of Content as a Medium for Learning *Qawā'id*

The results of the documentation analysis show that qawā'id content on the Instagram account @arabfaham is not presented in the form of direct material explanations, but rather in the form of questions or quizzes. A total of seven content items were analyzed, all of which were presented as reels and uploaded within the past year. These content items focus on practices or quizzes on the topics of *mubtada'* and *khavar*, covering aspects such as identifying word positions, completing sentence structures, *i'rāb*, and material summaries.

Table 1.

Content Code	Topic Material	Material upload date	Type of content	Presentation Focus	Form of presentation	Short Description
K1	The position of the word in <i>jumlah ismiyyah</i>	June 10, 2025	Reels	Practice/quiz	Video + Text	The content displays the Arabic sentence الكتابُ الجديدُ with one word colored red and accompanied by a multiple-choice question regarding the position of the word.
K2	The position of the word in <i>jumlah ismiyyah</i>	June 16, 2025	Reels	Practice/quiz	Video + Text	The content displays the Arabic sentence الكتابُ الجديدُ with one word colored black and accompanied by a multiple-choice question regarding the position of the word.

K3	Complete <i>jumlah</i> <i>ismiyyah</i> correctly	Septem ber 10, 2025	Reels	Practice/quiz	Video + Text	The content displays the Arabic sentence ... multiple-choice questions about the correct word to fill in the blanks.
K4	<i>I'rab</i> on <i>jumlah</i> <i>ismiyyah</i>	Septem ber 9, 2025	Reels	Practice/quiz	Video + Text	The content displays the Arabic sentence ... multiple choice questions regarding the correct harakat for the sentence .
K5	Identificati on of <i>jumlah</i> <i>ismiyyah</i>	Septem ber 14, 2025	Reels	Practice/quiz	Video + Text	The content displays Arabic sentences ... multiple-choice questions about this type of sentence in Arabic.
K6	The correct pair of <i>jumlah</i> <i>ismiyyah</i> in terms of grammatic al structure	Septem ber 15, 2025	Reels	Practice/quiz	Video + Text	The content is presented in multiple-choice questions that ask users to determine the grammatically correct pair of <i>mubtada'</i> and <i>khavar</i> . The material is presented through Arabic text with variations in the vowels to emphasize differences in grammatical structure.
K7	Summary of <i>mubtada'</i> and <i>khavar</i> material	January 24, 2026	Reels	Practice/quiz	Video + Picture + Text	This content contains several questions that summarize the <i>mubtada'</i> and <i>khavar</i> material.

The findings indicate that qawā'id content on the Instagram account @arabfaham is predominantly presented in the form of quizzes rather than direct explanations. This pattern suggests a shift from a teacher-centered approach toward a learner-centered strategy, where users are encouraged to actively construct their understanding through practice. The dominance of multiple-choice formats reflects an emphasis on applied learning, enabling users to directly engage with grammatical concepts such as *mubtada'* and *khavar*.

The consistent use of short video-based reels combined with textual elements indicates an intentional design that integrates visual and verbal information. This suggests

that the content is structured to reduce the abstract nature of Arabic grammar, making it more accessible and easier to process. By presenting grammar through focused questions, the content encourages users not only to recall rules but also to apply them in context. This result is also consistent with Pujiati, Zahra, and Tamela (2019), who found that Instagram-based learning can significantly enhance student motivation and engagement. In the context of this study, the use of quiz-based content appears to sustain learner interest while simultaneously encouraging active involvement in grammatical analysis.

This finding corroborates Habibi et al. (2024), who found that interactive Arabic learning content on Instagram promotes active learner engagement. However, this study extends previous findings by demonstrating that quiz-based formats not only increase engagement but also stimulate analytical thinking, particularly in identifying sentence structures and grammatical roles. In this context, the presentation of qawā'id through interactive questions transforms learning from passive reception into active problem-solving.

4.2 User Interaction with *Qawā'id* Content on the @arabfaham Instagram Account

Table 2.

Content code	Viewers	Likes	Comments	Dominant response form
K1	12.900	165	58	Answer questions and discuss in the comments column
K2	11.000	141	107	Answer questions and discuss in the comments column
K3	16.100	125	107	Answer questions and discuss in the comments column
K4	8.824	84	97	Answer questions and discuss in the comments column
K5	6.834	50	68	Answer questions and discuss in the comments column
K6	5.323	56	91	Answer questions and discuss in the comments column
K7	3.119	74	7	Answer questions and discuss in the comments column

The interaction data reveal that users actively engage with qawā'id content, as reflected in views, likes, and comments. However, variations in engagement across content indicate that interaction is influenced not only by topic but also by content design and question type. This suggests that certain forms of presentation are more effective in attracting user attention and participation.

More importantly, the dominance of comment-based responses indicates that users are not merely passive audiences but active participants in the learning process. This pattern suggests that users engage cognitively by analyzing questions and applying grammatical rules when formulating their answers. The presence of discussions in the comment section further reflects a form of collaborative learning, where users exchange ideas and validate their understanding.

This finding corroborates Habibi et al. (2024), who emphasized that participatory content formats enhance user engagement in social media-based learning. However, this study extends prior research by showing that engagement is not limited to surface-level interaction (e.g., likes or views), but also involves deeper learning processes, such as grammatical analysis and peer discussion. This indicates that Instagram-based learning can facilitate not only interaction but also meaningful knowledge construction.

Additionally, differences in interaction patterns across content suggest that the level of question complexity may influence the depth of engagement. Content that encourages discussion tends to generate more cognitively demanding responses, while simpler questions result in more limited interaction. This implies that well-designed instructional prompts play a crucial role in fostering higher-order thinking in language learning contexts. This finding also aligns with), who highlighted that social media platforms facilitate collaborative language learning through user interaction and peer discussion. The presence of comment-based exchanges in this study reflects not only participation but also a form of socially constructed learning, where learners actively negotiate meaning and validate their understanding.

4.3 Analysis of *Qawā'id* Content Presentation on the Instagram Account @arabfaham Based on the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning

Table 3.

No	Principles of Mayer's Theory	Analysis Indicators	Findings on Content
1.	<i>Dual Channel</i>	Combined use text and visuals	All content presents Arabic text with <i>harakat</i> and Indonesian text with a combination of simple visuals as a means of conveying the material
2.	Limited Capacity	The material is presented in a concise and focused manner	All content presents questions that represent the <i>mubtada'</i> and <i>khobar</i> material in a concise and focused manner
3.	Active Processing	Users are actively involved in understanding the material	All content requires users to actively analyze Arabic sentence structures and determine the correct answer by selecting the available options
4.	Contiguity Principle	Explanation of <i>qawā'id</i> and example sentences appear in one post	All selected content displays questions/quizzes as an evaluation of the material that has been presented in other videos.

5.	Segmenting Principle	The material is divided into small/gradual parts	Each content generally contains one focus question or one main rule, except for one summary content which contains several questions
6.	Personalization Principle	The language used is communicative and interesting	All content conveys questions in communicative language to invite users to participate in answering questions

To strengthen the analysis of content presentation based on the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, interviews were conducted with users of the Instagram account @arabfaham. The results of these interviews are presented in the following table.

Table 4.

Principles of Mayer's Theory	Summary of Interviewees' Answers	Answer Pattern	Analysis Conclusion
Dual Channel	Arabic text with <i>ḥarakāt</i> + Indonesian translation helps to understand the meaning and avoid reading errors	4 out of 4 agree	The dual channel principle is strongly confirmed; the combination of texts supports user understanding
Limited Capacity	The majority felt that one question allowed for focus and reduced stress; two sources suggested adding more questions for more practice	3 want to focus on one question, 1 wants more questions	The concise presentation is effective, but some users want more variety in the practices
Active Processing	All participants stated they had to think, analyze <i>i'rab</i> , <i>naḥw ṣarf</i> before answering.	4 out of 4 agree	Content encourages real-life active cognitive processing
Contiguity Principle	Quizzes are considered as practice/evaluation of previous material; some people try them before they understand	4 out of 4 acknowledge the function of practice	The content serves as reinforcement of the material, although the learning sequence is flexible
Segmenting Principle	Some prefer one question for focus; some want several questions for extra practice	2 single questions, 2 combinations/multiple questions	Sharing one focus of material is effective, but practice needs vary between users
Personalization Principle	Communicative, persuasive and relaxed language	4 out of 4 agree	Language style increases user interest and participation

The findings demonstrate that the presentation of qawā'id content on @arabfaham aligns with the principles of the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. The combination of Arabic text with ḥarakāt and Indonesian explanations reflects the dual-channel principle, which facilitates comprehension by engaging both verbal and visual processing systems. In this study, the use of Arabic text with ḥarakāt combined with Indonesian explanations reflects the application of this principle. This indicates that presenting grammatical material through both linguistic and visual representations helps learners better understand sentence structures and meanings. By simultaneously engaging these two channels, the content reduces ambiguity in interpreting Arabic sentences, which are often challenging for learners.

This finding aligns with Mayer's theoretical framework and is supported by Huda (2025), who found that visual and interactive media enhance learners' understanding of Arabic grammar. However, this study extends previous findings by showing that the effectiveness of multimodal presentation is significantly strengthened when combined with interactive quiz formats, which promote active engagement rather than passive reception.

The limited capacity principle suggests that each cognitive channel has a restricted ability to process information at one time. Therefore, instructional materials should be designed to avoid cognitive overload. The presentation of one question per content in this study reflects an effort to manage cognitive load. This suggests that breaking down grammatical material into smaller, focused units allows learners to concentrate on a single concept without being overwhelmed by complex rules. In the context of qawā'id, this is especially important because Arabic grammar involves multiple interconnected elements that can burden learners' cognitive processing. However, user responses also indicate a need for additional practice, implying that while simplicity supports initial understanding, repeated exposure is necessary for mastery.

This finding highlights the importance of balancing cognitive load management with sufficient practice opportunities. From the perspective of active processing, the requirement for users to analyze and respond to questions demonstrates that the content successfully promotes deeper cognitive engagement. This finding corroborates prior research emphasizing that active involvement is essential in grammar learning. Unlike traditional approaches that rely on memorization, this format encourages learners to apply grammatical rules in context, thereby supporting meaningful learning.

The active processing principle emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs when learners actively engage in selecting, organizing, and integrating information. The quiz-based format used in the content requires users to analyze sentence structures and determine correct answers, indicating active cognitive involvement. This suggests that learners are not passively receiving information but are actively constructing their understanding of grammatical rules. This finding corroborates prior research emphasizing that active engagement is essential in language learning. Unlike traditional approaches that rely heavily on memorization, this interactive format encourages learners to apply rules in context, thereby supporting deeper understanding and retention.

The contiguity principle states that learning is more effective when related information, such as explanations and examples, is presented closely in time or space so that learners can easily make connections. In this study, the quiz content functions as an immediate application of previously learned material, allowing learners to connect theory with practice. This suggests that even though learning on social media may not follow a

strictly linear sequence, the proximity between concept and application supports comprehension. Additionally, the integration of examples within the same content helps learners directly relate grammatical rules to their usage in sentences. This reinforces the understanding of qawā'id as a functional system rather than abstract theory.

The segmenting principle proposes that information should be divided into smaller, manageable units to facilitate step-by-step learning. The structure of the content, where each post focuses on a single question or concept, reflects this principle. This indicates that learners can process grammatical rules gradually, reducing cognitive overload and improving comprehension. However, variations in user preferences—some favoring single questions while others preferring multiple questions—suggest that segmentation should remain flexible. This implies that while microlearning formats are effective, incorporating varied levels of practice may better accommodate diverse learning needs.

Finally, The personalization principle states that learners understand material more effectively when it is presented in a conversational and engaging style rather than in a formal tone. The use of communicative and interactive language in the content reflects this principle. This suggests that a more relaxed and engaging tone can increase learner motivation and participation, particularly in subjects like qawā'id, which are often perceived as difficult and rigid. This finding corroborates Habibi et al. (2024), who emphasized that interactive and user-oriented communication enhances engagement in social media learning environments. In this study, the use of approachable language encourages users to participate actively, both in answering questions and engaging in discussions.

Furthermore, this finding is supported by Carpenter et al. (2020), who argued that Instagram's visual and interactive features provide meaningful opportunities for informal learning. The integration of short videos, text, and interactive questions in this study reflects how social media affordances can be utilized to support both cognitive processing and learner engagement.

Overall, the integration of content design, user interaction, and multimedia learning principles indicates that qawā'id content on @arabfaham functions not only as a medium for delivering material but also as an interactive learning environment. The findings suggest that quiz-based, visually supported, and communicatively presented content can transform Arabic grammar learning into a more engaging and cognitively stimulating process. This study contributes to existing literature by demonstrating that Instagram-based learning is not only effective in increasing engagement but also in facilitating deeper cognitive processing. By combining interactivity, multimodal presentation, and concise content structure, social media platforms can support more meaningful and applicative learning experiences in the context of Arabic grammar.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the use of the Instagram account @arabfaham as a medium for learning Arabic qawā'id demonstrates several significant benefits, both in terms of content presentation and user engagement. Content presented in the form of interactive quizzes, combining text and visuals, has been shown to encourage active cognitive processing and increase user participation in understanding the concepts of mubtada' and khabar. In addition, the application of principles from the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning—such as dual channel, limited capacity, active

processing, contiguity, segmenting, and personalization—is consistently reflected in the content design and contributes to a more interactive and contextual learning experience.

The findings also show that concise and focused presentation of material helps users gradually understand qawā'id, although some users expect a greater variety of questions to deepen their practice. User interaction, which is dominated by answering questions and discussions in the comment section, confirms that social media functions not only as a medium for delivering material but also as a collaborative learning space.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Arabic language learning research by extending Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning into the context of Arabic grammar instruction through social media environments. The findings demonstrate that multimedia-based learning principles can support the comprehension of abstract grammatical concepts when presented through interactive and visually engaging Instagram content. This study also enriches the discussion on digital pedagogy in Arabic language education, particularly regarding the integration of social media as a learning platform for qawā'id instruction.

Practically, the findings provide implications for Arabic language educators and content creators in designing effective social media-based learning materials. The use of concise explanations, visual elements, and interactive quizzes can increase learner engagement and encourage active participation in grammar learning. In addition, integrating conceptual explanations with practice exercises in a structured content sequence may help learners achieve a deeper understanding of qawā'id. Educators are also encouraged to utilize various Instagram features, such as reels, stories, and comment discussions, to create more interactive and collaborative learning experiences.

As for future development prospects, this study highlights the need for innovation in content variation, such as integrating conceptual explanations and exercises within a single content sequence, as well as utilizing other Instagram features to enrich the learning experience. In addition, future research could examine the effectiveness of using Instagram for learning qawā'id across different proficiency levels, or compare it with other digital platforms to gain a more comprehensive understanding of social media-based Arabic language learning.

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ETHNIC STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Despite increasing enrollment, ethnic students in Bangladesh face challenges in equitable language learning environments. This research examines obstacles and supportive factors influencing motivation to acquire English and provides insights for developing more inclusive and supportive educational practices for learning the English language. Self-determination theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan has been applied to focus on three basic psychological needs of learners, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Data was collected through interviews with 10 EFL teachers, classroom observations, and interviews with 30 students. The researcher followed the qualitative method to collect the data, and the data was analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis. Findings reveal cultural-linguistic, societal-institutional, and motivational factors affecting acquisition of ethnic students. Therefore, it is imperative to take approaches to cultural sensitivity, enhanced support systems, and policies that promote inclusivity and equal opportunities for all students. Teachers must recognize pronunciation challenges faced by ethnic students, which differ from Bengali learners.

Keywords: *EFL; ethnic language education; learning environment; motivation; tertiary education.*

1. Introduction

The demand for English in Bangladesh has grown rapidly, positioning it as both a second language and a gateway to socio-economic mobility. Most of the subjects at the tertiary level are taught and learned in English. Students' success in higher education increasingly depends on their ability to excel in English.

Bangladesh, known for its rich cultural diversity, is home to several ethnic communities with distinct linguistic and cultural identities. Different students from ethnic backgrounds come to university to receive higher education. Ethnic students, educated primarily in Bengali, face challenges when English becomes the medium of instruction at university. Understanding their learning environment and motivation is crucial for equitable support.

Ethnic students face the barrier sometimes due to their learning environment and socio-linguistic differences. It does not only harm their academic goal but also demotivates them not to learn English. Motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, plays a vital role in English learning. Ethnic students' motivation may vary as their perspectives are varied.

Therefore, a nuanced understanding of both the learning environment and motivation for ethnic students are vital in tailoring the English Language.

Despite growing attention to English education in Bangladesh, limited studies have examined ethnic minority students through the lens of Self-Determination Theory. The aim of the research is to identify the unique challenges affecting ethnic students' learning environment and motivation. This study contributes by integrating SDT with sociocultural perspectives. By examining these aspects, policy makers will create an equitable and supportive framework for English language education in Bangladeshi universities. Therefore, ethnic students can empower them equally with mainstream Bengali students.

Ethnic students frequently experience educational disadvantages compared to their mainstream peers, particularly those who come from geographically remote and underdeveloped regions such as hilly areas. Many of these students pursue education not only as a means of personal advancement but also as a pathway toward improving their socioeconomic conditions, which may ultimately contribute to broader national development. In this context, a supportive and inclusive classroom environment—especially within the EFL classroom—is essential to fostering their motivation, confidence, and active participation alongside mainstream students. Since ethnic minority students are often underrepresented in classrooms, sometimes comprising only one or two individuals, both teachers and mainstream peers should demonstrate sensitivity, respect, and inclusivity in their interactions. The researcher argues that a positive and engaging language-learning environment can significantly enhance ethnic students' motivation to learn English and encourage their equal participation in classroom activities.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What barriers do ethnic students face in the classroom in relation to their sense of relatedness?
2. Do ethnic students receive sufficient motivation to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in terms of autonomy support?
3. Why is the learning environment crucial for developing ethnic students' sense of competence in the EFL classroom?

2. Literature Review

English language education is vital in globalized societies, fostering intercultural communication and academic opportunities. (Baker, 2015; Graddol, 2006). In Bangladesh, ethnic students face cultural and linguistic barriers, limited resources, and insufficient culturally responsive teaching, which hinder their engagement in English classes. Understanding the learning environment and motivation of ethnic students is crucial, as research suggests that language learning experiences vary widely based on sociocultural backgrounds and educational contexts (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

The learning environment for English language education encompasses institutional policies, classroom dynamics, available resources, and social support systems. Studies in Bangladesh reveal that ethnic students often face cultural and linguistic barriers that limit their engagement and participation in English language classes (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014). These barriers may include limited access to culturally relevant materials, insufficient language support services, and a lack of culturally competent teaching approaches (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Additionally, peer interactions play a critical role in shaping the language learning experience. Ethnic students may experience social exclusion or find themselves at a

disadvantage in predominantly Bengali-speaking settings, which can impact their confidence and language acquisition (Al Amin, N., 2020).

Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, shapes engagement, persistence, and performance in language learning. Dörnyei's (2005) model of motivation highlights the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, which are often shaped by students' cultural backgrounds and future aspirations. In multicultural settings, ethnic students' motivations for learning English often involve aspirations for social mobility, improved academic outcomes, and greater cultural integration (Gardner, 1985; Noels, Pelletier, Clément, & Vallerand, 2000). However, for ethnic students in Bangladesh, motivation is constrained by economic barriers, cultural distance, and limited institutional support. (Rahman & Pandian, 2018).

Ethnic students face unique challenges in language learning, including linguistic anxiety, social marginalization, and limited access to resources (Lamb, 2007; Ellis, 2008). Research suggests that linguistic and social biases within tertiary institutions may create additional hurdles, as ethnic students often struggle to relate to standard curriculum materials that lack cultural relevance (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014). While previous studies highlight motivational challenges, few have systematically examined how SDT dimensions shape ethnic students' experiences in EFL classrooms. This research aims to identify these difficulties and propose solutions to address them.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985). SDT is a prominent motivational framework that explains how individuals' motivation, engagement, and well-being are shaped by the fulfillment of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to SDT, individuals are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation and sustain long-term engagement when these needs are adequately supported within their learning environment.

In language learning contexts, SDT provides a useful lens for examining how environmental factors, such as teacher support, peer interaction, and classroom climate, influence learners' motivation and participation. For ethnic minority students, whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds may differ from those of the mainstream student population, the fulfillment of these psychological needs plays a crucial role in fostering positive learning experiences and academic achievement. The theory suggests that supportive learning environments can enhance students' sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and agency, whereas controlling or unsupportive environments may hinder motivation and participation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Therefore, this study employs SDT to explore how ethnic students experience and negotiate the three psychological needs of relatedness, autonomy, and competence in English language learning.

2.1.1 Relatedness

Relatedness refers to the need to feel connected, valued, and accepted by others within a social environment. In educational settings, this need is fulfilled when students experience positive relationships with teachers, peers, and the broader learning community. For ethnic students, a strong sense of relatedness can contribute to greater classroom engagement, confidence, and willingness to participate in language-learning activities. In this study, relatedness is examined through ethnic students' interactions with teachers and mainstream students in the English language classroom. Particular attention is given to

their experiences of inclusion, acceptance, collaboration, and social support, as well as how these experiences shape their motivation and participation in language learning.

2.1.2 Autonomy

Autonomy refers to learners' perception that they have control over their learning processes and can make meaningful choices regarding their educational activities. Within SDT, autonomy does not imply complete independence; rather, it reflects the feeling that one's actions are self-directed and aligned with personal interests and goals.

A supportive learning environment promotes autonomy by encouraging students to express their opinions, make decisions, and actively engage in learning activities without excessive pressure or control. For ethnic students, opportunities to practice English with peers and teachers in a respectful and supportive atmosphere can reduce anxiety and foster greater confidence. Consequently, autonomous learning experiences can enhance students' motivation, persistence, and willingness to communicate in English.

2.1.3 Competence

Competence refers to the need to feel effective and capable of successfully performing tasks and overcoming challenges. In language learning, competence is reflected in students' perceptions of their ability to understand, use, and improve their English language skills.

For ethnic students, the development of competence is closely associated with positive learning experiences, constructive feedback, and opportunities for meaningful language practice. As students gain linguistic proficiency and confidence, they become more willing to participate in classroom interactions and apply their English skills in academic, social, and professional contexts. A strong sense of competence can also reduce fear of making mistakes, thereby encouraging students to engage more actively in communication and pursue broader educational and career opportunities.

Self-Determination Theory explores the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influencing behavior. Motivation in this context can be categorized as:

1. Intrinsic Motivation: The desire to learn English for personal satisfaction or intellectual curiosity.
2. Extrinsic Motivation: The need to learn English for external rewards, such as career opportunities or academic success.

The classroom atmosphere and teacher attitudes toward ethnic diversity are essential for fostering inclusive learning environments. Positive reinforcement and culturally sensitive teaching approaches are found to enhance ethnic students' participation and motivation (Lamb, 2007). Teachers who encourage collaborative learning and recognize the unique linguistic needs of ethnic students tend to create a more conducive environment for English learning (Ellis, 2008).

A learning environment that satisfies these needs can significantly enhance ethnic students' motivation and persistence in learning English.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach. All the participants have been given a survey forms with open-ended questions. A semi-structured interview has been taken also. After collecting the data, data were analyzed using phenomenological analyses. Each of the

answers was analyzed and the notes were taken to find the main or key information. After sorting the key information related to research questions, a theme has been identified to correlate with the theoretical framework. To continue this research, a self-determination theoretical framework has been applied. Thirty students from public and private universities and ten language teachers from private universities participated. Participants were selected purposefully using a snowball sampling approach. As ethnic students' number is not high at tertiary level for that reason thirty students have been selected for this study.

Participants' personal information will not be disclosed except for their university name and department. To disclose the university's name, the interviewee's permission has been taken.

4. Result and Discussion

Data were collected from six universities (four private, two public), involving both teachers and students. All were given both open-ended and closed-ended questions. All of them answered in the Google form. Data has been explained in the three categories of SDT theory these are Relatedness, Autonomy, and Competence. Here, in this study relatedness is the significant area to focus on and then the other two come chronologically. As the research is about the learning environment of ethnic students, that's why the researcher focused on the Self Determination Theory of Deci and Ryan. The data will be analyzed following interpretive phenomenological analysis. This approach has been used so that this study can represent the actual scenario of the English language learning experience of ethnic students.

4.1 Relatedness from Students' Perspective

According to Kramsch (1993), language learning environments significantly influence students' language acquisition, particularly when diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are present. If a student feels isolated in the classroom, it will be very difficult for that student to learn any language like English.

When the ethnic students were asked about barriers in the language classroom, all the participants answered positively that they face barriers in the English language Classroom. 22 students reported pronunciation and grammar barriers: 8 cited teacher favoritism, non-cooperative classrooms, and lack of resources.

One ethnic student from the University of Science and Technology says that they lack resources and need extra classes. According to him, it is the barrier.

"Firstly, the timetable of classes secondly as we are at the disadvantage of resources, we should have some extra classes for our adibashi students."

Another ethnic student from Shanto Mariam University of Creative Technology says that he feels non-cooperative.

"I feel the non-cooperative classroom is the biggest barrier for learning English."

As ethnic students' pronunciation is quite different from mainstream students, the researcher asked them whether they felt bad/ insulted or not. 25 of them answered that they felt bad and lost the confidence to speak in front of others while others said no. They are also asked how they overcame this issue.

One student from the University of Creative Technology, Chittagong says that he is feeling discouraged and then starts to think that he is an outsider.

"Yesh some do some seniors laugh or poke me saying many things of course i get discouraged and makes me differ myself from Bangladeshi"

Another student from City University who said no says that every student is facing the problem, so we are.

"No. Because English isn't anyone's native language here. Do everyone has struggles with that."

Another ethnic student from the University of Science and Creative Technology says that he is losing his confidence due to laughter from other students, especially the mainstream.

"Yes, they laugh at my pronunciation. That's why I feel very shy speaking in English. Though I know that I am making a lot of mistakes, when they laugh i lose my confidence."

In terms of demotivation in the class, while learning English, 20 students from different universities said they feel demotivated in the class while 10 students replied they do not feel demotivated. The reason for demotivation is a lot such as lack of understanding, discouragement, pronunciation problems, fear of mistakes, and fear of judgement.

One student from USTC says he feels demotivated in the English language because he seems he is not like others and also possibly his classmates will ignore his response as an Upojati.

"I feel demotivated when i lack of knowledge unlike others i can't ask others to explain because i think my mates will see me as UPOJATI not as their classmate and ignore me."

In the case of support to learn English in the classroom from both teachers and mainstream students, ethnic students around 25 said they get support from their teachers and 5 students said they do not. In terms of classmates, the scenario is completely different, 20 students of ethnic groups said they do not get much help from mainstream students, but 10 ethnic students said they get the help he/she needs. Among the 10 students and 5 students who gave negative responses wrote no comment. Among 25 ethnic students, some said their teacher corrected their mistake by showing a smile to them. One student of the University of Chittagong said if they face any laugh or mock, his/her teacher stop them doing.

Yes, If any of the friends in the class laughed or belittled us, he would stop and explain."

And another student from USTC put no comment in either this situation which we consider as silence and such kind of silence give us a big tension or mystery.

Participants were asked whether they feel socially equitable in the class or not. Here 10 students responded "yes" while the other 20 students responded differently. Here some of the responses are given below, one student from SMUCT answered that he is not Bangladeshi because everyone considers him as an UpToDate.

"I fill like whatever i say i will be an upojati not an Bangladeshi"

Another student from UCTC responded that due to language barriers he faces difficulty connecting with others or participating in any group.

Sometimes, I don't feel socially equitable in class due to language barriers, which can make it harder to connect with others or fully participate in group activities.

Interviewees are asked whether their class teacher takes examples from their culture while teaching English Language in the classroom. Around 10 students responded positively and other 10 students said that teachers are curious to know about our traditional dress and food and then the rest 10 ethnic students replied negatively about it. One student from SMUCT said that their language teacher take examples such as

"Yes, sir used to give examples about our food habits, clothes and other cultures."

Another student from USTC said that their language teacher also take examples so that the classroom can be more engaging.

"Yes, my language teacher sometimes takes examples from my culture, such as traditional festivals, foods, or customs, to make lessons relatable and engaging."

4.2 Relatedness from Teacher's Perspectives

This study also included the teacher so that this study's actual scenario can be represented. Among the 10 interviewees from different private universities were asked whether their classes are motivated for ethnic learners. Most teachers reported motivating ethnic students, though one emphasized treating them like mainstream peers to avoid differentiation.

I treat them like regular students. They are more comfortable with that.

Another teacher from Brac University responded that he/she shows empathy to them as they are few in the class. To engage them he/she asks questions often to them and gives them opportunities.

"ask questions, show empathy in the classrooms, listen to them, give opportunities to talk and engage them with the whole classroom"

Interviewees are also asked about the equality of ethnic students in their language-learning classroom. All the participants responded that in their class ethnic students get equal opportunity at the tertiary level.

"Though they may get equal chance at the tertiary level, but I think those who come from remote regions don't get equal chances at the secondary or higher secondary levels."

To ensure the learning environment of ethnic students' interviewees are asked whether their language classrooms are the best for the students. All interviewees replied that they considered their classes to be inclusive and engaging excluding one interviewee. She/he said that it is not possible to engage ethnic students like mainstream students. Teachers need to be aware of taking ethnic students as in the language classroom students need a lot of motivation.

"I guess no. There are different ways to engage them in the class and make them comfortable. There has to be teachers' separate training sessions on this"

to make the teachers aware about the Do's and Don'ts with ethnic students."

4.3 Autonomy

Self-learning comes from genuine interest and motivation which is influenced by the surroundings. Intrinsic motivation, such as a genuine interest in English for self-expression and personal growth, is crucial for sustained language learning. However, ethnic students' motivation often aligns more with extrinsic factors, including the necessity of English for career advancement and academic success (Gardner, 1985). Ethnic Interviewees are asked about autonomous learning and how much they learn from Bengali mixed classrooms. Here 5 participants say they are not facing problems but the rest 25 students reported confusion due to mixed Bangla-English instruction, hindering autonomous learning. For example, the two responses from the ethnic participants are given; one is from a public university, and another is from a private university.

"Yes, a Bengali-mixed English EFL class can affect my learning, as it sometimes causes confusion between the languages and slows down my progress in gaining fluency in English."

"I understand perfectly but don't know about others"

Participants are asked whether they share their culture while practising English in the classroom. Among the 30 interviewees, 20 participants answered negatively that it is not necessary, or they do not feel the necessity to share their culture with them and the rest 10 said they do share sometimes if they want to know or show their positive curiosity. One participant from SMUCT says that he is shy and he thinks it unnecessary. Another participant from USTC says no s his or her classmates belong to different cultures. And another participant from UCTC talks about the curiosity of others. If anyone wants to know, he/she will share.

"No, I don't always share my culture while practicing English in the spoken class. Sometimes, I'm focused on just improving my language skills and feel shy about bringing up my cultural background. I'm also unsure if my classmates would be interested or if it would fit into the lesson. However, I do think sharing my culture could help me connect with others and make the learning experience more personal and engaging."

"No. My culture and English-speaking persons' culture are very different. "

"I didn't try to but if i feel some one interested i would "

From the teachers' perspectives, all the participants gave different opinions. One teacher from Bangladesh University of Business and Technology says they are inattentive and irregular and another participant from City University says they are interested to learn but they do struggle a bit more compared to the mainstream students. Both of the mentioned reasons hamper the students' motivation to learn autonomously. Another 5 Participants responded they were positive, but they were not that interested which is also considered the reason for losing autonomously.

4.4 Competence

Ethnic students will not be competent enough if they don't get the extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to learn the English language. Research in South Asian contexts indicates

that ethnic students perceive English as essential for employment opportunities, particularly in urban areas where English proficiency is highly valued (Al Amin, N., 2020; Rahman & Pandian, 2018). All participants had the same response regarding the practical usage of the English Language in the realistic world. One Participant from UCTC says that he has an interest but due to his ethnicity and accent, he cannot be the master of the English language in the practical field. Another participant from SMUCT says as they come from very remote areas where they have not got enough facilities, they face difficulty getting good results in their academic era and also finding a job. Students linked lack of resources and accent differences to difficulties in achieving competence, affecting both academic success and employment.

"My accent and my race will be the problem but I have interest for English"

"Yes, since we have studied from a very remote area, there were not so many facilities, so we have difficulty in speaking English, which hinders us from getting jobs or academic results."

4.5 Discussion

Bangladesh hosts over 75 ethnic communities, many from remote areas with limited educational access. Ethnic students face barriers both before and during university, including language challenges and adjustment to mainstream peers. Therefore, most of the ethnic people of Bangladesh are still illiterate in this digital Bangladesh. Some ethnic groups do not have any highly educated children in their community so far. For example, recently Kaler Kantho newspaper (26th October 2024) reported news that the First Khumi girl from the Khumi community got a chance to enrol at a university. We cannot say they are not capable or intelligent to do their higher studies. They have lots of barriers to getting admission to university such as they do not get proper education, and they do not have lots of schools and colleges near to their home. They have to cross lots of miles to go to school and they do not have proper transportation as well as good teachers. So whenever a student from an ethnic community gets chance to enrol university, they have to overcome a plethora of barriers. After coming to university to be highly educated, here they face new problems that are adjustment with mainstream Bengali students or who are highly privileged. Similarly, they face the problem due to language barriers, which are very common to them. This study has collected information from 30 ethnic university students to know their difficulties in the English language classroom. Participants are from different public and private universities, especially from Chittagong and Dhaka.

4.5.1 Relatedness

Ethnic students often experience a cultural disconnect between their native languages and cultures and the dominant language (Bengali) and culture of the educational institutions. This disconnect can lead to lower motivation to learn English, as students may feel that their cultural identities are undervalued. This study has also found ethnic students cannot connect themselves with their partners, or the class environment due to the barrier of mainstream language, understanding the problem and feeling low esteemed. They feel isolated in the class and for that reason they can't practice properly. As they can't connect themselves properly, they fail to improve their English Language skills in the classroom. As a result, they become irregular and sometimes lose their educational motivation. If they try to speak and share their opinion, they feel scared if mainstream students do not accept it or laugh at their pronunciation. Ethnic students have pronunciation problems more compared

to the Bengali mainstream students and due to their accents, their pronunciation seems a little bit uncommon to Bengali students. From the teacher's perspective, it is found that whatever ethnic students said in their questionnaire part it is the reason of their lacked interest in learning English. Since they come from remote areas, they are not grammatically strong enough to practice in front of the class. Many ethnic students enter tertiary education with lower proficiency in both Bengali and English, making it difficult for them to fully engage in an English-medium academic environment. This language barrier often contributes to lower self-confidence and motivation.

4.5.2 Autonomy

Self-interest motivates learners from the inner sight which encourages learners to learn the target language. However, if someone loses that interest, it is very difficult for him to learn that language. The researcher has found in this study that ethnic students can't connect themselves due to their lack of relatedness and as a result, they lose their intrinsic motivation which hinders them from learning the target language. Ethnic students often have limited access to language support services such as tutoring, language labs, and counseling. The absence of these resources can negatively impact their motivation and overall academic performance. Limited interaction with peers, particularly native Bengali speakers, can hinder ethnic students' English language acquisition and reduce their motivation. The lack of a supportive peer network often exacerbates feelings of isolation.

4.5.3 Competence

Finally, the competence, here this study found that students face lots of difficulty in the practical field due to pronunciation and lack of English knowledge. They cannot apply properly in the practical work. Therefore, they cannot do a good academic result and also, they can't manage a good job. Experiences of discrimination or bias within the educational environment can significantly demotivate ethnic students. Feelings of marginalization can lead to a sense of helplessness and a decline in the motivation to learn. They can realize their language errors yet due to a lack of relatedness or a proper learning environment they cannot overcome it rather they lose interest in learning it.

Findings highlight the need for cultural sensitivity, enhanced support systems, and inclusive policies to ensure equal opportunities for ethnic students.

5. Conclusion

The sociocultural attitudes of ethnic communities towards English education can also shape students' motivation. Some ethnic groups view English as a threat to their cultural identity, which may lead to ambivalence or resistance toward language learning (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Institutional support systems such as advising, workshops, and counseling are critical for motivation and adjustment. These resources help address challenges related to language anxiety and social adjustment, thereby promoting a positive learning environment (Kramsch, 1993; Rahman & Pandian, 2018).

Research highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of ethnic students' learning environments and motivation in English language education at the tertiary level. Factors such as classroom dynamics, teacher attitudes, and institutional support significantly influence ethnic students' motivation and engagement in English language education. Addressing the unique challenges faced by ethnic students in Bangladesh, inclusive and culturally responsive strategies are essential to ensure equitable opportunities for ethnic

students in English education. Future research should explore longitudinal studies to evaluate tailored support systems for sustained motivation and success.

For national progress, all citizens, including ethnic communities, must be empowered through education. Ethnic or Upojati people are a part of Bangladesh. They love to live in hillside or remote areas. To bring the Ethnic people into our country's economy, we need to educate them. As they willingly are coming to university to continue higher studies, we should make the learning environment vivid for them as there are very few in the class. To encourage them our policy makers, authorities can take some steps such as.

- 1) Provide teacher training on inclusive practices.
- 2) Ensure ethnic students' comfort from campus to classroom.
- 3) Monitor attendance and address challenges promptly.
- 4) Encourage mainstream students to support ethnic peers.
- 5) Promote ethnic student participation in cultural programs to foster unity.

There are some limitations in this study. Although a mixed-method design was planned, the study primarily relied on qualitative phenomenological analysis. Secondly, data has been collected only from the teachers of private universities, not from the public universities. Finally, the limitation is, data were collected only from private university teachers in Dhaka and Chittagong, excluding public universities and other regions.

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Appendix

Table 1.

The Details of Ethnic Students

Sl.	Name of the University	Short Name of Uni.	Location	Number of Ethnic Students
1.	Shanto Mariam University of Creative Technology	SMUCT	Uttara, Dhaka	10
2.	University of Creative Technology, Chittagong	UCTC	Chittagong	6
3.	City University	CiU	Savar, Dhaka	2
4.	University of Science and Technology	USTC	GEC, Chittagong	7
5.	Chittagong University	CU	Chittagong	4
6.	Jahangirnagar University	JU	Savar, Dhaka	1
				Total= 30

Table 2.

The Details of Language Teacher

Sl.	Name of University	Location	Number of Language Teachers
1.	Daffodil International University	Savar, Dhaka	2
2.	Brac University	Dhaka	1
3.	City University	Savar, Dhaka	4
4.	University of Creative Technology, Chittagong	Chittagong	1
5.	University of Science and Creative Technology	Chittagong	2
			Total= 10

THE ROLE OF FIRST LANGUAGE IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A CASE STUDY AT A BANGLADESHI UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The use of Bangla in English classes has been a crucial issue in Bangladeshi classrooms. This research investigates the role of native language use in second language acquisition and the ways students utilize their native language while attempting to manage the interference between the two languages in classroom settings. A qualitative descriptive study was conducted based on five hours of classroom observation and a semi-structured interview schedule administered to four instructors of English at an English-medium private university in Bangladesh. The instruments used in this study where instruments were piloted to ensure consistency. Findings from this study indicated that Bangla served as a cognitive and communication support system for students as they learned English and did not serve as a barrier to the students' ability to learn English. Findings indicated that Bangla served as cognitive and communicative support, helping students clarify complex concepts, negotiate meaning, and generate ideas before producing English output. Findings further indicated that flexible language policies reduced student anxiety and increased participation. Most importantly, Bangla use decreased as students gained proficiency, indicating developmental rather than dependent L1 use. This study supports the notion that students should be encouraged to engage in pedagogically guided translanguaging practices and supports institutional policies that recognize native language use as a legitimate pedagogical resource in English-medium higher education.

Keywords: *academic equity; Bangladeshi higher education; bilingual education; English-medium instruction; first language use; qualitative research; second language.*

1. Introduction

Research on the role of first language (L1) in second language (L2) learning has gained increasing importance in multilingual higher education contexts, particularly in English-medium universities. Many Bangladeshi university students experience difficulty in reading complex disciplinary texts, in writing academically, and in contributing to classroom discussions that are held in English. Research has indicated that students who intentionally use their L1, a practice often referred to as translanguaging may help bridge some of these challenges by supporting students' understandings of L2 materials through scaffolding, peer-

to-peer communication, and cognitive support. These strategies help students acquire L2 more effectively (Cui et al., 2024; Rajendram et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2024). International graduate students from multilingual backgrounds have used translanguaging to navigate complex readings and technical vocabulary as a way to improve their understanding and engagement (Rajendram et al., 2023).

Researchers have also found that Chinese graduate students who selectively used L1 in ESP instruction improved academic achievement and classroom equity (Cui et al., 2024; Yuan et al., 2024). Translanguaging has been associated with increased motivation, peer collaboration, and academic performance, and even advanced L2 learners use L1 for discourse-pragmatic functions such as repair, emphasis, and quotation (Huang, 2025; Gu et al., 2024). In Bangladesh, students typically use their native language (Bangla) as a cognitive and social scaffold in English-medium classrooms, most notably when dealing with complex readings, creating written assignments, and participating in group discussions. The results of the above-mentioned studies demonstrate that L1 is a strategic asset for L2 learning across both Bangladeshi and international contexts.

Despite the large body of research on L1 use, the literature is characterized by methodological and conceptual limitations. For example, many studies use qualitative or cross-sectional methodologies, and therefore, the causal impacts of L1 use on L2 outcomes have rarely been investigated (Doiz et al., 2023; Alzahrani, 2019). There is limited research on discipline-specific contexts and productive skills such as writing and speaking, particularly in Bangladesh (Pham et al., 2025). Importantly, previous studies paid little attention to teachers' voices. An investigation of this topic at the undergraduate private university level would address these gaps by providing empirical evidence of how L1 functions in authentic classroom interactions and how it influences L2 acquisition. This study examines students' strategies for mitigating challenges due to L1 interference and thus provides insight into practical and pedagogical methods that could facilitate optimal translanguaging in higher education.

Therefore, the significance of the study is clear; however, the theoretical and practical development of L1 in L2 learning continues to lag. Both sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes the mediational role of language and interaction in cognitive development, and translanguaging theory (García & Wei, 2014), which views L1 as a dynamic resource for making sense, suggest that L1 use is more than a compensatory mechanism; it is a tool for actively constructing knowledge (García & Wei, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Results from this study will contribute to the theory currently in existence by situating translanguaging within Bangladeshi universities, providing practical recommendations to instructors on how to strategically incorporate L1, and guiding policy development for English-medium instruction in multilingual contexts. The study may also direct further research by identifying context-specific practices that could be examined longitudinally or experimentally to evaluate their effects on L2 proficiency and academic achievement.

The study focuses on English-medium undergraduate courses, providing a context for an in-depth exploration of instructional practices, learner experiences, and teacher perspectives in real-time classroom environments. The findings are expected to contribute valuable insights for educators and policymakers seeking to optimize second language (L2) learning while addressing the complex linguistic and pedagogical realities of higher education in Bangladesh. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) To what extent does first language (L1) use influence second language (L2) acquisition

among Bangladeshi university students? (2) What strategies do students adopt to mitigate the challenges associated with L1–L2 interference?

2. Literature Review

Current studies show that the use of the first language (L1) plays strategic and pedagogical roles in the English medium instruction (EMI) university settings. Nonetheless, the literature does not disagree on the question of whether L1 can be used to aid L2 learning, but on the manner and under what conditions such aids can be provided. Others view translanguaging as a cognitive tool of scaffolding complex information (Cui, Wang, & Gardiner, 2024; Rajendram, Shi, & Jun, 2023), whereas others consider translanguaging as having social and equitable roles, including promoting participation, peer collaboration, and epistemological justice (Yuan, Fang, & Hu, 2024). Such a conflict between cognitive and social orientations has not been resolved, with the majority of the studies not incorporating both aspects in a single framework.

The second difference point relates to the proficiency of the learners. Corpus analysis refutes the belief that L1 use decreases with high-level proficiency, indicating that even high-level L2 speakers use L1 to carry out discourse pragmatic activities such as repair and emphasis (Huang, 2025). However, other studies indicate that discipline can be a factor: English majors and non-English majors have dissimilar EMI, which can suggest that the role of L1 can be different depending on the academic field (Hasan et al., 2024). Comparative synthesis is uncommon in spite of these insights. As an example, although it is known that translanguaging is effective in understanding and building trust (Romanowski, 2025; Hsu, 2025), the connection between translanguaging and productive skills, i.e., academic writing and speaking, has not been explored much (Webb, 2025). In methodological terms, the field is mostly dependent on qualitative and cross-sectional designs (Mizumoto, 2025; Alzahrani, 2019), which restrict causal arguments regarding L1 usage and quantifiable L2 results.

In theory, sociocultural and translanguaging models are often called upon but seldom put into action. In the majority of studies, the concept of translanguaging is considered a descriptive label and is not a testable mechanism, such as scaffolding or identity negotiation are not associated with particular and observable L2 learning processes (Khan et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2024). Likewise, empirical evidence has been little gathered on technology-mediated translanguaging, such as AI-assisted writing and online platforms (Xu & Zhang, 2023; Liu & Zhang, 2024; Jannath & Akter, 2026).

Bangladesh is a case of such gaps. Local research supports the cognitive scaffolding, peer collaboration, and identity negotiation through Bengali, which is used by students in the region (Rafi and Morgan, 2022), reflecting trend in the area (Pham et al., 2025). Nevertheless, Bangladeshi studies are largely descriptive and cross-sectional with no experimental or longitudinal studies examining the effects of L1 on writing or oral proficiency. Additionally, the tensions between the policies of English only and the reality of translanguaging (Rafi & Morgan, 2022) underscore a policy gap that has not been addressed yet, but formal regulations still do not exist.

To conclude, the only thing known is that L1 use facilitates understanding, motivation and peer communication in EMI contexts such as Bangladesh. What is unknown entails causal relationships of L1 use and productive L2 results that include writing and speaking, patterns of discipline specificity, effects of technology-mediated translanguaging, and

integrated theoretical models operationalizing sociocultural and cognitive processes. The gap that will be addressed in this study is that by utilizing a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design, the authors can study how structured L1 use (Bangla) of AI in assisting writing activities influences the accuracy of academic writing and oral proficiency among Bangladeshi EMI undergraduates. Translanguaging is operationalized as a cognitive scaffold and a social mediation tool within a cohesive sociocultural context.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Design

This research employed a qualitative descriptive type of research to examine the effects of first language (L1) use on second language (L2) acquisition and learning processes in an English Language (EL) classroom environment at the undergraduate degree level in Bangladesh. The qualitative descriptive methodological approach was chosen for this research due to its ability to obtain the actual, lived experience of participants, language behaviors and perceptions in a naturally occurring environment; and for this reason, it is most suited for those types of studies that are aimed at developing rich, context-specific descriptions of phenomena rather than general theories (Creswell, 2013).

This methodology was especially useful for this research as it enabled observation of authentic classroom interactions between teachers and students, including spontaneous L1 use. In addition to providing the researcher with the opportunity to observe these classroom interactions, the qualitative descriptive methodological approach also provided the teacher(s) with the opportunity to express their personal beliefs, reasoning, and reflections about the use of L1 in L2 instructional practices, which can be difficult to gain insight into through solely quantitative methods. Ultimately, the qualitative descriptive design for this research provided a way for the participants' voices and the reality of the classroom to be represented and for the study's goal of gaining insight into how and why L1 is being used as both a pedagogical and communication resource in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms in Bangladesh to be met (Creswell, 2013).

3.2 Sample

The sample for this research comprised undergraduate students and English Language (EL) teachers from a university in Bangladesh. More specifically, the participants were one undergraduate English Department student group and five EL teachers who teach English at the university level as part of their work. To identify participants, a purposive sampling approach was used. Purposive sampling is preferred when the focus of a qualitative research project is on the richness of the data collected as opposed to its generalizability to the larger population. Using this sampling method ensured that the researchers could select teachers and students with relevant experience, knowledge and expertise to provide relevant responses to the research questions. The five teachers have considerable experience teaching English to university students, while a single group of undergraduate students participates in English-medium classes, providing a complementary perspective from teachers and students. The total number of participants was one undergraduate student group and five English language instructors. The five classroom observations and five teacher interviews provided rich and detailed information about the real-time language usage of students and teachers in the classroom, and also provided the

researchers' perspectives about how they use their native language (first language) during the process of teaching English (second language).

Table 1 is a summary of the classroom observations completed during 5 undergraduate English language courses (Sociolinguistics, Semantics and Pragmatics, Teaching Listening and Speaking, Methodology of English Language Teaching, and Syllabus Design and Materials Development). The class size in each course was approximately 30-35 students. Female students far outnumbered male students in every classroom observed.

Table 1.

Classroom Observation Information

Number of Students	Male Students	Female Students	Observed Class
35	6	29	Sociolinguistics
30	8	22	Semantics & Pragmatics
33	3	30	Teaching, Listening & Speaking
35	8	27	Methodology of English Language Teaching
32	5	27	Syllabus Design & Materials Development

Table 2 describes the demographics of the 4 faculty members who were interviewed as part of this research project. All participants were male professors who had at least 10 years of experience in the classroom and held PhD degrees in Applied Linguistics. They currently hold the position of either an Assistant Professor or an Associate Professor. The table provides a description of their instructional practices, which include using both Bangla and English with flexibility and awareness.

Table 2.

Demographic Information of Interviews

Teacher (Pseudonym)	Gender	Teaching Experience	Highest Degree	Current Position	Instructional Practices for academic precision
Dr. H	Male	10 years	PhD in Applied Linguistics	Assistant Professor	Makes informed translanguaging choices based on the type of class; Using Bangla for support and building confidence with a focus on using English in classes focused on skills.
Dr. A	Male	20 years	PhD in Applied Linguistics	Associate Professor	Makes educated choices about when to use their native language (L1) to support comprehension early in the process and increases the amount of English used based upon student proficiency.
Dr. R	Male	12 years	PhD in Applied Linguistics	Assistant Professor	Fosters flexible translanguaging, particularly in content-based classes to improve student comprehension by leveraging cross-linguistic transfer.

Dr. M	Male	17 years	PhD in Applied Linguistics	Assistant Professor	Makes use of Bangla as a scaffold at lower levels of instruction to promote positive language transfer and then transitions into using predominantly English.
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3.3 Instruments

The researcher used two qualitative techniques for collecting data: Classroom Observation and In-depth Interviews with Teachers. The researcher conducted five classroom observations in undergraduate English Department classes in a private University in Bangladesh; and five Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with experienced tertiary-level English Language Instructors to discuss how they use L1 in an L2 classroom. These two data collection techniques have been used together to provide rich, contextualized data that reflects classroom practices and teachers' attitudes toward using L1 in the English Language Learning process.

3.3.1 Classroom Observation Checklist

To recognize naturally occurring examples of instances when students did use Bangla in English lessons, classroom observations were carried out. The main aim was to learn how and why students and teachers code-switched and whether the activities helped or hindered L2 learning. The data collection tool was an observation checklist which was created based on the existing research on the practices in bilingual classrooms and L1 application in L2 instruction (Swain & Lapkin, 2000; García & Lin, 2017). The checklist recorded behaviors that could be observed such as student use of Bangla when performing classroom activities, teacher support or discouragement of L1, the role of L1 in meaning making and peer cooperation and the impact of L1 on student interaction. The checklist would include ten items, including question-asking in Bangla, speaking Bangla when working in the group, translating, explaining English, and modification of participation when limiting L1.

The checklist was subject to expert validation by an Applied Linguistics and ELT specialist before observations took place and the items were examined regarding their content accuracy, relevance and clarity. It was revised slightly to align with specific, measurable behaviors rather than interpretive constructs, enhancing content validity in line with established research practices (Cohen et al., 2018). Systematic notes were made in relation to every checklist item to give a contextual example and pattern of behavior. These field notes helped to compare with the data on interviewees in order to find similar themes about the pedagogical roles of Bangla in the English classroom.

3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

This study used an open-ended, semi-structured interview format as its primary method of inquiry to explore five ESL teachers' perceptions and beliefs about L1 use in L2 instructional settings. An initial set of interview questions were developed based on literature that has examined teacher perceptions and classroom-based language use in L2 instructional settings, and specifically how L1 is utilized in second language instruction (Macaro, 2005). Interview items were then developed based on this literature to elicit information regarding teachers' perceptions of how L1 is perceived to influence comprehension, student participation, and vocabulary acquisition in the classroom, as well

as the interactions between teachers and students within the classroom. In developing the interview protocol, 10 open-ended questions were developed to allow respondents to provide detailed responses. In addition to providing space for respondents to describe their thoughts and feelings, the open-ended nature of the questions also provided opportunities for respondents to share personal anecdotes and describe specific incidents that occurred in the classroom.

Finally, to confirm the clarity, relevance and content validity of the interview protocol, an expert in Applied Linguistics validated the interview protocol for clarity, relevance, and alignment with research questions. One specialist in Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching reviewed the interview questions for alignment with the research questions, and theoretical grounding and the appropriateness of the questions for use in a Bangladeshi University setting. Feedback received from the specialist resulted in some minor word-level and sequence-level changes to the wording of the questions in order to increase the coherence and effectiveness of the questions. Through this validation process, the interview protocol was developed into a clear and effective tool for generating rich, reliable and contextually meaningful data from the EL teachers who participated in the study.

3.4 Data Collection Process

The data collection of this research occurred into two stages: classroom observations followed by semi-structured interviews. The first stage included five observations of regular 80-minute undergraduate English classes at a private university in Bangladesh. While observing, the researcher documented authentic language use by both students and teachers, with emphasis on L1 instances.

Once all classroom observations had been completed, the second stage included the administration of semi-structured interviews to the four English Language (EL) instructors who taught in the observed classrooms. Interviews typically ranged from 10 to 20 minutes in length and were audio-taped using the informed consent of the participants. The interview protocol consisted of ten open-ended questions designed to prompt the instructors to provide reflective responses regarding classroom language practices, how students' use of L1 impacts L2 learning, and what they do to address the challenges presented by the use of L1 during instruction. The audio recordings of the interviews were then transcribed verbatim to ready them for analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied qualitatively to investigate the role and purpose of first language (L1) use when learning a second language (L2) in one of the universities in Bangladesh. The data were in the form of five classroom observations of undergraduate English courses and four semi-structured interviews with the teachers at the university. Observational field notes have been checked several times to see patterns in L1 use, such as frequency, pedagogical value, and interaction in classroom. The data obtained in the interview was analyzed in six phases of the analysis introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization, initial coding, development of the theme, revision and review of the theme. Themes that came out during the interviews were emergent as they were pedagogical support, affective factors, and perceived challenges of using L1. The triangulation of teacher responses and observational data was developed to bring credibility to the triangulation

process and the two data types were combined to give a complete answer to the research questions.

It was found that L1 can be used as a mediator to help students acquire L2 knowledge and skills to help them understand, participate, and interact in the classroom. The combination of observational and interview data enhanced the analysis reliability and offered more insight into the views of teachers and the real classroom practices. Throughout the study, ethical standards were maintained. Participants were well explained about the data collection purposes before informed consent was written. Finally, the results depict how L1 can be used as a strategic and pedagogical tool in English classrooms at Bangladeshi universities to bridge the gap between teacher beliefs and teaching practices. Member checking was also done to enhance credibility where the interview summaries were presented to the teachers to confirm the validity of the summaries. Triangulation was done between observational field notes and interview responses. To provide transparency and reliability in the research process, an audit trail of raw data, analytic memos, and coding decisions was kept.

3.6 Trustworthiness Criteria

This paper discusses the four dimensions of trustworthiness that have not existed in the methodology. The credibility is created with the help of triangulation of classroom observations and teacher interviews, which make sure that the findings received are credible and accurately reflect the experiences of the participants. Thick description of Bangladeshi EMI context, sample demographics, and classroom settings support transferability, allowing the reader to determine the relevance to his or her context. Reliability is ensured by the use of an audit trail of field notes, interview transcripts, and analytic decisions so that the research process can be replicated. Grounding the interpretations on the voices of the participants and observational data, as opposed to the researcher, provides confirmability, and objectivity is enhanced by having the instruments validated by experts.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

The research adhered to accepted ethical guidelines of qualitative research with human subjects. This was approved by the university, and informed consent in writing was signed by all the participants, including their right to withdraw without consequences at any time. All teachers were given pseudonyms and no information identifiable with the institution was provided. Observations in classrooms were carried out in a way that had minimum disturbance to the normal instruction. Interview data were recorded on computer with the express consent of participants and transcribed to undergo analysis and were stored safely with only the researcher having access. The researcher was also objective and truthful in presenting findings without fabricating or exerting any influence on findings. Also, the research showed that it respected the culturally and linguistically heterogeneous situation in Bangladesh, especially in respect of using English and Bangla as instructional languages.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The findings from classroom observations and teacher interviews are presented below.

4.1.1 The effect of first language (L1) to the second language (L2) acquisition among Bangladeshi university students?

A. Findings from Classroom Observation

Five undergraduate English courses were observed: Methodology of English Language Teaching, Semantics & Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, Teaching Listening & Speaking, and Syllabus Design and Materials Development. Classroom activity observations concentrated on how both the first language (Bangla) and English were employed throughout the teaching and learning processes.

Theme 1: L1 as Cognitive Scaffold

The use of the first language (Bangla) was found to be a critical factor in student understanding and participation in all observed classes. All classes provided consistent opportunities for students to ask questions in Bangla if they encountered difficulties articulating their responses in English. A clear example of this occurred during a poster presentation in a Methodology of English Language Teaching course. Prior to beginning her explanation, a student asked, "Sir, may I speak in Bangla?" Another example is from a Sociolinguistics course where a student asked in Bangla, 'Sir, does this example fall under diglossia?' to clarify a theoretical construct. Both teachers responded favorably to these types of queries, exhibiting a flexible language policy that prioritized understanding over strictly enforcing English-only practices. This flexibility seemed to minimize students' anxiety about using the English language and foster more active participation in classroom discourse.

Theme 2: L1 in Collaborative Learning

During group work and collaborative tasks, students most often employed Bangla to discuss ideas, negotiate meaning, clarify instructions, and to decide on specific roles. Frequently, during peer discussions, students would pose questions in Bangla “এটার মানে কী বুঝাচ্ছে?” to each other and would explain concepts to one another in Bangla. In a Teaching Listening and Speaking course, students used Bangla to divide up responsibilities and to explain grammatical elements while engaged in micro-teaching preparations. Bangla served as a cognitive tool to process information before producing English output. Additionally, students commonly used Bangla to fully explore ideas prior to translating the ideas into English for formal presentations or discussions.

Theme 3: Translation

Translation between Bangla and English was a common strategy observed in all of the courses. Students regularly translated words, phrases and sentences to ensure clarity and confidence in their output. An example of this occurred during a micro-teaching session, wherein a student stated, “এখন আমরা এই পয়েন্টটা সমাধান করবো,” and then attempted to rephrase the same concept in English. In Semantics and Pragmatics courses, students used Bangla examples that were culturally familiar (e.g., “রিকশা মামা”) to comprehend abstract concepts prior to attempting to express the concepts in English. Teachers also strategically employed Bangla to explain complex theoretical constructs. On several occasions, teachers shifted temporarily to Bangla before reverting to instruction in English.

Furthermore, lower-proficiency students relied more on Bangla, while higher-proficiency students used it less frequently. Data collected during the observations indicate that Bangla did not replace English in the students' minds but rather served to support students' use of English by providing students with ways to organize ideas and complete tasks. During group discussions, students explicitly recognized this process when they stated that they first comprehended ideas in Bangla and then communicated the ideas in English during presentations. The data also demonstrated that permitting students to utilize Bangla resulted in students being more willing to engage in discussions and make attempts to produce output in English.

Lastly, students tended to employ Bangla more frequently during the preparatory stages of tasks than they did during the final stages of English production. Although students relied heavily upon Bangla during the preparation and discussion phases of tasks, many made an effort to utilize English during presentations and formal classroom activities. Overall, the observation data demonstrate that employing students' first languages strategically supports effective second language acquisition within the context of Bangladeshi university classrooms.

B. Findings from Teacher Interview

When responding to the research questions regarding the relationship between Bangladeshi students' use of their native language (L1) and their acquisition of English (L2), teachers reported that Bangladeshi students use their native language to facilitate their acquisition of English in a number of ways. Teachers reported that Bangladeshi students use their native language in order to assist them in comprehending and participating in the classroom, as well as to express themselves with confidence and to accurately use vocabulary.

To address the effect of native language use on overall EFL competence, all four teachers stated that they believe the use of Bangladeshi by students affects their acquisition of English. The teachers explained that students can benefit from utilizing their prior experience with Bangla to assist them in their acquisition of English due to cross-linguistic transfer of cognates and other related characteristics. For example, Teacher R explained that cross-linguistic transfer helps students understand concepts more effectively. Additionally, Teacher H stated that "Bangla was particularly beneficial in theoretical courses requiring complex conceptual understanding." While the teachers were hesitant to allow excessive dependency on Bangla, they both agreed that strategic use of L1 would help facilitate comprehension, particularly for lower proficiency students. Teacher M reiterated this facilitation role of Bangla by stating, "Bangla can be used for the elementary level learners as a tool for scaffolding their English learning process."

In response to classroom settings where code-switching (Switching from L1 to L2) takes place, the teachers stated that students generally switch from Bangla to English based on what was required to do so, i.e., classroom rules, presentations, etc. Teacher R noted that language use is often conditioned, and that "students switch from Bangla to speaking English when you enforce a classroom rule that you have to speak in English." Teacher H also noted that the amount of freedom that teachers give to students in terms of their use of L1 will influence whether students will use English or Bangla, and stated that "it depends on how much the teacher allows them." On the other hand, students were more likely to use Bangla

when they were seeking clarification of a difficult concept, asking a question, or engaged in a peer discussion. As Teacher A stated, "When the topic is a bit difficult, they switch their language or they are trying to ask questions to the teacher." In general, the frequency of code-switching was seen as dependent on teacher practices, as well as the nature of the course.

In answering the role of Bangla in students' conceptual understanding and in the development of their second language, the teachers agreed that Bangla supports L2 development rather than hindering it. The teachers emphasized that Bangla is beneficial for students who are attempting to clarify complex ideas, especially in theoretical courses. Teacher H referred to Bangla as having a "catalytic role" in helping students understand concepts, and Teacher A stated that the mother tongue is now viewed "as a resource instead of a barrier." Teacher R emphatically supported this position and stated, "It never hinders. If somebody argues that it hinders, that's a very wrong conception." The teachers also indicated that the explicit identification of similarities and differences between Bangla and English can promote positive language transfer.

To address the influence of students' use of their native language on participation, confidence, and desire to engage in oral communication, the teachers agreed that Bangla is used by students to build confidence, increase participation, and encourage freer expression in the classroom. Teacher H explained that limiting Bangla could result in students being silent, and stated, "If teacher discourages or stops their use of native language, they may not speak at all." Teacher A also noted that the use of Bangla "can have a positive effect, since their participation level will increase." Teachers agreed that providing students with the opportunity to strategically use Bangla provides a more supportive and less anxiety-provoking learning environment, which is particularly important for less confident students.

Regarding the patterns of students using Bangla as a resource to support Second Language Acquisition, the teachers agreed that students who possess lower levels of proficiency or higher levels of anxiety tend to rely more heavily on Bangla. Teacher H explained that such students often view their first language as a safe option, and stated, "They might think, 'Okay, my native language is safer.'" Teacher A also observed that students rely on Bangla "when they have trouble with a particular topic or struggle to communicate their ideas in English." However, the teachers also emphasized that reliance on Bangla is temporary. Teacher M emphasized that the reliance on Bangla should be decreased as students' progress, and stated, "The more they progress, the more Bangla should be reduced." The teachers agreed that as students become more confident, proficient, and appropriately scaffolded, their reliance on Bangla decreases over time, resulting in improved English proficiency.

4.1.2 Students' strategies in mitigating challenges arising from the interference between their first and second languages

A. Findings from Classroom Observation

Observations made in classrooms have demonstrated that first language (L1) (Bangla) has provided opportunities to support second language (L2) (English) acquisition for students in all types of undergraduate English courses at a Bangladeshi university for the entire semester. Rather than being viewed as an obstacle to learning, L1 has been shown to

increase students' comprehension, involvement in their own learning, and confidence when performing academic work. Additionally, L1 use reflects the typical language use of students at a multilingual university.

Theme 1: Collaborative Use of L1 for Comprehension of Abstract Concepts

As seen in the classroom, Semantics and Pragmatics, “students constantly explained ideas to one another in Bangla whenever topics became difficult. Their use of Bangla developed a feeling of group knowledge during complicated discussions.” Examples of the most obvious uses of L1 are to help students explain to one another in Bangla how to understand complex concepts, directions, or examples that they struggled with. In every classroom observation, students continually helped one another in Bangla to develop an understanding of abstract ideas or ideas that may appear in texts, lectures, or discussions. In addition, in the classroom Sociolinguistics presentation session, “students frequently collaborated by providing explanations of sociolinguistic theories to each other in Bangla so that everyone understood them equally,” and one student defined the concept of “speech community” in Bangla to aid his fellow students. By using L1 collaboratively to define abstract ideas in the classroom, students from a Bangla medium background could feel comfortable participating in their classes. It is certainly true that without having the ability to use L1, many students would have been unable to understand and make sense of the abstract content of classes like Semantics, Pragmatics, and Sociolinguistics.

In addition, students typically attempted to use English during scheduled class time (i.e. presentations and micro-teaching) and their use of English was limited to the degree of proficiency in which they were proficiently able to use English. This was evident in the Methodology of English Language Teaching class, where “students attempted to speak in English even though they lacked confidence and made noticeable attempts to self-correct pronunciation and grammar errors.” Students from an English medium background were significantly more likely to remain independent in their use of English compared to students from a Bangla medium background.

It appears that students rarely relied solely on English for higher-level thinking tasks. No matter what type of task students were engaged in, they continued to rely upon Bangla to produce ideas, resolve ambiguity, and solve problems. In the Semantics and Pragmatics class, “most of their thought processes and discussions were conducted in Bangla,” and English seemed to emerge primarily when the instructor introduced major vocabulary. For students, English was used primarily for creating a final product or output, such as presentations or micro-teaching demonstrations.

Theme 2: L1 as Interactional Support

Since L1-based resources were less frequent than L1-based interactions, the primary purposes of L1 in this study appear to have been as a communication and cognition resource. This is especially apparent in the Methodology and Syllabus Design classes, where “students depended on spontaneous Bangla speech rather than Bangla written materials,” illustrating that Bangla served primarily as an interactional support rather than as a formal instructional tool. Overall, the findings demonstrate that students employed L1 as a strategic

means to facilitate comprehension and engagement in their L2 learning environment, and that L1 was beneficial to students in acquiring English over time in a Bangladeshi university.

B. Findings from Teacher Interview

Teachers were asked whether they had noticed any patterns in how students communicate in English. Teachers were asked about how students used other languages besides English to aid in communication when they didn't have the right words to say in English. All of the teachers answered "yes," in reference to their observation of students' use of code-switching and code-mixing. One of the reasons why teachers said students switched between languages is that students tend to want to express themselves quickly and easily, especially if they don't know the exact vocabulary, they need to say what they mean. The way students switch between languages is not random. Students generally follow English sentence structures, but insert Bangla vocabulary or grammatical elements into those sentence structures in order to convey their intended meaning. This practice has been referred to as "translanguaging." Translanguaging is a way of communicating across languages, using a combination of languages as a tool to convey meaning.

Regarding the strategies students employ to manage the potential interference between their First and Second Languages, teachers reported that students reacted in varying ways when they received an explanation in English that they could not understand. In some cases, students remained silent when they were unable to understand a teacher's explanation because they felt nervous about asking questions. In these types of situations, the students were fearful of being judged for not knowing something. Some examples of quotes from teachers related to this type of reaction include, "When I give an explanation in only English, many students will remain silent and/or withdraw," (Teacher R) and "If the teachers do translanguaging, then the students find it more convenient and they respond even better," (Teacher A).

However, in some classrooms, students took advantage of the opportunity to ask for clarification in Bangla when teachers used translanguaging. According to Teacher A, "when teachers allow students to ask for clarification in Bangla, students become more engaged in class." Many of the teachers suggested that when teachers are able to provide explanations that students can understand, students become more interested in what they are studying and are able to engage more with their teachers and peers. Teacher A also mentioned that when teachers limit their use of Bangla to only, when necessary, it can help to avoid causing confusion among students without preventing students from improving their L2 skills.

To address students' utilization of English-Only strategies to reduce their reliance on their native language, teachers respond to whether they knew whether there were times when students relied solely on English-based strategies to explain their confusion. The teachers stated that yes, there are definitely times when students rely on English-based strategies to explain their confusion. For example, in institutions that have strict English-only policies, students may feel pressure to only speak in English, even if they cannot fully understand what is being explained. Teacher A mentioned that she saw "English-speaking zones" at her university, and Teacher M said that self-motivated students and teachers' encouragement encourage students to use only English to explain their confusion. Teacher R, however, cautioned against enforcing English-only policies too strictly, stating that this could place a disadvantage to students who are not as fluent in English.

In response to the last question on how teachers believe that students can best be encouraged to move away from relying on their first language and focus more on developing their second language. Most of the teachers suggested that developing students' ability to think critically in English takes time. Teachers recommended several strategies to help students develop their critical thinking in English including scaffolding (where teachers break down difficult concepts into smaller, easier-to-understand pieces), strategically allowing students to use their native language to communicate (a practice referred to as "translanguaging"), building students' confidence in speaking English, and linking the language that students use in the classroom to the course objectives. Teacher A, for example, stated that teachers should "gradually increase English usage" as students get older. Teacher R stated that students should be allowed to use their "full linguistic repertoire" when taking content-focused assessments, but students should not be allowed to use their native language when taking language-focused assessments. Teacher H also recommended providing individualized support to students who may struggle to transition to using English to communicate (Uddin et al., 2024; Hasan et al., 2025). She recommended that teachers should "identify students who are weaker or shy and help them step-by-step." Ultimately, all of the teachers believed that it is important for teachers to carefully consider students' proficiency levels, emotional states, and course goals before implementing strategies to encourage students to move away from using their first language and develop their second language.

4.2 Discussion

This study found that the appropriate use of students' First Language (L1) - Bangla - facilitated Second Language (L2) - English - learning at the University Level in Bangladesh. Observations of classes showed that Bangla was consistently used as a cognitive and communicative tool to improve students' comprehension, decrease students' anxiety, and increase students' participation. Students commonly used Bangla during group work and idea generation; however, they most often reserved English for their final spoken or written responses. Data from teacher interviews provided additional insight into the same observation and stated that Bangla assisted students in comprehending abstract content, developing their confidence in using the L2, and sustaining their interest and motivation to participate in class - especially those with lower proficiency levels in the L2 (Alam & Hasan, 2025; Rahman & Hasan, 2025). Perhaps, more importantly, the findings illustrated that Bangla scaffolded English learning without replacing it. This is reflected in that as students progressed in their ability to produce the L2, they began to rely less on their native language.

Regarding the Research Questions, the findings provide support that students' use of Bangla increases students' comprehension of the subject matter, students' participation in the classroom, and their confidence in producing the L2. The regular use of Bangla during collaborative projects and to clarify complex ideas demonstrated its value as a cognitive tool in developing meaning. The teachers' perceptions supported the notion that code-switching and translanguaging support students' ability to communicate their ideas when the students experience limitations due to language. The findings also suggested that the amount of L1 use is determined by students' proficiency levels in the L2, the policies governing the classroom environment, and the type of course. Therefore, the findings are an answer to the Research Questions and support the notion that strategic use of L1 promotes L2 learning in the EFL context of Bangladesh.

The findings of this study corroborate prior research that has shown that the use of L1 is viewed as a useful resource in second language classrooms. For example, Cummins (2007) proposed that learners utilize their existing linguistic knowledge to facilitate additional language learning; this is consistent with the cross-linguistic transfer observed in this study. Similarly, Macaro (2005) found that the purposeful use of L1 by the teacher improved students' comprehension and interactions in the classroom. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Cook (2010), who posited that L1 can function as a cognitive mediator and not as an obstacle.

Conversely, the findings of this study contradict prior studies that have advocated for the use of English exclusively in the classroom, such as Krashen's (1985) advocacy for "maximum" exposure to the L2. In particular, unlike prior views, the current study found that the intentional and purposeful use of Bangla in the classroom did not restrict students' exposure to the L2 but rather facilitated a greater depth of understanding and more meaningful L2 production.

These results are a challenge to monolingual EMI policies which presuppose that English-only instruction maximizes L2 learning. This study challenges the pedagogical soundness of English-only mandates prevalent in South Asia and beyond by showing that strategic use of Bangali can increase understanding, engagement, and confidence without replacing English. This study applies to colonial language policy situations as in India, Pakistan, Nepal, and some parts of Africa, where strict English-only policies can, in fact, increase the achievement gaps among L2 students. It is important that policymakers rethink a blanket ban on L1 and devise more adaptable translanguaging policies that would enable teachers to employ the native languages of students as purposeful scaffolding resources. The EMI policy should not be based on exclusionary monolingual ideologies but instead the ideologies should be based on linguistic inclusive models that embrace bilingual practices as assets as opposed to deficits.

This paper is not just confirming the existing theories but also operationalizing translanguaging as a cognitive scaffold and social mediation tool through the analysis of one classroom only. Although Vygotskian theory suggests that the learning process is facilitated by a social interaction process, this study shows how exactly L1 is a mediating artifact during collaborative meaning-making. Moreover, it disputes the input hypothesis by Krashen that comprehensible input necessitates L2-only exposure; conversely, the quality and richness of L2 processing are enhanced by the strategic use of L1. Accordingly, this research paper contributes to the translationguing theory by presenting empirical data which suggests that L1 and L2 are not autonomous systems but rather, a coordinated linguistic repertoire of learning.

This study provides empirical, classroom-based evidence on how Bangla is utilized by both teachers and students in university-level English courses in the EFL context of Bangladesh. This is a unique contribution to the gap in EFL research in Bangladesh that has previously been addressed through theoretical debates rather than descriptive accounts of actual translanguaging practices in instructional environments.

It is essential to note that the generalizability of the findings is limited to the specific institutional context of one university in Bangladesh, and future research should include multiple institutions and longitudinal designs to assess long-term effects of L1 use. Additionally, the study did not quantitatively measure the L2 proficiency gains of the

participants, nor did it investigate the potential long-term effects of L1 use on L2 development over a period of multiple semesters.

The study contributes to sociocultural and translanguaging theories by illustrating that L1 serves as a mediating tool for learning. The study supports Vygotskian perspectives on scaffolding and illustrates that the theories of translanguaging view bilingual practices as natural and advantageous for the development of second languages.

5. Conclusion

This research explored how students' use of Bangla supports their English language learning at the undergraduate level in Bangladesh. The results show that instead of hindering English acquisition, Bangla functioned as cognitive and communicative support. In this way, Bangla helped students clarify complex concepts, negotiate meaning in groups, and generate ideas before producing English output. Through these activities, students were able to reduce their levels of anxiety and increase their participation in the classroom and comprehension, especially for those with lower levels of English proficiency. It was important to note that students' reliance on Bangla decreased as their English proficiency and confidence improved. Data highlight the need for teachers to implement effective translanguaging practices. The flexibility of language policies and informed pedagogical decision-making enabled students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire while maintaining English as the primary medium of instruction.

The findings of this study support sociocultural and translanguaging theories, which view bilingual practices as natural and beneficial for L2 learning. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to examine long-term effects of L1 use on L2 proficiency, particularly in academic writing and speaking. Discipline-specific and technology-mediated translanguaging practices in the higher education of Bangladesh would be further areas of study in future research. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the need for educators and institutions to recognize students' first language as a legitimate pedagogical resource and develop inclusive policies to promote equitable L2 learning outcomes.

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WOMEN'S WORLDVIEW IN WARTIME: A GENETIC STRUCTURALIST READING OF ZOULFA KATOUH'S *AS LONG AS THE LEMON TREES GROW*

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Abstract

This study examines the women's worldview in Zoulfa Katouh's novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. The research aims to analyze how the experiences of war shape female consciousness through the character of Salama Kassab. This study applies Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism, which views literary works as expressions of collective consciousness shaped by socio-historical conditions. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the analysis focuses on narrative excerpts that illustrate women's psychological and social experiences during the Syrian civil war. The findings reveal four major aspects that construct the women's worldview in the novel: despair and emotional exhaustion, trauma and psychological fragmentation, shattered dreams and disrupted futures, and moral conflict between survival and humanitarian responsibility. These aspects demonstrate how prolonged conflict transforms women's identities, aspirations, and ethical perspectives. Salama's experiences reflect not merely an individual struggle but the collective condition of women living in war-affected societies, where caregiving responsibilities, psychological trauma, and moral dilemmas become part of everyday survival. Through the lens of genetic structuralism, the novel articulates a collective female consciousness shaped by violence, displacement, and social collapse. This study contributes to the limited scholarship on women's collective consciousness in wartime literature by extending Goldmann's framework into gendered conflict analysis.

Keywords: *genetic structuralism; Syrian civil war; trauma; women's worldview.*

1. Introduction

Literature is not only a form of artistic expression but also a reflection of human reality within its socio-historical context. Lucien Goldmann, through his theory of genetic structuralism, argues that literary works should be understood as "human facts" that embody the worldview (vision du monde) of particular social groups (Muniroch, 2011). In this sense, literature is more than a personal creation of an author; it is an expression of collective consciousness shaped by specific historical and social structures.

This theoretical perspective provides a foundation to understand how individual narratives can represent the broader social experiences. Within this framework, the Syrian civil war, one of the most profound socio-historical realities of the 21st century, becomes a

crucial context for examining collective consciousness through literature. The conflict, which began in March 2011 in the southern city of Daraa, started as a peaceful protest against government corruption and repression before escalating into a prolonged civil conflict involving multiple factions and foreign powers (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2026). Over the years, this conflict has devastated Syria's social and cultural fabric. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2024), more than 16.7 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, while millions have been displaced. The conflict has caused not only massive physical destruction but also deep psychological trauma. Women, in particular, face a dual burden: surviving violence while sustaining their families under extreme conditions. Reports indicate that women experience increased unpaid care responsibilities, heightened risks of violence, and limited access to essential services during crises (Azcona et al., 2020).

Such conditions have given rise to literary voices that testify to both collective suffering and resilience. Many Syrian writers have used storytelling as a means of witnessing and resistance. Among them, Zoulfa Katouh's *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022) stands out for transforming collective pain and endurance, especially that of women into a narrative of hope and survival. The novel has gained international recognition for its emotional depth and humanitarian message, portraying the Syrian war through the perspective of an 18-year-old pharmacy student, Salama Kassab, who becomes a volunteer medic during the revolution. Torn between her duty to help others and her instinct to survive, Salama's struggle mirrors the dilemmas of Syrian women. Her hallucinations of Khawf, an embodiment of fear and trauma, reveal the psychological toll of war while symbolizing collective endurance and resistance. From a psychological perspective, such hallucinations can be associated with trauma responses, including intrusive and dissociative experiences commonly found in individuals exposed to extreme stress and violence (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

Through Salama's internal conflict and hallucinations, the novel constructs a narrative structure that reflects the collective worldview of Syrian women as a trans-individual subject shaped by war. However, despite the growing number of studies on the novel and on genetic structuralism, existing research tends to emphasize individual trauma, material conditions, or general socio-historical reflection without sufficiently addressing how gendered wartime experiences construct a collective women's worldview. Furthermore, the application of genetic structuralism has rarely been extended to examine the intersection between collective consciousness and gendered survival in conflict settings. This limitation reveals a substantial deficiency in comprehending how women's experiences are structurally depicted as a collective worldview within literary text.

This study argues that Zoulfa Katouh's *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* constructs a gendered collective consciousness in which women's worldview is shaped by trauma, moral conflict, and survival ethics, thereby extending Goldmann's concept of *vision du monde* into the context of wartime female experience.

Several studies have applied Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism in literary analysis, although with diverse research objects and focuses. The first relevant research was conducted by Dewi Nurhasanah in an article entitled "Strukturalisme Genetik Lucien Goldmann dalam Novel Orang-Orang Proyek Karya Ahmad Tohari" (Nurhasanah, 2015). This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with a sociological approach to literature. Goldmann's genetic structuralism was used to explore the interaction between social

structure and literary structure within the novel. The analysis examined how intrinsic elements such as characters, themes, and conflicts correspond with extrinsic aspects that reflect Indonesia's social conditions, particularly class differences, modernization, and human relations in a developing society. The findings revealed that the novel portrays the collective worldview of Indonesian workers and intellectuals who struggle between idealism and corruption. Nurhasanah concluded that "Orang-Orang Proyek" represents the moral consciousness of a social class seeking integrity within a system dominated by materialism and power. While this study successfully demonstrates the relevance of genetic structuralism in analyzing class-based moral consciousness, it does not address gendered experiences or the formation of women's collective consciousness, particularly within conflict settings.

The second related study was an article entitled "A Genetic Structuralism Analysis of Materialism in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*" (Sakinah & Kusumayanti, 2023). This research also adopted a qualitative descriptive approach within the framework of genetic structuralism. It focused on examining how themes of materialism and social class are represented in Burnett's novel and how they reflect the worldview of the Victorian era. By applying Goldmann's theory, the study identified homology between the structure of the novel and the socio-economic realities of nineteenth-century England. The results show that the protagonist, Sara Crewe, is constructed as a non-materialistic character positioned in binary opposition to Miss Minchin, reflecting resistance to materialistic values in Victorian society. The analysis further reveals that narrative structure, characterization, and setting correspond to the collective consciousness of the Victorian social hierarchy. However, this study remains limited to class and ideological opposition, without engaging with gendered consciousness in contexts of crisis or examining how extreme conditions such as war reshape collective worldview.

The last previous research that the researcher found was an article entitled "Genetic Structuralism Analysis in the Novel Alf Syams Musyriqah" (Apriliyanti et al., 2025). The study aimed to analyze the novel's structure and to reveal the social facts, collective subject, and the author's worldview as represented in the narrative. The findings indicate that the novel's intrinsic structure, including its themes, plot, character relationships, and setting, is deeply interconnected with the social structures that shape it. The narrative reflects the socio-historical reality of Afghanistan, particularly issues of patriarchy, domestic violence, war, and political conflict. The researchers concluded that Khaled Hosseini's worldview in the novel is a feminist view, emphasizing gender equality and women's empowerment in resisting oppression. Nevertheless, although this study addresses gender and conflict, it does not explicitly examine how women's experiences are structured as a collective consciousness through a systematic application of genetic structuralism, leaving the concept of gendered vision du monde underdeveloped.

Therefore, previous studies demonstrate that the genetic structuralism approach has been successfully applied to various literary works, from Indonesian contemporary novels to English classics and Middle Eastern narratives. However, most of these studies have concentrated on issues of class, morality, and modernization, while insufficient attention has been given to the construction of women's collective worldview in wartime contexts. Understanding the worldview of women in wartime literature is essential, as it reveals how female experiences of trauma, loss, and resilience are collectively represented and

articulated through narrative form. Such representation not only provides a nuanced understanding of the impact of war but also illustrates how women construct meaning, identity, and moral consciousness amid destruction.

Accordingly, this current research on Zoulfa Katouh's *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* aims to fill this gap by applying Goldmann's genetic structuralism to examine how the collective consciousness of Syrian women is represented through the character of Salama Kassab, who embodies both personal and communal struggle in the midst of war. This study limits its analysis to the representation of Salama Kassab as the embodiment of Syrian women's worldview, focusing on how her experience, choices, and psychological struggles reflect the broader collective consciousness of women in the context of the Syrian conflict.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Women's Worldview in Literature

The concept of worldview (*vision du monde*) is important in understanding how women are represented in literature, especially within certain social and historical contexts. Feminist literary studies highlight that women's voices offer different perspectives that often challenge dominant, male-centered narratives. Through literature, women express their experiences and show how they respond to social pressures and inequalities (Ahmed, 2021).

Women's experiences in literature are closely related to their socio-cultural background, including issues such as patriarchy, conflict, and inequality. Recent perspectives also emphasize that women's experiences are diverse and influenced by factors like culture and social conditions (Crenshaw, 2019). This means that women's representation in literature should be understood as both individual and collective.

In this study, women's worldview refers to shared values, perspectives, and ways of understanding reality that are expressed through women's experiences in the text. It includes how women respond to trauma, oppression, and survival.

In Middle Eastern literature, women's narratives often reflect both struggle and resilience, especially in situations of conflict and war (Abu-Lughod, 2013). In *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, Salama's story represents not only her personal experience but also the collective experiences of women living in wartime. This concept helps explain how individual experiences in the novel reflect a broader women's worldview shaped by socio-historical conditions.

2.2 Socio Historical Consciousness

The concept of worldview (*vision du monde*) helps explain how women are represented in literature, especially in relation to their social and historical conditions. Recent feminist studies show that women's voices in literary works offer different perspectives that often challenge dominant narratives and highlight women's lived experiences (Ruiz-Eugenio et al., 2024).

In literature, women's experiences are not only personal but also shaped by broader social factors such as gender inequality, culture, and power relations. Feminist research today emphasizes that women's perspectives are diverse and influenced by different backgrounds and conditions, rather than being seen as a single, uniform experience (Aulia et al., 2024).

Women's worldview in this study refers to shared ways of understanding life, including values, emotions, and responses to situations such as trauma, oppression, and

survival. Through literary texts, these experiences are expressed both individually and collectively. Contemporary studies also show that modern literature often gives space for women to present their voices, challenge patriarchal ideas, and reconstruct their identities (Taj et al., 2024).

In the context of literature from conflict regions, women's narratives often reflect both struggle and resilience. Their stories show how they deal with difficult conditions while still maintaining their identity and sense of purpose. Therefore, women's worldview in literature can be understood as a reflection of both personal experience and collective social reality.

2.3 Genetic Structuralism Worldview

Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism helps explain how a literary work is connected to the social conditions behind it. Goldmann argues that literature is not only created by an individual author, but also reflects a collective consciousness shaped by certain socio-historical situations (Goldmann, 1975). In this sense, a literary text carries a worldview (*vision du monde*) that represents the values, struggles, and perspectives of a particular social group.

Recent studies still use this approach to show how literary texts are closely linked to social reality. Genetic structuralism focuses on the relationship between the structure of the text and the structure of society, meaning that what appears in the story is often influenced by real social conditions (Sultani & Hamdi, 2024).

Goldmann also explains that literary analysis involves three main aspects: the internal structure of the text, the worldview expressed in it, and the socio-historical background that shapes it. These aspects are interconnected, because a literary work can be understood both as an artistic form and as a reflection of social life. Recent research also shows that this theory is still relevant for analyzing how social values and collective ideas are represented in literary works (Wahid et al., 2023).

Genetic structuralism is used to see how Salama's experiences are not just personal, but also represent the shared experiences of Syrian women. Through this approach, the analysis focuses on how individual stories in the novel reflect a broader collective worldview shaped by the realities of war.

2.4. Middle Eastern Literature and War Context

Middle Eastern literature is closely connected to themes of conflict, resistance, and displacement. Recent studies show that literature from this region often functions as a way to represent social and political struggles, especially in contexts shaped by war and crisis. War narratives, in particular, give space for individuals to express the impact of violence, loss, and forced migration, while also challenging dominant or simplified representations of the Middle East (Tanous et al., 2025).

Within this context, women's voices have an important role. Their narratives often highlight aspects of war that are not always visible in male-centered stories, such as emotional trauma, family breakdown, and the responsibility to maintain everyday life in difficult conditions. Research shows that people in conflict areas experience both deep psychological distress and, at the same time, forms of resilience and adaptation (Tanous et al., 2025).

Recent feminist studies also emphasize that women's experiences in war are not only about vulnerability, but also about agency and survival. Women often play central roles in sustaining life, care, and social connections even in extreme situations (Veronese et al., 2026).

Zoulfa Katouh, as a contemporary writer, brings this perspective into focus by centering women's experiences in wartime. In *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, Salama's inner conflict between staying to help others and leaving to survive reflects a broader dilemma faced by people living through war. Her story is not only personal, but also represents shared experiences of suffering, resilience, and hope among women in conflict settings.

Placing this novel within the context of Middle Eastern war literature helps show that women's perspectives are essential in understanding how collective experiences are shaped during times of crisis.

3. Research Method

3.1 Data Selection

The primary data consist of quotations, narrative passages, and dialogues drawn from *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, while secondary data include scholarly books, journal articles, and credible academic sources related to genetic structuralism, feminist literary criticism, and the Syrian socio-historical context. The data were selected based on their relevance to key analytical themes, namely trauma, moral conflict, and gendered experience. This selection ensures that only significant textual elements contributing to the construction of women's worldview are included in the analysis.

3.2 Analytical Procedure

The data analysis was conducted through several systematic stages. First, coding was applied to identify significant textual units related to trauma, moral conflict, and gendered experience. Second, categorization was carried out to group the coded data into thematic patterns, including recurring symbols, conflicts, and narrative structures. Third, interpretation was conducted using Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism, encompassing intrinsic analysis, identification of *vision du monde*, and socio-historical contextualization. Through these steps, the analysis explains how individual experiences in the text construct a broader collective consciousness of women in wartime contexts.

3.3 Validity Strategy

To ensure analytical credibility, this study applies theoretical triangulation by integrating genetic structuralism with trauma theory and feminist perspectives. This strategy allows the data to be examined from multiple analytical lenses, strengthening the validity of the interpretation and ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of how women's experiences are collectively represented in the novel.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings derived from the analysis of *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoulfa Katouh. The discussion examines how Salama Kassab's experiences construct a distinctly female worldview shaped by the realities of war, trauma,

displacement, and socio-historical instability. The analysis reveals that Salama's consciousness is characterized by profound despair, psychological fragmentation, disrupted aspirations, and persistent moral dilemmas. These experiences not only reflect her individual struggle for survival but also symbolize the broader realities faced by women living amid the Syrian conflict. Through Salama's perspective, the novel portrays the complex intersections of gender, violence, loss, and resilience, demonstrating how prolonged exposure to armed conflict reshapes women's perceptions of themselves, their communities, and their futures. Consequently, Salama's worldview emerges as a powerful representation of the collective experiences of Syrian women whose lives have been profoundly transformed by war and political upheaval.

4.1 Salama's Despair and Emotional Exhaustion

In *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, Zoulfa Katouh constructs Salama Kassab's despair as a defining element of a women's worldview shaped by war. Salama's statement, "People are dying from haemorrhages and infections and there's no way for me to help them," reflects a profound collapse of agency that extend beyond individual frustration. Within Lucien Goldmann's concept of *vision de monde*, this despair signifies a consciousness structured by socio-historical pressures rather than purely personal emotion. Contemporary reinterpretations of genetic structuralism emphasize that literary character embody the collective consciousness of specific social groups whose worldview are shaped by historical crises and material limitations (Goldmann, 1975).

Salama's inability to enact her ethical roles as a medic mirrors the broader humanitarian reality in wartime Syria. Years of conflict have devastated the country's healthcare infrastructure, leaving millions without adequate medical support. Reports indicate that nearly half of Syria's healthcare facilities have been destroyed or rendered non-functional, while severe shortages of medicines, equipment, and trained personnel continue to restrict access to essential treatment. As a result, more than 15 million Syrians require urgent health assistance, and many medical workers have fled the country due to violence and instability (UNFPA, 2023). In such conditions, even trained caregivers often lack the resources necessary to save lives, creating situations in which individuals witness suffering yet remain unable to intervene effectively.

This structural collapse disproportionately affects women, whose social roles frequently involve caregiving and community health support. Many displaced women struggle to access even basic healthcare services, including maternal and mental health care, while damaged hospitals and limited humanitarian funding further reduce available treatment options. Consequently, Salama's despair does not merely represent an individual psychological response but reflects a shared experience among women living through the Syrian conflict. Her worldview emerges from a socio-historical reality in which survival displaces aspiration and moral responsibility collides with systemic destruction. In this sense, Salama's statement embodies the experiential reality of women whose identities as caregivers, healers, and protectors are destabilized by violence, displacement, and the collapse of institutional support.

Salama's emotional exhaustion further illustrates how prolonged conflict erodes psychological resilience. Her reflection, "In the last six months, I have participated in more surgeries than I can count... This wasn't supposed to be my life," reveals chronic fatigue

produced by continuous exposure to death. This conditions aligns with research indicating that women in war zones experience heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional depletion due to cumulative trauma and caregiving burdens (Ommeren, 2019). Hochschild (2012) notion of emotional labor is relevant here: Salama's must repeatedly regulated grief, fear and guilt while functioning in life-and-death situations. In this context, exhaustion is not merely physical but existential, signaling the disintegration of anticipated futures. The phrase "This wasn't supposed to be my life" captures the rupture between imagined womanhood and war-imposed reality, a disruption widely documented among women affected by armed conflict (United Nations, 2023). In such conditions, even trained caregivers often lack the resources necessary to save lives, creating situations in which individuals witness suffering yet remain unable to intervene effectively.

Salama's despair is framed collectively, as seen in "We'll be lucky if the worst that happens to us here is death... There's nothing to fight for." The pronoun "we" transforms personal anguish into communal consciousness, reflecting shared vulnerability. Empirical studies on women affected by the Syrian conflict report pervasive feelings of helplessness, insecurity, and psychological distress linked to displacement, loss of family members, and constant threat of violence (Kak, 2025). Women frequently bear dual roles as survivors and primary emotional anchors of families, intensifying stress and burnout (UNHCR, 2024). Through Salama, the novel articulates a women's worldview marked by endurance amid devastation, where despair becomes a structural condition of living rather than a transient emotional state. In Goldmann's framework, Salama's psychological exhaustion embodies the dialectical relationship between individual subjectivity and the collective social reality of women navigating war.

This demonstrates that Salama's despair and emotional exhaustion are not merely personal reactions to trauma but structurally produced conditions that reflect a collective women's consciousness, shaped by the intersection of gendered caregiving roles and the systemic collapse of social and medical institutions in wartime Syria.

4.2 Trauma and Psychological Fragmentation

In *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, Zoulfa Katouh portrays trauma not only as an emotional response but as a force that fragments Salama Kassab's psychological reality, shaping a distinctly gendered worldview. This condition is evident in Salama's intrusive sensory memory: "...the echo of the oscillating saw... is stuck in my mind on a loop." The persistence of violent imagery reflects what Caruth (Caruth, 1996) defines as trauma's belated nature, where overwhelming events return repetitively through involuntary recollection. Trauma theory explains that survivors of extreme violence frequently re-experience events through intrusive memories, flashbacks, and recurring sensory impressions that disrupt their perception of time and reality (Betancourt et al., 2013). Salama's consciousness therefore becomes a psychological space where past and present collapse into one another, indicating that war continues to exist internally even when the immediate threat has temporarily subsided. Within Lucien Goldmann's framework of genetic structuralism, such fragmentation signifies a worldview structured by instability, where reality is filtered through fear, loss, and the impossibility of emotional closure. The narrative structure thus reflects how individual consciousness mirrors the broader social disintegration experienced in wartime societies.

In the Syrian context, studies have shown that women frequently experienced layered trauma stemming from bereavement, displacement, and caregiving under extreme scarcity (Kak, 2025). More than a decade of armed conflict has forced many Syrian women to assume multiple survival roles within families while simultaneously coping with psychological distress, uncertainty, and grief. Research on conflict-affected populations demonstrates that such prolonged exposure to violence significantly increases the risk of anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and emotional exhaustion (UNHCR, 2024). Salama's experience reflects this broader social reality: trauma disrupts not only emotional equilibrium but also self-perception, generating a fractured worldview in which survival coexists with persistent guilt, fear, and moral conflict. Her internal struggle illustrates how war reshapes personal identity and moral reasoning, especially for young women who are compelled to navigate life-and-death decisions in unstable environments.

Psychological fragmentation is symbolically reinforced through Salama's dissociative coping mechanism, particularly her repetitive focus on flowers and medicinal plants: "Daisies. Daisies. Daisies." and "Feverfew. Feverfew. Feverfew." These moments function as cognitive refuge, revealing attempts to regulate overwhelming anxiety and maintaining. Trauma psychology identifies such patterns as grounding or dissociate responses, where the mind seeks temporary escape from unbearable stimuli (Herman, 1997). From a women's worldview perspective, these fragments of imagined calm contrast sharply with the brutality surrounding Salama, emphasizing the tension between inner vulnerability and external chaos. In war-torn Syria, women often adopt psychological survival strategies to endure continuous exposure to violence while maintaining functional roles within families and communities (United Nations, 2023).

Salama's hallucinations, particularly Khawf as the embodiment of fear. The novel renders trauma as both personal and collective. Her fractured perceptions mirror the socio-historical condition of Syrian civilians whose realities are shaped by uncertainty, insecurity, and loss. In genetic structuralism, Salama's psychological fragmentation thus represents more than an individual breakdown; it embodies the collective consciousness of women negotiating trauma within a collapsing social structure (Goldmann, 1975). Katouh's narrative articulates a women's worldview marked by endurance under psychic disintegration, where fear becomes internalized and reality itself destabilized by war.

This demonstrates that trauma in the novel operates not merely as a psychological consequence of violence but as a structuring force that fragments perception and identity, reflecting a collective women's consciousness shaped by prolonged conflict, instability, and the necessity of emotional survival within a collapsing social order.

4.3 Shattered Dreams and Disrupted Future

In *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, Zoulfa Katouh articulates the erosion of Salama Kassab's future through the collapse of personal aspirations and the redefinition of life milestones. Salama's recollection of her earlier ambitions "Graduated from university with high GPA... and finally be able to travel outside of Syria and see the world" establishes a contrast between anticipated adulthood and war-imposed reality. This rupture reflects Goldmann's notion of *vision du monde*, where individual consciousness becomes structured by socio-historical disruption rather than personal intention (Goldmann, 1975). In situations of prolonged conflict, individual aspirations are often replaced by immediate survival

concerns, as war restructures the temporal horizon of everyday life (Chatty, 2018). The future, once imagined as a space of mobility and self-realization, is replaced by a horizon dominated by survival, loss, and uncertainty. Salama's experience thus represents a collective female consciousness shaped by conflict, where dreams are not merely postponed but fundamentally destabilized.

The destruction of Salama's imagined future is symbolically intensified in the wedding scene: "We don't have cake, a proper wedding dress, or even clean clothes. But it doesn't matter. It feels like the whole thing happens in snapshots." This passage encapsulates how war dismantles culturally significant expressions of femininity, joy, and normalcy. In many Middle Eastern contexts, including Syrian-Islamic tradition, wedding rituals signify renewal, purity, and communal continuity (Joseph, 2018). The absence of these elements—cake, dress, cleanliness—therefore symbolizes not only material deprivation but also the disintegration of social and emotional stability. Armed conflict frequently disrupts social rituals and family traditions, which normally function as markers of life transitions and communal belonging (Chatty, 2018). Salama's phrase "but it doesn't matter" reveals a critical transformation of worldview: happiness is redefined not through ceremonial completeness but through emotional endurance. This moment reflects what recent humanitarian reports describe as adaptive resilience among women in conflict zones, where traditional aspirations are reshaped under conditions of violence and scarcity (UNFPA, 2023).

Narratively, the wedding scene functions as a subtle shift from despair toward negotiated acceptance. Rather than portraying the event as romantic fulfillment, Katouh frames it as fragmented, fleeting, and filtered through Salama's war-conditioned consciousness. The description "snapshots" suggests discontinuity, indicating that even moments of intimacy cannot escape the psychological imprint of war. Empirical studies on Syrian women have documented similar disruptions, where marriage, education, and career pathways are reshaped by displacement, insecurity, and economic collapse. Within Goldmann's genetic structuralism, this symbolic reconfiguration reflects the collective worldview of women whose dreams are recalibrated by necessity. Salama's disrupted future thus embodies a women's worldview defined by endurance, adaptation, and the reconstruction of meaning amid devastation.

This demonstrates that the destruction of Salama's future is not merely the loss of personal aspirations but a structurally produced transformation of temporality, reflecting a collective women's consciousness in which dreams are redefined, deferred, and reshaped by the constraints of prolonged conflict and socio-historical instability.

4.4 Survival versus Humanity (Moral Conflict)

In *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, Zoulfa Katouh frames Salama Kassab's consciousness within a persistent moral tension between self-preservation and humanitarian responsibility. This conflict is explicitly articulated when Salama states, "Layla, I'm the only pharmacist left in three neighbourhoods. If I leave, who will help them? The crying children. The sniper victims. The wounded men." The passage reveals a worldview structured by ethical obligation rather than personal safety. Salama's hesitation to flee Homs reflects a moral consciousness shaped by collective suffering, where survival is inseparable from responsibility toward others. Within Goldmann's concept of *vision du monde*, this dilemma signifies the dialectical relationship between individual agency and socio-historical

conditions, as Salama's choices are constrained and defined by war, scarcity, and communal dependency (Goldmann, 1975).

Salama's moral conflict further emerges in her declaration, "I volunteer at the hospital because I can't stand seeing people die," and "I'm not a monster. There are people suffering and I can help." These statements position humanitarian engagement not as heroic abstraction but as existential necessity. Her refusal to abandon the hospital illustrates what feminist conflict studies describe as gendered ethical labor, where women disproportionately assume caregiving roles under crisis conditions (UNFPA, 2023). In war-affected societies, women often experience intensified moral pressure to preserve life, sustain families, and uphold social cohesion despite personal risk (Said et al., 2015). Salama's worldview therefore reflects a specifically gendered consciousness in which empathy and duty compete with fear and exhaustion.

At the same time, the novel does not romanticize Salama's altruism. Her confession, "All I care about... is Layla and the hospital," exposes the psychological cost of prolonged moral strain. The narrowing of Salama's emotional world signals survival fatigue, a condition associated with chronic exposure to trauma and ethical stress. Empirical research on Syrian women indicates that continuous decision-making under threat—whether to stay, flee, protect, or sacrifice—produces severe anxiety, guilt, and emotional depletion (Kak, 2025). Salama's internal struggle thus mirrors the lived reality of women navigating impossible choices in conflict zones, where neither survival nor solidarity can be achieved without loss.

Through genetic structuralism, Salama's moral dilemma represents the collective worldview of women situated within collapsing social structures. Her oscillation between leaving and staying embodies a consciousness shaped by war's ethical contradictions: the instinct to survive versus the compulsion to remain human. Katouh's narrative reveals that within a women's worldview, moral conflict is not a peripheral theme but a structural condition of existence under violence. Salama's struggle ultimately signifies the collective female experience of negotiating care, guilt, endurance, and responsibility amid the dehumanizing pressures of war.

This demonstrates that Salama's moral conflict is not merely an individual ethical dilemma but a structurally produced condition, reflecting a collective women's consciousness in which survival and humanity are continuously negotiated within the constraints of war, gendered responsibility, and socio-historical collapse.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzes the women's worldview portrayed in Zoulfa Katouh's *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* through Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism. The analysis demonstrates that the character of Salama Kassab embodies a collective female consciousness shaped by the socio-historical realities of the Syrian civil war. Her experiences reflect how prolonged conflict restructures women's emotional, psychological, and moral perspectives.

The findings reveal four major dimensions that construct the women's worldview in the novel. First, despair and emotional exhaustion emerge from continuous exposure to violence and the overwhelming responsibility of caring for others. Second, trauma and psychological fragmentation illustrate how war disrupts personal identity and mental stability through intrusive memories, fear, and dissociative coping mechanisms. Third,

shattered dreams and disrupted futures show how war dismantles personal aspirations and life milestones, forcing women to redefine hope and happiness under conditions of uncertainty. Finally, the moral conflict between survival and humanitarian responsibility highlights the ethical dilemmas faced by women who must balance self-preservation with the obligation to help others in times of crisis.

Through these dimensions, the novel reflects not only Salama's individual struggle but also the broader experiences of women living in conflict zones. From the perspective of genetic structuralism, Salama's consciousness represents the collective worldview of women navigating trauma, caregiving responsibilities, and moral pressures within a collapsing social structure. Ultimately, the novel portrays women's worldview in wartime as a complex negotiation between suffering, resilience, ethical responsibility, and the persistent effort to maintain humanity amid devastation.

This study also offers a theoretical contribution by extending genetic structuralism to the analysis of gendered consciousness in wartime literature, showing how the concept of vision *du monde* can be applied to understand women's collective experiences in conflict settings.

The practical implication of this study lies in providing a deeper understanding of women's perspectives in war narratives, which can be useful for literary studies, gender studies, and educational contexts that aim to promote awareness of trauma, resilience, and humanitarian values.

Future researchers may further explore women's perspectives in war literature by examining other Middle Eastern narratives or by comparing different literary representations of female resilience in conflict contexts.

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POLITICAL DISCOURSE DURING CRISIS: DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN PRESIDENTIAL COVID-19 SPEECHES

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Abstract

This study investigates the discursive strategies employed by Ghana's President, Nana Akufo-Addo, in his public addresses on the COVID-19 pandemic. The corpus consists of twenty-nine televised national update speeches delivered between March 2020 and May 2023. Socio-cognitive model of critical discourse analysis, the study examines how discursive strategies are used to construct ideological representations, shape public consciousness, and sustain political legitimacy during a period of national crisis. Employing a qualitative interpretive approach, the analysis identifies eighteen discursive strategies, including authority, metaphor, number game, evidentiality, victimization, comparison, and national self-glorification. These strategies are strategically deployed to construct ideological polarization, mobilize public emotions, justify governmental interventions, and reinforce presidential authority and national unity. The findings reveal how political discourse functions not merely as communication, but also as a mechanism of persuasion, ideological reproduction, and crisis management. The study contributes to scholarship on political discourse, critical discourse analysis, and crisis communication by demonstrating how rhetorical and ideological resources shape public perception and legitimize political power during national emergencies.

Keywords: *COVID-19; crisis speech; critical discourse analysis; discursive strategies; political discourse.*

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected governments worldwide, and public health communication played a crucial role in educating citizens about appropriate actions to mitigate viral transmission. Ghana's President at the time, Nana Akufo-Addo, delivered a national address to communicate the government's implemented actions, despite the absence of any recorded cases in the country at that time. This prompt dissemination of information by the president effectively primed and equipped citizens for the onset of the worldwide/nationwide crisis. This presidential effort was crucial in protecting citizens' physical safety and psychological well-being. Presidential speeches have played a significant role in enhancing public knowledge and addressing health inequalities during pandemics (Allen, 2001; Sibiri et al., 2021). Political leaders employ various discursive strategies to

define the nature and scope of the pandemic and to reflect their priorities and values (Adom, 2020; Alhassan et al., 2023; Essel & Logogye, 2021; Anyanwu & Abana, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, presidential speeches served as key channels for communicating the government's interventions to safeguard citizens and prevent the spread of the pandemic at the border. Sibiri et al. (2021) thus note that analysing these speeches provides valuable insights into the complexities of leadership during a global crisis and the intersection of politics and public health. Through discursive strategies and ideological representations, leaders frame the crisis, communicate vital information, and project their political ideologies (Coombs, 2020). While several studies have examined Ghanaian presidential COVID-19 speeches (Alhassan et al., 2023; Amankwah et al., 2022; Musah, 2021; Pedavoah & Ansah, 2023; Inusah, 2021; Koller, 2023; Rockson et al., 2023). These studies have largely focused on specific rhetorical devices or thematic analysis rather than providing a comprehensive mapping of discursive strategies across the entire corpus of presidential updates. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the full set of presidential COVID-19 update speeches through the lens of Van Dijk's discursive strategies. Hence, the paper seeks to answer the question: What discursive strategies are employed in President Akufo-Addo's COVID-19 update speeches?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Discourse in Crisis Situations

Coombs (2019) defines a crisis as a significant disruption to an individual, group, or organisation's normal functioning that requires immediate resolution to mitigate negative consequences. Crises are unexpected, high-stakes events that threaten the well-being of individuals and organisations (Coombs, 2019). Similarly, Pearson and Clair (1998) describe crises as low-probability yet high-impact events that demand urgent decision-making and responses. The nature of discourse during crises is characterised by urgency, an emotive tone, and an emphasis on reassurance and guidance. This discourse serves multiple functions: to inform, persuade, reassure, and mobilise action among stakeholders. During crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders and organisations often employ language that blends factual information with emotional appeals to foster trust and compliance.

During a crisis, the discourse surrounding the event often focuses on providing clear and accurate information. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, public health officials emphasised transparent communication about infection rates, safety protocols, and vaccination campaigns (Dhanani & Franz, 2021). This approach aims to reduce uncertainty and equip audiences with actionable insights. Additionally, emotional framing is used to foster solidarity and resilience. Leaders often employ metaphors and narratives to foster a sense of unity, for example, referring to the pandemic as a 'battle' that requires collective effort (see Pedavoah & Ansah, 2023).

Speeches during crises often incorporate empathetic language to acknowledge the suffering of affected individuals while offering hope. For example, many COVID-19 speeches recognised the sacrifices of frontline workers and the grief of bereaved families (Sellnow & Seeger, 2021). Crisis communication also seeks to persuade audiences to adopt specific behaviours. During the COVID-19 pandemic, speeches by health authorities and governments emphasised compliance with public health measures, such as mask-wearing and social distancing (Van der Linden et al., 2020). Studies analysing crisis speeches,

particularly those from the COVID-19 pandemic, highlight the diverse linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed by leaders worldwide. For example, Morrison's speeches in Australia used war metaphors to frame the pandemic as a threat. In contrast, Duterte in the Philippines employed assertive, directive language to convey authority and emphasise public compliance (Gelilang et al., 2021). In the U.S., Trump's tweets were analysed through Van Dijk's ideological framework, revealing a dichotomy between 'us' (America as a hero and authority) and 'them' (China, WHO, and others blamed for the crisis) (Luo et al., 2022).

African researchers have also examined crisis communication, uncovering unique linguistic and rhetorical patterns. In Ghana, studies of President Akufo-Addo's speeches reveal a focus on freedom and security, the use of metaphors such as war, and elements of African communitarianism to emphasise collective welfare (Pedavoah & Ansah, 2023; Musah, 2021). Moreover, research in Ghana highlighted how Akufo-Addo's speeches integrated resilience theories and emotional appeals, demonstrating flexibility in strategies to mitigate the pandemic's effects (Amankwah et al., 2022). Across these studies, discourse analysis tools, including metaphor and framing theories, underline how crisis communication adapts to sociocultural and ideological contexts to address public concerns. Kenyan and Tanzanian media framed the crisis through newly coined words and war metaphors, while South African politicians relied on multilingual resources (Rudwick et al., 2021; Habwe & Ndung'u, 2022).

There is a plethora of studies on presidential speeches about COVID-19 across different geopolitical contexts (e.g. Alhassan et al., 2023; Abdel-Qader & Al-Khanji, 2022; Alyeksyeyeva et al., 2021; Dada et al., 2020; Gelilang et al., 2021; Jinshuang & Rong, 2022; Luo, He & Yu, 2022). These studies adopt different approaches which offer revealing insights into the rhetoric of health, politics and security (Musah, 2021). In Ghana, for example, the President's updates have been studied several times (e.g. Amankwah et al., 2022; Gyamfi & Amankwah, 2021; Musah, 2021; Navei & Donkoh, 2022). However, drawing on CDA, particularly the socio-cognitive approach, to reveal his discursive strategies, which are influenced by his political ideologies, remains unstudied. Consequently, the present study examines the discursive strategies deployed by President Akufo-Addo in his public addresses on the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Theoretical Lens

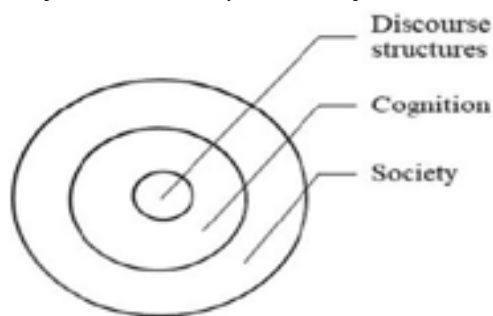
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines how language shapes social order and reflects hidden ideologies within sociocultural contexts. Scholars such as Widdowson (2000) and Rahimi and Sahragard (2007) emphasise CDA's focus on exposing power and inequality in society through linguistic analysis. Fairclough (2003) highlights that discourses represent unique perspectives on the world, shaped by individuals' social connections. Van Dijk (1998) underscore CDA's interdisciplinary nature, integrating insights from linguistics, sociology, and psychology to analyse the relationship between linguistic and social structures. It is argued that CDA examines how linguistic structures convey ideological meanings and reveal social orientations and power dynamics in texts (Corson, 1995).

This study applies Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, which views the relationship between discourse and society as cognitively mediated (Van Dijk, 2016). This approach combines CDA methods with cognitive linguistics to analyse discourse structures within social and cognitive frameworks (Attiah, 2007). Van Dijk (1995) notes that the socio-

cognitive approach comprises three key components: the social, the cognitive, and the mediating role of cognition between discourse and society (see Figure 1). This approach highlights the complex interplay of language, cognition, and social structures in shaping communication and power relations.

Figure 1.

Van Dijk's three components of the socio-cognitive approach



The social component focuses on overarching social structures and addresses group relations, including discrimination, racism, and sexism, as well as group dynamics. The cognitive component examines both social and personal cognition, including values, ideologies, and knowledge, with a dual focus on societal and individual perspectives. The discourse component analyses linguistic features such as syntax, semantics, and lexicon, exploring how ideologies shape the meaning of discourse. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach seeks to uncover the network of beliefs, attitudes, and biases enacted through discourse. Central to this approach is the concept of mental models, which guide perception, interaction, and discourse comprehension (Van Dijk, 2014). Mental models represent subjective depictions of experiences, encompassing personal emotions, thoughts, and sensory details. Van Dijk (2014) distinguishes between situation models, which reflect an individual's interpretation of a situation, and context models, which assess the relevance of conditions within a communication context (Van Dijk, 2014, 2018). These models are grounded in shared knowledge expressed through language and facilitate mutual understanding among discourse participants. Language thus serves as a medium for constructing and interpreting subjective experiences.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data and Procedures

The COVID-19 updates delivered by Nana Akufo-Addo during the pandemic constituted the data for the study. The Updates were written but orally delivered by the President. In all, the President delivered twenty-nine (29) Updates from 11th March 2020 to 28th May 2023, and all these were included in the data for the study to provide a comprehensive account of the discursive strategies employed. The written updates that were used for this study were obtained from the official websites of the President (<https://www.moh.gov.gh>) and the Ministry of Health, Ghana (<https://www.presidency.gh/>). Figure 2 illustrates the lengths of all the data included.

Figure 2.
Text length of COVID-19 update speeches

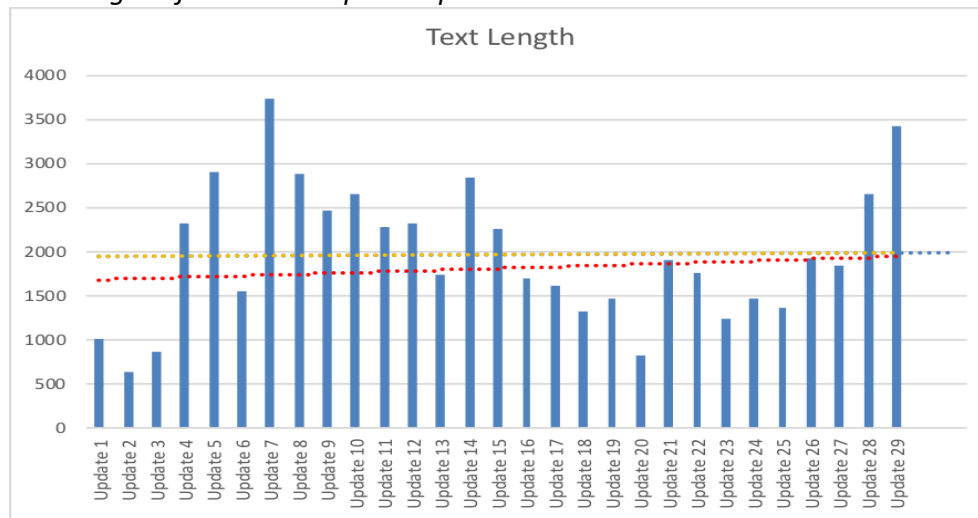


Figure 2 shows the lengths of all the 29 updates. The length of the updates marginally increased with updates, reaching a peak in update 7, arguably reflecting the pandemic's peak effect, and again in update 29, marking the end of the pandemic. The updates were coded using the acronyms CUS001-CUS029.

3.2 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework used in this study was proposed by Van Dijk (2005). Van Dijk (2005) offered 25 discursive strategies. The 25 discursive devices identified by Van Dijk (2005) are as follows actor description, authority, burden (topos), categorization, comparison, consensus, counterfactuals, disclaimers, euphemism, evidentiality, example/illustration, generalization, hyperbole, implication, irony, lexicalization, metaphor, self-glorification, norm expression, number game, polarization, populism, presupposition, vagueness, and victimization.

Van Dijk's (2005) 25-discursive framework provides a robust foundation for analyzing language and ideology. However, this framework has notable weaknesses that pose challenges during data analysis. A fundamental weakness of the framework is its focus on textual elements. The framework does not encompass the broader context surrounding the speeches. To address this, the study incorporated additional information, such as the period of the speeches. This contextualization helped in adopting various strategies for specific situations, target audiences, and the overall messages. The model also posed a challenge during data analysis. A major challenge encountered during the analysis was the inherent overlap between certain discursive strategies. For instance, evidentiality is intertwined with illustration, polarization and victimization. To resolve these overlaps, we considered the context. First, the analysis was iterative. We examined how individual discursive strategies interacted and contributed to the broader strategies and ideologies in the speeches.

4. Findings and Discussion

The first part of the analysis examines the discursive strategies employed by Akufo-Addo in his COVID-19 speeches. In all, the President employed eighteen discursive devices in his speeches, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Distribution of discursive strategies in PAA's COVID-19 Speeches

Discursive Devices	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Authority	83	12.0%
Metaphor	78	11.3%
Number game	74	10.7%
Illustration	68	9.9%
Evidentiality	62	8.0%
Categorization	40	5.8%
Populism	40	5.8%
Disclaimers	37	5.4%
National self-glorification	36	5.2%
Actor description	35	5.1%
Consensus	33	4.8%
Counterfactuals	29	4.2%
Hyperbole	26	3.8%
Comparison	19	2.8%
Polarisation	14	2.0%
Victimisation	8	1.2%
Euphemism	4	0.6%
Irony	3	0.4%
Total	689	100%

Table 3 shows that authority was used most frequently, occurring 83 times (12.0%); metaphor occurred 78 times (11.3%), and the number game occurred 74 times (10.7%). Similarly, Victimisation occurred 8 (1.2%) times, euphemism 4 (0.06%) times, and irony the least, 3 (0.4%) times.

4.1 Actor Description

Actor descriptions are used several times in the speeches to illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to and not belonging to groups. Characters are described differently based on their traits and characteristics. Projecting members of the outgroup as bad and those in the ingroup as neutral or positive is a typical practice (Wodak 2001; Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1993). PAA used the actor's description 35 times to highlight the positive and negative qualities in himself and others, respectively. To project a favourable image of himself, PAA employed several actor descriptions. An instance of the actor description in the speeches is shown in extract (1):

1. *I have provided, so far, seventeen (17) updates, which have demonstrated the coordinated approach we initiated towards winning the battle against the pandemic. We can safely say that the benefits are showing.* (CUS018).

In extract (1) above, PAA demonstrates his ability to work. In an attempt to secure public confidence, he demonstrated his capacity to prevail over the pandemic. Clausal expressions like "we initiated towards winning the battle against the pandemic", "we can safely say," and "the benefits are showing" illustrate how hard he has worked to combat the infection in Ghana. In extract (2), the President portrayed the opposition as a bad force.

2. *Fellow Ghanaians, I know there are still some who continue to express doubts about the vaccine, others have expressed reservations about its efficacy, with some taking sides with conspiracy theorists who believe the vaccine has been created to wipe out the African race. This is far from the truth.* (CUS024).

The indefinite pronouns "others" and "some" were employed by PAA in extract (2) to allude to those he believed to be his opponents who had doubts about the vaccines. He emphasises his knowledge, beliefs, and opinions by using the perceptive verb "know" and the expressive verbs "express" and "believe."

4.2 Polarization

Elaine Eaton, S. (2016) contends that ideological polarisation leads to public uncertainty and controversy. PAA successfully employed this tactic by manipulating speech acts and by providing explicit or implicit information. Extract (3) suggests that there is a non-negligible chance that the majority of Ghanaians will be exposed to COVID-19. PAA's claim is supported by empirical evidence; his credibility is uncontested. Although he appears to suggest that the country may be in danger, PAA offers assurances that Ghana is implementing increased measures in response to the pandemic, which contradicts his later declaration of a state of emergency. This has a significant psychological impact on recipients, as it conveys a clear indication that their risk of contracting the virus is high, given that neighbouring countries have confirmed cases. The impact of this situation suggests that Ghanaians should be concerned about the low risk of infection.

3. *Fellow Ghanaians, as you may have heard in the news, Burkina Faso our Northern neighbour has confirmed their first two cases of Coronavirus infections. Togo, to our east, has one confirmed case. Côte d'Ivoire to our West also has one confirmed case.* (CUS001).

4.3 Authority

Individuals with disparate views often cite multiple authorities to bolster their claims. PAA used authority in all his speeches to bolster the argument for his positions. Van Dijk (2005) defines these authorities as organisations or individuals who are highly regarded as specialists in their field and are impartial with respect to political parties. Leaders employ this strategy of citing sources to support their positions. Authority exists to either encourage or strengthen the in-group while demoralising the out-group. It is an incredibly strong force. PAA referred to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Ghana Health Service (GHS), and other national institutions, such as the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) and the Bank of Ghana (BoG), when discussing data on COVID-19 and the state of the Ghanaian economy. Several times in PAA's speeches, he referred to the World Health Organisation (WHO) when speaking about data on the coronavirus pandemic. This is exemplified by extracts (4–6).

4. *WHO has now characterised it as a pandemic.* (CUS001).
5. *At the outset of the pandemic, the scientific community and the World Health Organisation (WHO), on 12th January 2020, recommended two main criteria for declaring someone who has tested positive as having recovered from the disease...* (CUS012).

6. *Some three weeks ago, on 5th May, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that COVID was no longer a public health emergency of global concern. (CUS029).*

By citing the WHO, PAA sought to demonstrate that Ghana's pandemic response is not in isolation. He encouraged Ghanaians to believe that the government's measures to address the novel coronavirus disease are consistent with WHO directives on COVID-19. PAA made use of authority in announcing and denouncing COVID-19 as a global pandemic, respectively, as "... WHO has now characterised it as a pandemic", and "... the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced that COVID-19 was no longer a public health emergency of global concern."

4.4 Metaphor

Metaphors are essential mental structures that enable us to apply our understanding of social and physical experiences to a wide range of issues (Atuhura, 2022). Metaphors are regarded as concepts rather than merely literary devices, which shape our perceptions and subtly influence our attitudes and actions. President Akufo-Addo employed metaphor as a discursive strategy 78 (11.3%) times in his presidential addresses on COVID-19. This discursive strategy enables the relatability and tangibility of meanings that are abstract, complex, or emotional.

7. *...We should not go down that road...Let us continue down this path. (CUS0020)*

Here, he did not intend to pursue a physical path but to follow the measures to combat the pandemic as directed by the government. A variety of metaphorical discourse frameworks, including personification, symbolism, and allusion, are used in excerpts 8 and 9 to depict COVID-19 as a battle or an act of war. President Akufo-Addo again said:

8. *...They are and will remain our weapons in this struggle against the virus. (CUS017).*
9. *Our success in defeating the virus is largely within our control... (CUS007).*

In excerpt 8, the President did not mean real weapons, but rather the steps the government was taking to eliminate the virus and the measures being implemented to progressively and safely ease the restrictions put in place to defeat it. In this context, the comparison is that the impression or atmosphere conveyed in the expression can be likened to warfare. The phrases "in defeating the virus", "our weapons", and "the struggle against this virus" in the excerpts are used to refer to COVID-19 and figuratively depict it as a war that needs to be fought. The president refers to his belief that "Our success in defeating the virus is largely within our control" in excerpt 9. He refers to himself and all Ghanaians as "fighters" who must arm themselves with a "strong sense of selflessness, self-control and self-discipline" in the fight against COVID-19.

4.5 National self-glorification

National self-glorification produces a favourable image of a particular nation (Kuo, 2009). Dominant groups often use it to exaggerate and emphasise their achievements, qualities, and values, thereby constructing a positive self-image and identity. This strategy is

also used to legitimise their power and dominance over other groups, to disguise or downplay their flaws and wrongdoings, and to justify their interests and actions (Wodak, 2001). President Akufo-Addo employed national self-glorification as a discursive strategy in his addresses on COVID-19 updates. The president used it 36 times (5.2%).

10. *We have demonstrated not only to ourselves but also to the entire world that we are capable of charting our path towards containing the spread of this disease. We must all be proud that we have become a reference point for others on how to combat it. (CUS010)*

In excerpt 10, PAA is proud of his own country for the feat achieved in combating the virus. Employing the subject pronoun, ‘we’, he rhetorically enhances his strong position by recognising the importance of celebrating as a nation and as a people for being “a reference point for others on how to combat” the virus. His hyperbolic declaration that ‘We have demonstrated not only to ourselves but also to the entire world’ and ‘we are capable of charting our path’ implies that Ghana deserves applause for being proactive and a leading example. The glorification of Ghana is emphasised with further declarations: ‘We must all be proud’ and ‘We have become a reference point for others’ to cement his pride in the country’s success.

4.6 Populism

Van Dijk (1998) postulates that populism encompasses political ideologies and actions aimed at advocating for the interests and desires of the general population. Thus, populism is a political discourse and strategy that appeals to the masses by simplifying complex issues, fostering a sense of shared identity, and employing emotional language. Van Dijk (1998) again views populism as a discourse that creates a binary between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ by exploiting emotions such as anger, fear and resentment to mobilise support. The approach is to demonstrate individuals’ inclination towards either endorsement or opposition. Most of PAA’s speeches employed populism as a discursive device, amounting to 40 instances (5.8%). In most updates, President Akufo-Addo consistently concluded with populist rhetoric, as illustrated in extracts (11–13).

11. *I’m confident that together, with all hands on deck, we will be successful in weathering the storm. May God bless us all and our homeland, Ghana, and make her great and strong. I thank you for your attention. (CUS001)*
12. *This too shall pass! For the Battle is the Lords. May God bless us all, and our homeland Ghana, and make her great and strong. I thank you for your attention, and have a good night. (CUS016)*
13. *This too shall pass!! For the Battle is still the Lord’s!! May God bless us all, and our homeland Ghana, and make her great and strong. I thank you for your attention and wish the Black Stars, who gave a good account of themselves in Kumasi, the best of luck in Abuja on Tuesday (CUS028)*

In excerpts (11–13), PAA expresses his utmost support, assurance, and optimism that, with God, the coronavirus pandemic will be a thing of the past. He also believes that successfully defeating the pandemic is not ordinary; it requires “all hands on deck” and God’s intervention.

4.7 Hyperbole

Hyperbole concerns the intentional exaggeration of specific facts or figures to create a stronger impact. The president used hyperbole as a rhetorical strategy in his addresses on COVID-19. People employ hyperbolic language to focus on things purposely. They embellished the commendable actions of individuals within their group while magnifying the negative actions of those from other groups (Van Dijk, 1998). To him, politicians use hyperbole as a strategic device, alongside media and other powerful actors, to emphasise a point, create a sense of urgency or crisis, and mobilise public opinion or support. The speeches had a total of 26 instances of hyperbole, which accounted for 3.8% of the total occurrence of discursive strategies in the text. This is illustrated in extract (14).

14. *It has taken three years five months and twenty days of unbelievable tumult, unrelenting pain and suffering and emotional turbulence of a world turned upside down, but we have at last heard the words for which we had all been praying.* (CUS029)

In extract (14), President Akufo-Addo seeks to demonstrate the extent of the virus's damage and its effects on people. Similarly, the degree of the entire situation is exaggerated when PAA said that "the hospitality industry was devastated ... indeed our world was turned upside down."

4.8 Euphemism

Euphemism is when a moderate or pleasant term or expression is used in place of one that is rude or unpleasant. Politicians seek to defuse tensions by using softer language. Van Dijk (1998) views euphemism as a discursive strategy used to manipulate language and meaning, often to maintain power and control. PAA illustrates this in extract 15.

15. *... and who sadly passed away on Friday, as a result of a COVID-related death.* (CUS011)

He tried to mitigate the unbearable pain and grief associated with death by using the phrase "passed away" instead of 'died,' even though the latter is pre-modified by the adverb 'sadly.'

16. *Fellow Ghanaians, these are not ordinary times, so, let us all put our shoulders to the wheel and I am confident that by the grace of God, we shall overcome this challenge.* (CUS002)

He used euphemism as a discursive strategy in extracts 15 and 16. In this instance, the president used gentler language, such as "these are not ordinary times," when discussing COVID-19 and its effects, to obscure the truth and conceal unpleasant realities. To create a more palatable narrative, PAA describes the COVID-19 pandemic as a "challenge" instead of a widespread outbreak of a disease. Here, PAA uses a softer and kinder expression for a positive spin or framing effect. This helps to construct a desired or positive image or reputation of himself.

4.9 Comparison

Comparisons are utilised to emphasise the distinctions and similarities between in-groups and out-groups. A comparison involves explicit comparisons between groups, policies and ideas, often used to highlight differences, contrasts, and inequalities (Van Dijk, 2013). He identifies two main types of comparison: Analogical reasoning (e.g. 'A is like B') and

Categorical comparison (e.g. 'A is a type of B'). Positive depictions of groups to which one belongs and negative depictions of groups to which one does not belong are presented. Van Dijk (2005) posits that ingroups are seen more positively, whereas outgroups are viewed more negatively. Various similes and metaphors can be employed to illustrate both optimism and pessimism. PAA used comparisons in the majority of his addresses on COVID-19.

17. *Like the World Health Organisation (WHO) has recently advised, I want to encourage you to wear a mask wherever you go, as it will help you not to contract the virus, and keep it clean. (CUS007)*
18. *The pandemic trend in Ghana is similar to the general global trend as announced by WHO. (CUS007)*

In excerpt 17, PAA used the pronoun "I" to liken himself to the WHO in his quest to admonish the Ghanaian populace to wear masks at all times. He does this to present a favourable image of himself and to equate his authority with that of the WHO. In excerpt 18, Ghana's situation in the wake of the pandemic is framed as similar to the global trend, as indicated by the use of the word "similar".

4.10 Irony

Irony is the deliberate and often humorous contradiction between what is stated and what the speaker intends to convey. As a discursive strategy, irony is used to influence social interactions and maintain social relationships (Van Dijk, 2013). He distinguishes between two kinds of irony: situational irony and verbal irony. Van Dijk (2005) asserts that statements made in seemingly less direct, more sarcastic tones may have a greater effect on listeners. This was something that PAA used a few times in his speeches. Extracts 19 and 20 exemplify this.

19. *I know some political actors will want you to believe that our current numbers represent a failure on the part of the Government. Do not begrudge them. They need to make such comments for their political survival. (CUS009)*
20. *However, some expressed various degrees of hysteria and negativity towards the exercise, with some, who swore heaven and earth to resist the compilation of the register at the peril of their lives, ending up registering. Some made delicate, personal sacrifices in the event of the register, yet still ended up registering. Some claimed that, amid a pandemic, the registration exercise should not be conducted, warning of an "explosion" in our case count and very high numbers of deaths should the exercise go ahead. (CUS015)*

In extracts 19 and 20, PAA trivialised the attitudes of his opponents using sarcasm, an instance of verbal irony. Van Dijk (2005) believes that irony can convey criticism or disapproval without directly offending others. PAA ridiculed individuals who made extravagant promises, individuals who made personal sacrifices and individuals who expressed varying degrees of "hysteria and negativity". For example, the expression "Do not begrudge them" is sarcastic because he meant the opposite. The comment that immediately followed it, "They need to make such comments for their political survival", gave it emphasis. He intended to reveal the false claims made by opponents regarding Ghana's

ability to compile a voter register without a significant increase in our case count and a high number of deaths.

4.11 Victimisation

The use of the binary distinction between ingroups and outgroups is a form of victimisation. This serves as a metaphor for how outgroup members harm ingroup members. D'Errico et al. (2012) posit that by employing verbal assaults such as criticism, accusation, and insults that insinuate a below-average evaluation, an individual might undermine the credibility of another person. PAA employed the notion of US-Them polarisation, where he openly criticised and vilified the opponents. Extract 21 shows his use of the victimisation strategy.

21. *So far, it has been established that the virus was imported into our midst from foreign shores and is being spread through person-to-person contact.* (CUS007).

In extract (21), PAA used the clause "the virus was imported" to refer to COVID-19, which appeared to reflect bias against immigrants. This contentious phrase implies that the virus did not originate in Ghana. Therefore, he asserts that travellers, whether or not they are Ghanaians, are increasing their exposure to the highly contagious virus spreading worldwide. The recipients of the bad presentation will accuse travellers of spreading the disease.

4.12 Counterfactual

A counterfactual is a statement that describes how something or someone might be different under different circumstances. Politicians typically employ counterfactuals to illustrate fictitious or compelling arguments. In the speeches, the president employed counterfactuals. PAA charged his speeches on COVID-19 with passion by employing rhetorical devices, universal emotions, and a positive self-image. Brown et al. (2012) postulate that pathos is the improper application of strong emotional appeals intended to change the feelings and moods of the recipients. This strategy is displayed in excerpt 22.

22. *Fellow Ghanaians, these are not ordinary times, so let us all put our shoulders to the wheel, and I am confident that, together, by the Grace of God, we shall overcome this challenge.* (CUS001)

PAA employs emotive frames in almost all of his speeches. For instance, he concludes with the lexical phrase "assured" rather than a logical conclusion to emphasise his point and elicit the readers' emotions. By expressing his confidence, he also conveys his feelings, supporting his claim that, by working together and using all available resources to combat the coronavirus pandemic, it is possible to defeat the virus. PAA seeks to elicit recipients' emotions and gain their trust by empathising with their feelings. This gives him the moral authority to choose the policy measures to implement to control the infection, and he expects recipients to accept his decision. As a result, the expression, "I'm optimistic that with everyone working together, we will be able to weather the storm."

4.13 Evidentiality

Evidentiality as a discursive marker is used to indicate the source of information, evidence, or claims, to establish credibility and legitimacy (Van Dijk, 2006). Facts, figures,

statistics, and other forms of proof are employed in political speeches as a discursive strategy. Lippi and Torroni (2016) argue that concerns with subjective and contested claims are automatically extracted to give ordered data for models of arguments and reasoning. PAA frequently employed this strategy to emphasise his ideas on the best ways to combat the pandemic and to sustain economic activity. Extracts (23 – 25) illustrate this discursive strategy.

23. *...I gave an update on the measures put in by the Government in response to the novel Coronavirus disease which has so far affected some 118,000 people across the world, resulted in the death of some 4,000 persons, and is wreaking havoc on the global economy. (CUS001)*
24. *... He will, then, immediately make available a minimum of one billion cedis (GH¢1 billion) to households and businesses, particularly small and medium-scale enterprises. (CUS004)*
25. *... This week, Wednesday, 24th February, to be precise, we took another concrete step in our quest to rid our nation of COVID-19, with the arrival in the country of six hundred thousand (600,000) doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, the first consignment of many more to come (CUS024).*

In extracts (23–25), the President reassures his audience that the government is committed to protecting Ghanaians' lives and managing the economy during the COVID-19 crisis. He does so by promising bold measures to mitigate the impact on businesses and households and minimise job losses. The specific mention of facts and figures (i.e., 118,000 affected persons, 4,000 deaths, GH¢1 billion, 600,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine) not only indicates that PAA is on top of the issues but also demonstrates its commitment to resolving the crisis. The use of these specific numerical figures in extracts 23-25 adds a level of precision and concreteness to the information. This numerical detail helps in quantifying the scale of the resources procured and distributed.

4.14 Illustration

PAA used the discursive technique of illustration in all of his speeches. Discourse experts adopt the use of genuine or fictional illustrations to bolster their stance or enhance their credibility. Citing particular examples is thus an effective tactic for making a persuasive argument (Van Dijk, 2005). For example, Nana Addo illustrated the prevalent challenges in Ghana as:

26. *... those who, as at 27th June, 2020, had the virus, stood at four thousand, two hundred and forty-five (4,245). As at midnight of 24th July, nearly a month later, the number of active cases in Ghana stands at three thousand, three hundred and seven (3,307). Again, a month ago, the number of recoveries stood at twelve thousand, nine hundred and ninety-four (12,994). Today, it is twenty-eight thousand, nine hundred and twenty-seven (29,494). This means our recovery rate has improved from seventy-five per cent (75%) of positives, a month ago, to eighty-nine point five per cent (89.5%), all in one month currently" (CUS014)*

27. ... *Additionally, we have procured and distributed forty-five thousand (45,000) Veronica Buckets; ninety thousand (90,000) gallons of liquid soap; ninety thousand (90,000) rolls of tissue paper; forty thousand (40,000) thermometer guns; seven hundred and fifty thousand (750,000) pieces of 200mils sanitizers; and 2.2 million reusable facemasks, i.e. three per person, all with the intent of guaranteeing the safety of students, teaching and non-teaching staff, Two (2) masks each will be delivered tomorrow, and the third within the next two (2) weeks (CUS013)*

The enumeration of various items, including “Veronica Buckets,” “liquid soap,” “tissue paper,” “thermometer guns,” “sanitizers,” and “reusable facemasks,” provides a clear and comprehensive picture of the range of materials distributed. This list helps the audience understand the variety of resources dedicated to ensuring safety. Moreover, the explanation of the distribution plan for facemasks is another illustrative element. The statement “Two (2) masks each will be delivered tomorrow and the third within the next two (2) weeks” provides a timeline and process, enhancing the audience's understanding of how the resources will be allocated. In addition, the repeated emphasis on the intent behind these measures, i.e., “guaranteeing the safety of students, teaching and non-teaching staff,” reinforces the purpose behind the actions taken. This emphasis on safety conveys the government's commitment to protecting the population's well-being. By incorporating these illustrative elements, President Akufo-Addo effectively employs Van Dijk's (2005) discursive strategy of “Illustration” to communicate the tangible efforts and resources invested in combating the challenges posed by COVID-19. This approach aims to make the information more tangible, relatable, and memorable for the audience.

4.15 Number Game

PAA used number games as a discursive tool in all of his COVID-19 updates. Van Dijk (2005) points out that several arguments are centred on enhancing credibility through actions that emphasise objectivity. This strategy has numerous applications. The number game is a discursive strategy that emphasises “reality” by using specific, detailed examples such as dates, timings, and figures. Since it is more powerful or direct, it is often refuted with additional concrete examples. For instance, PAA provided particular examples of the new coronavirus when he stated that there were around “118,000 infected individuals” and “4,000 fatalities worldwide.” Additionally, the Number game is evident in the details of suspended activities or events recorded by PAA, as observed in extract 28.

28. *Here, I am referring to the suspension of all public gatherings, including conferences, workshops, funerals, parties, nightclubs, drinking spots, beaches, festivals, political rallies, religious activities and sporting events. (CUS007)*

4.16 Categorization

This discursive device groups certain people or objects into broader categories. Collections are made up of connections between these categories. Van Dijk (2005) states that individuals tend to classify others, particularly when it concerns immigrants and refugees. This is done to categorise individuals by nationality, ideology, religion, and regional affiliation. President Akufo-Addo usually classified the people in the Ghanaian community

into groups or categories. In the wake of the pandemic, President Akufo-Addo used categorisation to define 'Frontline workers', 'Contact tracers', and 'isolation'. Extracts (29 - 31) show his use of the categorisation strategy.

29. *Frontline workers are those who are responsible for finding, testing, and treating virus-infected individuals. They also include those who guard our borders or prevent prospective virus-carriers from entering; these individuals are primarily drawn from the health and security sectors. (CUS004)*
30. *Contact tracers identify those who are searching for those who have interacted with those who have been tested and confirmed to have COVID-19 positivity. (CUS004)*
31. *While isolation refers to those who have been confirmed as having COVID-19 and are separated from the rest of the population to receive treatment, quarantine refers to those who have been identified and excluded from the population to be tested because they are suspected or probable infected. (CUS004)*

Extracts 29- 31 indicate that PAA makes a clear mention of numerous societal memberships and how important each membership is to the effort to combat COVID-19. When he demonstrates that all decisions regarding the measures and policies were made in consultation with members or stakeholders in the religious, health, labour, chieftaincy, educational, tourism, transport, hospitality, creative arts sectors and sports, he presents a positive self-image.

32. *I, therefore, call on all Muslims to heed this prophetic admonishment to pray at home, so that we might protect ourselves from the threat of COVID-19. (CUS008)*

This pronouncement identifies and acknowledges the Muslim community as a significant segment of Ghanaian society whose cooperation must be sought in the effort to combat the global pandemic. This is especially true given Ghana's sizable Muslim population.

4.17 Consensus

Consensus as a discursive strategy refers to the use of language and communication to achieve agreement and shared understanding among individuals or groups (Wodak, 2001). According to Van Dijk (1993), consensus is not always a genuine or inclusive agreement but can be used by dominant groups to maintain their power and control over marginalised groups. When they sense danger, politicians try to reach an agreement among various groups and organisations. This means that other parties, usually supporters, must be involved. It could be something intellectual, like principles, or something intangible, like friends or other groups. In a political context, consensus, according to Van Dijk (2005), is a national or cross-party mechanism for protecting a nation against external threats. It is done to achieve national or social unification. PAA employed this strategy to cultivate a positive self-presentation in its speeches by applauding or encouraging individuals and organisations to work together. The president also pledged that government institutions and agencies would cooperate to ensure that measures to combat the virus are implemented as necessary. He made the following utterance:

33. *The government, in collaboration with the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI), Business & Trade Associations and selected Commercial and Rural Banks, will roll out a soft loan scheme of up to a total of six hundred million cedis (GH¢600 million) ... (CUS005)*

From extract 33, PAA's use of the adverbial or prepositional phrase "in collaboration with" signals the government's collaboration, cooperation and consensus with other national agencies to establish loan support schemes for struggling businesses in the wake of the pandemic.

4.18 Disclaimers

This rhetorical strategy is employed to preserve one's reputation by diverting attention from one's shortcomings or mistakes to others' actions. Van Dijk (2005) argues that disclaimers serve the purpose of momentarily preserving one's reputation by acknowledging positive qualities. This has diverse effects because it assigns responsibility for a specific incident to a particular organisation or individual. President Akufo-Addo shifts the blame for his and the government's inadequacies to other individuals or institutional actions. This presents a negative portrayal of such entities while protecting his reputation from being threatened.

34. *Fellow Ghanaians, with the Bank of Ghana predicting a worst-case GDP growth rate scenario of 2.5% for 2020, should the virus continue to linger for the rest of the year, the effects on our economy would be dire. However, as we have demonstrated over the last three years, where we inherited an economy that was growing at 3.4% and transformed it into one which has grown by an average of 7% over the last three (3) years, I assure you that we know what to do to bring our economy back to life. What we do not know how to do is to bring people back to life. (CUS004).*

Van Dijk (1993) notes that disclaimers can be used to manage impressions, maintain a positive self-image, and avoid criticism. PAA in extract 34 shifts blame for the crisis to the crisis itself, claiming it is the worst-case scenario for GDP growth. Also, PAA distances itself from criticism, as shown in extracts 35 and 36.

35. *This is the time for sacrifice so that we do not have to bear a greater cost in the future. Unhappily, there continues to be the worrying news of a few Ghanaians aiding some West African nationals to enter our country illegally, despite the closure of our borders. Even more disturbing is the fact that several of the West Africans, who have been arrested, have later tested positive for the virus (CUS008).*
36. *These are unpatriotic acts and must stop. We cannot continue to allow a few persons, who are motivated by their own selfish, money-making interests, to endanger the lives of the rest of the population. Not only will persons who enter our country illegally be strictly dealt with, but so will Ghanaians who facilitate their entry (CUS008).*

The President occasionally condemns and disassociates himself from those who prioritise their self-interest over the common good and those who question the

government's capacity to combat the pandemic instead of collaborating with it. In this context, PAA avoids social repercussions by characterising some Ghanaians as misanthropes. To reiterate this point, the President cautioned the misanthropists for what he terms their persistent scepticism and desire to purposefully muddy the government's efforts to combat the deadly virus.

37. *The professional Jeremiahs and naysayers, who seek, cynically, to make a profitable industry out of spreading falsehoods, fear and panic, stoking divisive, ethnic sentiments, underestimate the resolve and the determination of Ghanaians to build a united, democratic, peaceful, prosperous, and happy Ghana. We will continue to work hard to prove them wrong (CUS015).*

The President uses phrases such as "professional Jeremiahs" and "naysayers" in excerpt 78 to shift blame to a specific group targeted in the speech. By calling them professionals and naysayers, there is an implicit suggestion that their motivations are sceptical and profit-driven. In addition, the President explicitly accuses the targeted group of engaging in undesirable activities, such as "spreading falsehoods," "fear," and "panic." This accusation serves as a disclaimer, pre-emptively addressing potential concerns about the credibility of the information shared by the targeted group. President Akufo-Addo denies any misconduct. He seeks to avoid accountability and therefore employs this tactic to save face.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated discursive strategies in Presidential speeches during a crisis. It specifically examined the speeches to uncover patterns of ideological self-representation and negative representation of others. The President of the Republic of Ghana's COVID-19 speeches were selected for analysis using Van Dijk's (2005) socio-cognitive model. To address the research questions, the study examined discursive devices individually, linking them to the socio-cognitive dimension of self-presentation and other presentation. The study employed qualitative methodologies to establish a connection between micro-level features, namely discursive devices, and macro-level phenomena, namely theme/mind control.

Analysing the use of various discursive strategies in presidential speeches allows us to discern how politicians employ language to manipulate their listeners' thoughts. PAA utilises the authority device to the greatest extent and employs minimal irony. In his COVID-19 update speeches, PAA employs a higher frequency of positive self-representation. The president's ideology is predominantly self-representational rather than characterised by a negative attitude toward others. Both positive and negative representations aimed to capture the audience's attention by portraying the president and his government as superior to others. This indicates the president's desire to portray himself as superior to his opponents. The president again employs the "Us versus Them" to establish divisions between ingroups and outgroups. Thus, the study has found that politicians employ various strategies to manipulate public opinion. They employ various discursive strategies to establish their superiority over others through positive self-representation and negative other-representation. This study contributes to critical discourse studies by demonstrating how discursive strategies function as tools for ideological construction in crisis governance communication.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that future research conduct a comparative analysis of the discursive strategies used by presidents in different countries. This can provide insights into cross-cultural variations in presidential communication. Secondly, this study focused exclusively on Van Dijk's (2005) socio-cognitive model, so future studies can consider other theoretical frameworks, such as politeness theory, to examine COVID-19 speech updates.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL ENTRAPMENT AND SPATIAL POLITICS IN CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN'S *THE YELLOW WALLPAPER*

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Abstract

This article examines the dialectical relationship between psychological entrapment and spatial politics in *The Yellow Wallpaper* to critique the domestic ideology of nineteenth-century America. The study explores how domestic and social spaces restrict women's agency, ability, and well-being through patriarchal expectations embedded within the home. Using theories of psychological entrapment and spatial politics, the analysis focuses on the protagonist's confinement in the nursery room, where surveillance, enforced isolation, and patriarchal control gradually lead to her psychological breakdown. The room and the yellow wallpaper symbolize the oppressive structures imposed on women, while simultaneously becoming sites of resistance. As the narrative progresses, the protagonist increasingly recognizes and resists the forces that confine her, culminating in the symbolic destruction of the wallpaper. The study argues that Charlotte Perkins Gilman transforms domestic space from a site of oppression into one of psychological and symbolic resistance. By connecting mental confinement with domestic spatial control, the article demonstrates how the story remains a significant feminist critique of patriarchal ideology and domesticity.

Keywords: *Charlotte Perkins Gilman; entrapment; politics; psychological; the yellow wallpaper.*

1. Introduction

By the turn of the nineteenth century, greater numbers of women took to education and gainful employment, but prevailing social attitudes isolated woman in the home as her natural and rightful place. The domestic space is depicted as a refuge, sacred and moral ground that provided women with fulfillment, yet served also to regulate the lives of women restricting their needs for intellectual and emotional self-determination. Enabling external gaze was portrayed as weakness, therefore bolstering the trapping of women within domesticity. While home can be restrictive, it was also a site for contestation where women negotiated, and resisted patriarchy through subtle manoeuvring.

Space, as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* exemplifies, operates in a powerful role within the realm of women's psychological experience and social identity. Published in 1892, this story is recognized as one of the seminal works in American feminist literature. Trapped in an upstairs nursery as part of the "rest cure," Gilman uses the first-person perspective of a woman sedated by both medical and domestic practice to reveal

damaging institutions that stripped women of control over their own bodies and minds. The narrator's increasing obsession with the wallpaper shows us exactly how stale sitting and constrained environment is a morose agent of frustration.

Space is a highly contested political arena (Lamphere 2024): one on which economic, psychological and gendered effects overlap. This lens is particularly relevant to Gilman's text, in that the home interior serves as a cage not only literally but allegorically as an enclosure on male performance. Likewise, Nicklaus (2010) declares *The Yellow Wallpaper* needs to be interpreted systematically as a text based on the hot images and inner subjectivity of its narrative structure with underlying tensions from perhaps hidden visual readings. This concept further solidifies the need for exploration of these spatial arrangements and how they both enable mental degeneration and provide grounds for opposition to oppression.

It is possible to analyse it somewhat critically, in fact, feminist literary criticism has done just that pretty well. Some scholarship sees the wallpaper as a literal depiction of female oppression and madness and rebellion while others view Gilman's critique of nineteenth-century medicine and gender ideology. By this framework, the present study theorizes and discusses the sense of psychological enclosure that domestic space induces, expanding on Ghafoor Raouf and Sherko Ali (2018) grounding description in a metonym for American domestic novel canon/tradition. While this scholarship has cast light on the text, it often addresses domestic space and psychological decline as disparate concerns rather than mutually reinforcing forces.

Chapters on feminist reading in *The Yellow Wallpaper* have appeared from many angles of inquiry, but few of those individual works treat psychological entrapment and spatial politics as composite canon. Although much existing scholarship already examines the interplay of confinement, insanity and resistance it does so to a lesser extent with regard to how exactly in this case the physical environment actively constitutes both her mind and acts of resistance. And that this limitation implies a complete valuation of how Gilman transmutes the domestic realm into an active battleground for women's concurrent ideological assault and defense.

The article analyzes Gilman by using spatial politics to discuss the psychological entrapment of this protagonist and her negotiation and eventual resistance to domestication. Specifically, it investigates the symbolic purposes of the room itself and windows and walls as if they were material audiences of patriarchal oppression and collective psychological deterioration. Drawing on an examination of the relationship between spatial repression and mental perception, this study intends to demonstrate that the protagonist's madness is just as much a thread of resistance against the domestic ideology modeled by confinement.

A feminist literary criticism that investigates the confluence of psychological entrapment and spatial politics unveils how the two operate in succession to interrogate domestic ideology of the nineteenth century. This is how *The Yellow Wallpaper* turns not just into one story of an individual breaking down but also a counter-narrative of women that turn these places of oppression into affirmative landscapes.

2. Literature Review

The body of knowledge on this subject matter provides readers with a wealth of intellectual resources that serve particular function in putting the current investigation of psychological entrapment in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* into historical context. The complicated relations that occur between gender and spatial dynamics actually

constitute an important framework for exploring how this story brings together issues of gender, mental health — and institutional power. They are each set down in relation to both the wallpaper and the room itself (and also the very act of observing) through Gilman's deft symbolism. At the level of idea, critical stances toward home reinforce claims about how people (particularly women) are mentally trapped in physical spaces that oppress them as presented in *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Hanna, 2023).

The idea of home, one that many of you, like me associate with a place of safety, security and nurture is one often addressed throughout feminist writing. Scholars contend that although the domestic sphere is culturally constructed as a site of refuge for women, it often operates as a source of oppression. Émile Zola offered a quiet critique of institutions that kept female shop workers apart from men in his *The Ladies' Paradise*. Written works of the loud suffragists, including Caroline Norton, Harriet Martineau, and Harriet Taylor Mill also demonstrate how deeply ingrained this expectation was in the public consciousness that a woman's place is 'in the home' — her sphere being naturally sacred (Arabovna & Rashidovna 2024).

Beliefs about women's separate sphere reached their zenith in the 1850s and 1860s, as the image of the home was framed ever more sharply against that of men's busy world. This ideology was often so powerful that it obscured the social realities of women from the consciousness, especially those of working-class women who struggled to be published in top journals. This idealization of domesticity drowned out the voices of many women and hid the conditions under which their lives were constrained (García, 2021).

So let us tackle the section about historical accounts of domestic space; Traditionally, representations of the home depict it as a domain with men behind the wheel in control. This conception is illustrated by midnineteenth-century periodicals and early twentieth-century fiction such as the writing of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. The public sphere was considered male territory, and ideal middle-class homes were becoming a sanctuary in a world dominated by work and industry. In this time period, when *The Yellow Wallpaper* was produced, the view that women were saved from loss of morality within the home was common. While this separation was intended to protect women from the supposed dangers of public life, it also severely limited their independence. In this way, even if having a private room in their own home, they do not have autonomy and control (Ghafoor Raouf & Sherko Ali, 2018).

2.1 Gender, Mental Health and Institutional Powers

The information discussed on the contemporary notions surrounding gender and mental health along with an invigorated academic interest in *The Yellow Wallpaper* render a new reading of the tale especially timely. The narrator is clearly suffering from what we now know as Postpartum Depression, but the so-called medical and social institutions of her time do not acknowledge it as a valid illness. The domestic sphere has emerged as the main focus of academics and activists alike, who have either emphasised women's entrapment here or her potential to offer resistance.

Gender, mental health and institutional power are still probably the most important components of this tragedy. Her husband is the ruler of her life, of what she can offer socially and flourish creatively. Insofar as her confinement comes from the dual presence of patriarchal and medical oppression, it is understandable that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar would characterize the narrator as a victim (Cuadrado Garcia, 2019). In fact, Gilman herself went through a similar experience when prescribed the infamous "rest cure" and had

also been written about critically in Watt's 2023 (Waham, 2023) research article as a critique of nineteenth century medical practice since women's mental health was simply ignored.

Drawing on key selections, they show that *The Yellow Wallpaper* represents domestic life and institutional care as both productively shaping the narrator's subjectivity and proudly robbing her of agency. Simultaneously the text articulated possibilities for resistance and negotiation, depicting home as potential prison and site of nurturing new female consciousness. The irony of the narrative voice and the open ending complicates any straightforward psychosocial classification or assessment (Herrity & Warr, 2023).

2.2 Symbolism and Narrative Technique

The Yellow Wallpaper is about the narrator being kept in an isolated room with barred windows while her symptoms of postpartum depression emerge. But even as modern medicine grew aware of the dangers of social isolation, nineteenth-century psychiatric protocols mandated rest and solitude for nervous malfunction without significant scientific documentation of utility.

The story is told from the first person perspective of an anonymous woman through her private journal entries. In this way, the narration provides an outlet for a narrator who cannot say those thoughts aloud; it also serves as a written record of her growing consciousness of the oppressive forces surrounding both her husband and society. The story is centered around the narrator and her slowly psychological deteriorating condition, with the yellow wallpaper itself being its representative and encapsulating both an enclosure or imprisonment of herself growing to realize this decomposition.

Its chaotic detail represents an image of imprisonment. Middle-class women were often written out of public life, but mental illness was a way their pain could come into the public eye. Conceptual Information The barred windows and the nursery background take over much of the narrator's mind-space, and this makes her ruminate on female creativity-set against the backdrop of women who stay in confinement (Ghafoor Raouf & Sherko Ali, 2018). In doing so, Gilman utilizes symbolism and the narrative form to comment on domestic entrapment, whilst being cognizant of the struggle with voice that women endure.

2.3 The Yellow Wallpaper in Critical Discourse

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's '*The Yellow Wallpaper*' continues to be a cornerstone work in all literary analysis, but especially regarding insanity, female authorship and gender oppression. The richness of themes and complexity of text has led to several major critical approaches. The first turns femininity and madness into a reading of the narrator's breakdown as an act of defiance. The second develops the autobiographical traces and the link of this story to both Gilman herself and her physician, Silas Weir Mitchell. A further frames this in broader cultural/political discussions of home, spatial control and closure (Ghafoor Raouf & Sherko Ali, 2018)

The scholarships are a testament to the fact that entrapment is an intricate concept that exists not only along emotional but also spatial and discursive planes. Authoritative systems regulate this voice so that her experience and the shape of the story are reintegrated into an inseparable whole. In this way, Gilman gives us an important example to sort out the relations between discourses of confinement, domestic control and female agency.

Thus, critical analysis usually worked through three questions: What historical meanings fall under the term entrapment; what spatial mechanisms sustain strategies of

domestic control; and how does voice relate to discourse and agency in its own telling (Gilman, 2022)?

3. Methodology

The current study utilizes qualitative textual analysis as the main methodology to explore the way psychological entrapment and spatial politics are represented in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. It is well-suited for literary research specifically because it allows you to do a close, systematic analysis of narrative structure, characterization, symbolism and thematic development. The method is concerned with interpreting the meaning that is created through language and form, not measuring numerical quantities of data. This method is applied in this study to explore how the second wave of a feminist writer, Gilman represents the psychological torment of the narrator caused by domesticity specifically through her nursery room and its strange wallpaper.

The theoretical framework for this study is situated between feminist literary criticism, spatial theory and psychological interpretative framework. Feminist criticism provides understanding (theoretical/practical) and establishes an appropriate framework, with the emphasised theory of incredibility in Butler's reading, to understand how local ideologies rooted in patriarchal space repression compel women into roles of dependency; having stripped them of their intellectual and emotional independence. The concept of space as both a social and political construct is fully theorized in the writings of Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault, which makes them theoretically useful for analyzing how power exerts itself through individuals' experiences in space and what strategies they then use to contest it. Psychological reading is used to chronicle the psychological downfall of the narrator and how external constraint and internal fragmentation are related. As such, these theory frontiers enable us to explain how domestic space functions as a psychological apparatus.

This type of analysis gets bolstered by strong examples taken from the primary text. I then pick out and analyze key excerpts showing the nursery, the wallpaper, entries from her diary and events depicting her husband. One tracks through this minute examination of diction and imagery, symbolism (both politics as a dirty image and physicality) narrative voice itself and fractures. Particularly focused on is the episodic and, at times, more fragmented first-person narration of the story as it reflects both the narrator's waning sanity and enhances his sense of entrapment. In effect, this makes textual evidence consistent with ideas of entrapment, surveillance and resistance

The study adopts a close reading as well as thematic analysis of the data sets in an interpretive strategy. Unlike close reading which interrogates language and form, thematic analysis pulls terms that reappear in relation to themes — domesticity; gender oppression; madness; confinement. The analysis traces the escalating viewpoint of the narrator in the room from passive discontent with it to actively identifying with the woman trapped behind the wallpaper. This turn is interpreted not only as psychological collapse but also an act of sexual rebellion against male power. By means of textual particulars and theoretical elaboration, the research reveals how Gilman critiques versus ideological female domesticity simultaneously as it exposes the complex interrelations between space, power and subjectivity.

The study shows how *The Yellow Wallpaper* fleshes out the domestic space as a site of both repression and transformation by employing this rigorous methodological framework. The narrative shows that the very act of creating systems of abuse and

patriarchal power can be acts of psychological captivity while simultaneously hinting at how those being oppressed might foster imaginative methods for survival. This approach of measuring the accuracy of the writing offers a formal and scientific understanding, and in turn lends authenticity and substance to the exploration of what this can mean.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The *Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a very eloquent demonstration of the traumas of domesticity that speak loudly to the reader even today when the focus on the home as the most perfectly created environment in which women can thrive is a strong theme of the Victorian age and the critical discourse of the present-day era that criticizes the complexities of power relations of space. The book eloquently captures the bleak seclusion of the main hero in an isolated rural estate, which strongly brings to mind the contemporary notions of the 19th century regarding housewifery and social roles women were supposed to fulfill. The wallpaper that captures her sight eventually becomes a sophisticated means to her personal and interpretative freedom and self-exploration. All through the text, this brilliant work of Gilman therefore places the phenomenon of entrapment either within the space of the home or within the spatial constraint or in regard to the feminine subject within its imaginative relation to the politics of the domestic space in a much broader context.

The strata of meaning involved in the fight against such entrapment highlight the fundamental struggles of the women who existed then and which are still relevant today with regard to the realms and roles that women now assume in the modern society. (Molesworth, 2021). The short stories of Gilman can be placed in a historiography in which the content and role of domesticity were in flux that was used to mark out a specific set of normative social expectations with regard to gendered space in particular. These traditionalized norms, both informal and formal, hold a strong force upon the habit of inhabiting spaces, and remain invested with an exemplifiable discursive existence which echoes across the modern-day feminization of domestic spaces and places. The *Yellow Wallpaper* stands out as a result of these multifaceted cross-over of these habitual practices, as well as a shared anxiety about ideas of female autonomy that are formed in particularly recognizable ways in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As the narrator actively interacts with the world around her she is watching the more arboreal and nearly suffocating manifestation of the domestic landscape that constitutes her life; the house itself is becoming the locus of her captivity and a means through which she tries to write and trace her own autobiographical text of domination of her own incarceration. Such a feeling of quarantine, pre- and post-natal, is revealed as a limitation that has a very strong influence on her own identity. Thus, the text carefully traces an ambivalent path to a more personal freedom, which is told in an increasingly dialogic and exploratory interaction with the spaces and objects around her, allowing her to have a more profound reflection on herself and emotional terrain. (Ghafoor Raouf & Sherko Ali, 2018)

4.2 Discussion

In response to the theorization of domesticity and an assessment of the centrality of space in a selection from *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the concept of psychological entrapment and spatial politics emerges as a zone worthy of further inquiry. The following section expands on these insights. Psychological entrapment denotes a continuum facilitating a tenuous stability among competing normative demands exerted by others in pursuit of the

individual's commitment in a variety of domains, including authority, social roles, and availability (Ghafoor Raouf & Sherko Ali, 2018). Spatial politics signifies contestation over access to and control of space and, hence, the potential for being enabled or constrained the potential for political power (舞, 2012).

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, psychological entrapment resides at the intersection of the domestic routine of social roles and the architectural constraints of space, creating a situation of restricted agency and control over the self. Both confinement and a history of socially mandated obligations sculpt the protagonist's entrapment. Because space operates as a conduit through which entrapment is negotiated and expresses simultaneously a means of potential resistance, a second dimension of analysis reveals that space designates a site of political power. At various moments, the protagonist's desires about space reflect efforts to transcend her domestic role and find a substitute a site traditionally associated with creative expression. By illustrating how these dimensions weave together, the analysis indicates that *The Yellow Wallpaper* extends consideration of domesticity beyond prevailing interpretations to encompass a broader understanding of space as a mechanism of control and, simultaneously, a zone of potential agency.

4.2.1 Entrapment and Domesticity

The mundane domesticity that the protagonist of *The Yellow Wallpaper* is repeatedly told she must "rest" for, to avoid stimulating her oppressed brain, is a microcosm of the wider structures trapping her. This social control plays upon and bolsters the architectural control inherent in the domestic built environment. Yet at the same time as the protagonist looks firstly in less concrete terms at the house itself — both it as a home, and as a prison, but also hints at perhaps intolerable constraints of both domesticity and architecture within that framework; she starts to formulate strategies of negotiation or resistance against her subordination. These factors are indicative of the constraining dimensions of domestic space that must be central to any understanding of the entrapment depicted in Gilman's text—an entrapment which has important implications for a conception of the political.

[The house itself, full of "rest cure," gradually holds her captive captive, through rest from writing, from exercise and from her own narrative desires. Between rest, of which writing is prohibited, the house begins to emerge as prison, as home that is both refuge and captivity. The initial description asserts and welcomes its qualities; domesticity unfolds further.] In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, therefore, domestic space emerges as a primary site through which the narrator is entrapped. Control supersedes the domestic routine itself; she is locked into space through the demands of domesticity. An architectural safeguard against illness becomes, in effect, a trap. The characterization of space may reflect forces of restraint, yet she attempts (albeit unsuccessfully) to negotiate its terms. Domesticity is both a condition and a register. *The Yellow Wallpaper* depicts the interplay involving domesticity, control, and enclosure by representing distinctive remarks and elements linked to space, enclosure, and transgression.

Through the imposition of domesticity, control begins early in the narrative, limiting and confining even the very manner in which the character can articulate her own desires and experience. Only observe in silence or within strictly regulated hours; any expression beyond is forbidden. Charted and calibrated. First via the inventory enumerated in the opening, which manifests as the continual and rigid regulation of an imprisoned mind. Domesticity signifies that to which the character is resigned. Contagion of hysteria infects narrator's discourse. She is cautioned against freedom, treated by the brother-practitioner

as patient, infantilized and, above, entrapment within domesticity. (Ghafoor Raouf & Sherko Ali, 2018).

4.2.2 Space as Power and Resistance

As I argue in Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, space functions as both a site of and an imaginary realm through which we can work against power. The way that the heroine is caged in a plain white-walled room denotes the normalisation of domesticity based upon prevailing normative beliefs; so the redemptive power her husband sees in it is compromised and systems of surveillance and control are allowed to creep into domestic, intimate spaces. The analysis shows that even under this widespread and seemingly impenetrable social control, the protagonist has lines of flight and the ability to produce strategy. Space is utilized as an implement of control and an instrument for agency throughout the text. Control happens via domestic order and site-specific politics, while lines of flight also appear based along the way that tell a strikingly different story about dwelling. Home becomes a zone of negotiation between contradictory forces; space secures surveillance, but also serves as a site where one can conduct elusive subversion in relative privacy. Gilman presents an inscape marked by signification, through which the text interrogates domesticity's relationship to both agency and identity.

The text consistently conveys the view that space constitutes a major vector of power. Setting and milieu play an instrumental role in shaping individual lives, limiting opportunities for imagination, travel, sociability, and large-scale cultural engagement, whether through journeys abroad, movement through city streets, or participation in public rituals. Confinement to a single dwelling, room, or surface strips the individual of access to transformative experiences absorbed through broader textures and patterns of cultural traffic. Prose mimics the scale and stylisation of graphic invitations. At the same time, space delimits the package of possibilities conferred on the subject. In contrast to Emmeline Pankhurst's calls for radical action, *The Yellow Wallpaper* and the writings of contemporaneous poet T. Sturge Moore advocate a reconciliation of time and attention with property, reality, and constraint. (Ghafoor Raouf & Sherko Ali, 2018).

4.2.3 Narrative Voice and Subjectivity

Gilman creates this immersion in the protagonist's fragmented subjectivity through the first narrative from an unnamed woman, producing an intimate alignment between narration and psychological disintegration. The heroine of the story has what is described as 'temporary nervous depression', a diagnosis from the nineteenth century which closely matches our present examples of post-partum depression and female hysteria within patriarchal medical definitions, leaving her with her husband in the country and locked in an attic.

While a Foucauldian reading would claim the domestic space is operating as a disciplinary device upon its subject—a mechanism registering via surveillance, structuring through spatial restraint and medical authority, controlling both body and mind. The husband's role as doctor is amplified in relation to this arrangement, placing the narrator within Foucault's concept of 'biopower', whereby knowledge governed by medical regimes becomes a tool for regulation. In so doing the attic room becomes a micro-panopticon and the protagonist is able to internalise surveillance such that external forces are psychologically self-sustaining.

The narrator's voice, as hampered by her body, continually oscillated between a veneer of normalcy and the internalized anxiety that is constraining her conduct, which was distributed working under the societal model of an obedient Victorian spouse at first. But here, from a psychoanalytic reading, normality easily becomes unmoored by the return of the repressed; as hallucination and symbolic projection rise to fill her increasingly anxious mind, so too does obsession with the wallpaper. These manifestations are signs of a slow disintegration of ego due to imposed suppression and confinement.

The mood changes in the narrative reflect this growing conflict between achieved domesticity and a gradually disintegrating inner life with an emerging psychic fragmentation. The cage-like room, with cross-hatched windows and visually restrictive design, is both a physical enclosure and a metaphor of patriarchal subjugation. Nonneutrality of domestic space Within feminist spatial theory, whereby domestic space is understood as an ideologically produced form, it takes on a gendered architecture and ultimately limits the terms of female identity to passivity, compliance with power and emotional regulation. Noted scholars including Henri Lefebvre and feminist geographers have drawn our attention to the fact that space is socially produced, and we can think of the production of feminine docility — through spatial design — of the attic room as this.

The established control within the marital relationship precisely indicates where institutional (medicine, marriage, and domestic ideology) authority subsumes female agency. Strangely enough, it is this enclosure that creates the very possibility of resistance. The narrator starts to identify with the woman trapped behind the wallpaper, in a split subjectivity, where the unconscious creates another self that rejects symbolic order. The two conflicting positions of submission and rebellion embody what psychoanalysis defines as a disturbance in the symbolic father function, this being carried out by the husband;

On its own, one reading of the text through the combined lenses of entrapment theory, Foucauldian discipline, feminist spatial politics and psychoanalytic subject formation is inadequate; readers may nuance their understanding of spatial control in relation to female subjectivity alongside an understanding of this interrelationship. At once constraining, and simultaneously producing (in almost a paradoxical distortion of effect), the psychic rupture that heralds fragmented forms of agency; behaviour constituted through educational and domestic models. So much of the narrative exists between a normative and a subversive space, reflecting aspects of the feminine experience as regulatory and resistant (Hill, 1990).

5. Conclusion

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman writes about psychological entrapment and spatial politics. Psychological entrapment refers to the process whereby a person loses voluntary control over thoughts, behavioral patterns, and perception. Space politics revolves around the power mechanisms that control and define spatial configuration. The main research questions tackled in this analysis are the following: how does Gilman's work construct psychological entrapment and space politics? What broader theoretical questions can her novel address?

The general theoretical framework which governs this study is in line with feminist theoretical traditions. The purpose is to add to the feminist or female fiction studies through analyzing how the creation of female entrapment always comes with a parallel talk of space and how this can be politicized.

Space construction thus offers an opportunity to ask more general questions regarding power, agency, and resistance possibility. On a close examination of the text, entrapment, space and female subjectivity are constructed in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, using three interconnected axes. The domestic space and subjectivity can be observed by the wider historical situation in which actions of women were restricted to maintain order in the households. Institutional control is represented symbolically by the confinement room and the wallpaper. The shift of the first-person narrative position, voice, and tone develops as being a form of subjectivity that the female character is struggling with as trapped.

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INHERITED SILENCE AND DIASPORIC IDENTITY FORMATION IN HALA ALYAN'S *SALT HOUSES*

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Abstract

In studies of diasporic literature, *Salt Houses* by Hala Alyan has frequently been examined through the lenses of trauma, displacement, and memory. However, less attention has been given to how silence operated as a mechanism through which these experiences were transmitted across generations. This study examined how inherited silence functioned not merely as the absence of speech, but as a force shaping memory, emotion, and diasporic identity. Tracing a Palestinian family across generations, the novel presented quietness and narrative gaps as embedded in both narrative form and everyday interaction. Drawing on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory and Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity, this study employed qualitative close reading of narrative gaps and silences within the text. The findings showed that the selective withholding of family history, emotional restraint, and epistemic gaps shaped the transmission of memory and the negotiation of diasporic identity across generations. More broadly, this study positioned silence as a communicative mode of transmission that extended existing discussions of postmemory and trauma beyond explicit narration and representation. By foregrounding silence as an active structure rather than a simple absence, this study contributed to broader discussions of intergenerational memory, diasporic belonging, and cultural identity formation. The study was limited to one literary text, which may have restricted broader generalizability.

Keywords: *diasporic identity; inherited silence; intergenerational trauma; Palestinian diaspora; postmemory.*

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, Middle Eastern diasporic literature has become increasingly prominent in contemporary literary and cultural studies (Alkayid et al., 2023) for its exploration of hybridity, border crossing, and cultural encounters (Baghdadi, 2024) while also offering critical insights into displacement, migration, and how individuals reconstruct a sense of belonging across different geographical and cultural contexts. Within this context, Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses* (2017) has been recognized due to its multigenerational representation of Palestinian diasporic experience. Earlier Palestinian diaspora novels, such as *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) by Susan Abulhawa or *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015) by Susan Abulhawa, follow a single narrator or a single migration experience. In contrast,

Salt Houses traces four generations of a Palestinian family across different geographical locations, presenting shifting experiences of memory, identity, and belonging. The novel received the Dayton Literary Peace Prize for Fiction in 2018.

Existing studies on *Salt Houses* primarily focus on themes of trauma, displacement, and fragmented identity. Some scholars focus on how traumatic experiences and memories are transmitted across generations, emphasizing remembrance as a form of resistance to historical erasure (Salam, 2022; Salam & Mahfouz, 2020). Others highlight how repeated displacement produces identity instability and ongoing cultural negotiation within diasporic life (Rubab et al., 2019). Additional studies draw attention to the role of material objects as "memory archives" and to Alyan's use of multiple narrative voices in representing diasporic experience (Aladylah, 2019; Noreen & Ahmad, 2024). While these studies collectively demonstrate the importance of memory and displacement in the novel, they largely focus on what is explicitly remembered, narrated, or materially preserved. In contrast, this study shifts attention to what remains unspoken, examining inherited silence as an intergenerational mechanism through which memory, emotion, and diasporic identity are also transmitted.

Foregrounding silence as an overlooked dimension of diasporic experience, this study examines inherited silence as an intergenerational mechanism shaping diasporic identity in *Salt Houses*. Rather than treating silence merely as a consequence of trauma, the study considers how unarticulated family histories and emotional experiences influence the transmission of memory and belonging across generations. By shifting attention from explicit remembrance to forms of restricted articulation, this study introduces a new perspective on intergenerational transmission within Palestinian diasporic literature.

This discussion is particularly relevant in contemporary contexts marked by forced migration, postcolonial displacement, and ongoing debates surrounding silenced histories and contemporary diaspora politics. As communities across the world continue to negotiate the long-term effects of displacement and intergenerational trauma, understanding how memory and identity are transmitted not only through explicit remembrance but also through silence becomes increasingly important. Examining inherited silence therefore contributes to broader discussions of how diasporic communities preserve, negotiate, and transform collective identity across generations.

Theoretically, this study draws on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory and Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity and diaspora. The study employs qualitative close reading of narrative gaps, silences, and emotional atmospheres within the novel. By examining how meaning is communicated through absence and restricted articulation, this research extends discussions of intergenerational transmission beyond explicit storytelling. It also contributes to literary and cultural studies by demonstrating how silence functions as a meaningful narrative strategy in diasporic literature.

Therefore, this study addresses the following research question: How does inherited silence function as an intergenerational mechanism shaping diasporic identity in Hala Alyan's *Salt Houses*? More specifically, it examines how silence mediates memory transmission, emotional inheritance, and epistemic uncertainty across generations.

2. Literature Review

Scholarship on *Salt Houses* by Hala Alyan has primarily examined themes of trauma, displacement, and diasporic identity. Salam & Mahfouz (2020) argue that the novel portrays

transgenerational trauma as a force shaping identity across generations, while Rubab et al. (2019) emphasize identity fragmentation caused by repeated displacement and shifting cultural affiliations. Although both studies focus on diasporic instability, Salam and Mahfouz foreground inherited trauma, whereas Rubab et al. concentrate on the negotiation of multiple identities. Together, these studies position memory as a central mechanism sustaining diasporic identity.

Other scholars have explored how memory is mediated through narrative structure, collective remembrance, and material traces. Salam (2022) interprets acts of remembering as forms of resistance against historical erasure within Palestinian diasporic literature. Similarly, Noreen & Ahmad (2024) focus on “memory archives,” such as letters and heirlooms, as tangible carriers of intergenerational memory. In contrast, Aladylah (2019) focuses on the novel’s polyphonic narrative structure and argues that multiple narrative voices produce layered representations of displacement and belonging. Collectively, these studies show that memory is mediated through narrative form, material objects, and collective remembrance. However, despite these contributions, important dimensions of transmission remain insufficiently examined.

This study addresses that gap by positioning inherited silence as a central mechanism of cross-generational transmission. Although previous scholarship has largely concentrated on trauma, memory, and identity formation, no existing study has systematically examined silence as a structured mechanism of transmission in *Salt Houses*. As O’Neill et al. (2018) suggest, intergenerational trauma is often accompanied by silence and emotional restraint that shape familial relationships and historical understanding. However, the specific role of silence as a narrative and affective mechanism remains underexplored in studies of *Salt Houses*.

Beyond trauma and memory studies, silence scholarship increasingly conceptualizes silence not merely as the absence of speech, but as a meaningful social and communicative practice (Murray & Durrheim, 2019). Within intergenerational memory studies, Leksana (2023) argues that silence may function not as forgetting or repression, but as a strategy for coping with trauma and negotiating relationships with the past. Likewise, postmemory scholarship suggests that memories may continue to circulate across generations even in the absence of direct articulation. Together, these perspectives position silence as a medium through which meanings and historical knowledge are transmitted.

Theoretically, this research draws on Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory and Stuart Hall’s theory of cultural identity. Hirsch (2008; 2012) conceptualizes postmemory as the transmission of traumatic experiences through mediated forms such as stories, images, and affective atmospheres. Meanwhile, Hall (2023) defines cultural identity as a continuous process shaped through history, representation, and positionality rather than fixed origins. While Hirsch emphasizes the mediated inheritance of trauma, Hall conceptualizes identity as an ongoing process of positionality and becoming. Read together, these frameworks enable the study to examine how inherited silence shapes both memory transmission and diasporic identity formation. These frameworks further provide a basis for understanding how epistemic gaps and forms of not-knowing emerge through restricted access to family histories and collective memory.

Unlike previous studies that prioritize explicit remembrance or material archives, this research examines how absence and restricted articulation shape diasporic identity and emotional inheritance. By integrating postmemory and cultural identity theory, this study extends existing scholarship on *Salt Houses* by demonstrating that diasporic belonging is shaped not only through what is remembered, but also through forms of silence that regulate access to memory and history.

3. Research Method

This study employs qualitative literary analysis through literary criticism and close textual analysis. Qualitative research is applied to interpret meanings and cultural significance within literary texts, as Creswell & Poth (2018) note. The study focuses on how inherited silence operates as a mechanism of intergenerational transmission in *Salt Houses* by Hala Alyan.

The data sources in this research are divided into primary and secondary data. The primary source is *Salt Houses* (2017), from which the data are drawn in the form of narrative elements, dialogues, and textual passages that reflect inherited silence. These include forms of withheld family history, emotional restraint, unarticulated trauma, and narrative gaps. The secondary data consist of scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles that provide theoretical and analytical support related to postmemory, trauma transmission, and cultural identity.

The data collection process was conducted through close textual reading of the novel. Ohrvik (2024) emphasizes that close reading requires attentiveness to textual detail and meaning, supporting this study's methodological approach. Close reading is particularly appropriate for this study because inherited silence often operates indirectly through omissions, fragmented narration, emotional restraint, and affective atmospheres rather than through explicit statements. Since silence emerges through what remains unarticulated, close reading enables careful attention to subtle textual patterns and narrative absences that might otherwise remain overlooked. Through repeated and focused reading, passages indicating inherited silence were identified and documented. The collected data were classified into three categories: (1) withheld family history, (2) emotional restraint, and (3) epistemic gaps or not-knowing. Irrelevant data were excluded to maintain focus on inherited silence as the central analytical concern.

After the data were collected, they were analyzed descriptively through close textual analysis. Passages were selected based on their relevance to inherited silence, particularly moments in which family history is withheld, emotional expression is restrained, traumatic experiences are indirectly represented, or characters encounter gaps in knowledge about the past. The analysis focused on recurring textual patterns of omission, emotional restraint, narrative interruption, and epistemic uncertainty, which were examined through narrative elements such as dialogue, focalization, narrative gaps, and emotional atmospheres.

To conduct systematic interpretation, these textual features were systematically interpreted through Hirsch's concept of postmemory and Hall's theory of cultural identity to identify how silence structures familial transmission and diasporic identity formation. Hirsch's framework was used to examine how trauma and displacement are transmitted

indirectly through affective atmospheres, fragmented narratives, and incomplete histories, while Hall's theory was employed to analyze how such silences shape diasporic belonging and historical positioning.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of inherited silence in *Salt Houses* identifies three interconnected patterns that shape memory transmission and diasporic identity across generations. First, silence appears through the avoidance and partial withholding of family history, particularly in relation to displacement and loss. Second, silence operates affectively through emotional restraint and habitual quietness, regulating how emotions are expressed within the family. Third, inherited silence produces epistemic gaps or forms of not-knowing that influence how later generations understand and articulate their identities.

In this study, fragmentation refers to incomplete or discontinuous access to family history, while not-knowing refers to epistemic uncertainty produced by restricted transmission. Narrative compression refers to the reduction of complex historical experiences into simplified or abbreviated expressions, whereas suppression refers to moments in which articulation becomes possible but is ultimately withheld. Together, these patterns suggest that silence may function as an intergenerational mechanism shaping memory, emotional inheritance, and diasporic belonging.

4.1 Inherited Silence as Avoidance and Concealment

This section addresses the first research question concerning how inherited silence operates through the withholding of family history in *Salt Houses*. The findings demonstrate that silence frequently appears through partial articulation and selective avoidance, particularly in relation to trauma, displacement, and historical loss.

This pattern is evident in the statement: *"The adults rarely speak of these things, giving vague responses to questions. It is clear they find this talk painful, and Riham isn't the type of girl to ask for more"* (Alyan, 2017, p. 98). In this scene, while helping her grandmother in Amman, Riham recalls hearing about a garden in Palestine that was destroyed by fire during the war and links this memory to her father's prolonged absence. However, the relationship between these events remains unclear to her, as the adults never fully explain their significance.

Silence is constructed not only through what is withheld but through how it is expressed. The phrase "these things" exemplifies semantic vagueness, avoiding direct reference to traumatic events. Such indirection is a recognized feature of trauma discourse, where unspeakable experiences are often expressed through avoidance, abstraction, and referential gaps (Bifulco, 2021). Similarly, the use of expressions such as "rarely speak" and "vague responses" indicates that communication is not absent but carefully limited. This produces a fragmented narrative structure, as elements such as the garden, the war, and the father's absence remain only loosely connected. Trauma memories are often fragmented and lack coherent temporal structure (Bedard-Gilligan et al., 2017) and literary narratives frequently mirror this through disjointed storytelling (Batool & Khan, 2023).

In addition, the use of child focalization further restricts the narrative to the character's limited perception, producing partial knowledge and interpretive gaps. As Genette (1980) argues, internal focalization restricts narration to what a character knows or

perceives, inherently limiting access to complete information. This restricted perspective often results in uncertainty and fragmented representation, particularly in trauma narratives (Hayati, 2025; Myketiak et al., 2017). Such perspectives are particularly significant in contexts of displacement, where childhood perspectives are shaped by evolving and contextually mediated processes of remembering, in which traumatic experiences are continually reinterpreted rather than directly recalled (Nasser, 2025). Silence, therefore, is not only thematic but embedded in the narrative form itself.

This dynamic reflects postmemory, in which the past is inherited through fragments and absences rather than coherent narration (Hirsch, 2012). In this context, silence does not prevent transmission but shapes how it occurs, influencing the ways in which memory circulates within the family. This aligns with Caruth's view that trauma resists full articulation and often appears in indirect and fragmented forms (Caruth, 1991). At the same time, the narrative suggests that fragmentation is not only psychological but socially embedded, shaping patterns of communication across generations.

A similar pattern can be observed in the way historical events are simplified and only partially communicated to younger characters. This is evident in the following exchange: *"The adults won't elaborate"* (Alyan, 2017, p. 200) and *"There's a war. People are fighting, bad things are happening"* (Alyan, 2017, p. 200). This moment occurs when Linah attempts to understand the situation of the war based on what she hears from her parents. Although she is exposed to references to Palestine, Israel, along with references to war, land, and people dying, these ideas are presented to her in generalized and incomplete forms.

The phrase "bad things are happening" is particularly significant because it compresses political violence into abstract vocabulary stripped of historical specificity. Instead of explaining displacement, occupation, or death in concrete terms, the adults replace detail with simplification. This simplification reduces political violence to emotional awareness without historical clarity, allowing Linah to sense that something is wrong without fully understanding it.

The declarative sentence "the adults won't elaborate," further reinforces deliberate narrative restriction. Communication is not interrupted accidentally; it is consciously controlled. Rather than functioning merely as an absence of speech, silence may operate as a meaningful social and communicative practice that structures what can and cannot be said within particular relationships (Murray & Durrheim, 2019). This creates what Philips (1973) describes as narrative compression, where complex events are condensed into abbreviated and incomplete forms. In the novel, compression becomes part of intergenerational communication itself. Historical trauma is not erased entirely but transmitted in reduced and fragmented ways.

This moment reflects indirect intergenerational inheritance, as Linah engages with a past she did not directly experience but inherits indirectly through family memory (Hirsch, 2008). The adults' refusal to elaborate does not prevent transmission; rather, it shapes its form. Instead of receiving a coherent historical account, Linah inherits a fragmented understanding of the past, formed through imaginative investment and projection rather than direct recollection.

The statement "the adults won't elaborate" thus reflects not merely a lack of information but a mode of transmission in itself. In this sense, silence may function as a vehicle of transmission, producing what Eva Hoffman describes as a deeply internalized but "strangely unknown" past that continues to shape the second generation's perception

(Hoffman, 2017). Linah's fragmented understanding is therefore not a failure of communication but a defining feature of indirect memory transmission.

The consequences of this pattern become more visible when Linah is required to articulate her identity. When confronted by a peer who questions her identity and associates Palestinians with violence. Caught off guard and placed under social pressure, she remains silent, not only because of the accusation itself but also because of her limited understanding of her own background: *"...no one ever really talked about being Palestinian in her house... But her voice felt ghosted and so she said nothing at all"* (Alyan, 2017, p. 201–202). Her silence reflects not only hesitation but the absence of accessible narratives through which identity can be expressed.

This moment is shaped through both linguistic and structural features. The phrase "no one ever really talked" indicates habitual avoidance, while the metaphor "her voice felt ghosted" suggests symbolic suppression and difficulty articulating identity. The shift from "wanting to say something" to "so she said nothing at all" emphasizes the breakdown between thought and expression. Unlike earlier moments of narrative compression, this scene reflects narrative suppression, where articulation becomes possible but is ultimately withheld.

This scene demonstrates how inherited silence limits not only knowledge but also the ability to articulate identity. Without access to coherent narratives, Linah cannot position herself within a broader historical framework. As Hall (2023) argues, identity is continuously produced within representation and remains always in process, shaped through discursive positioning rather than fixed essence. In this case, limited access to historical knowledge restricts Linah's ability to construct a coherent account of herself. Her silence thus reflects a lack of discursive resources necessary for self-positioning, leaving her identity fragmented and difficult to articulate.

The long-term consequences of this restricted transmission become more visible in Manar's reflection: *"I thought I had more time... to ask her things"* (Alyan, 2017, p. 237). This moment occurs as Alia's health declines, marking a turning point in intergenerational transmission. As a central bearer of familial memory, Alia represents a key link between past and present. Throughout her life, her granddaughter Manar had opportunities to ask questions about the family's past, particularly regarding displacement, homeland, and earlier generations but these moments were often delayed or avoided. The family environment, shaped by emotional restraint and selective storytelling, did not encourage direct questioning, leading her to assume that there would always be more time to learn.

This scene is shaped through interruption and ellipsis, most clearly in the broken utterance "I thought I had more time—." The dash signals a disruption in speech, reflecting both emotional hesitation and the belated realization of loss. This interruption marks a sense of incompleteness. It reflects the unfinished process of cross-generational transmission. The phrase "to ask her things" remains deliberately vague, reinforcing the idea that what is lost is not only specific information, but an entire category of unarticulated knowledge. The narrative thus foregrounds absence not only at the level of content but also through form, where what cannot be fully spoken corresponds to what can no longer be recovered.

This moment highlights the fragility of inherited mediation. Because memory depends on familial mediation, the loss of the memory-holder disrupts continuity. In this case, the continuity of memory inheritance is disrupted before it can be fully realized. The

past is not only inherited in fragments, but also partially lost due to the delayed engagement with it. What Manar confronts, therefore, is not simply the incompleteness of postmemory, but its fragility, its dependence on the continued presence of those who carry and transmit memory. The absence of direct narration, combined with the eventual loss of the memory-holder, results in what can be understood as a breakdown of postmemorial continuity. Martínez-Alfaro (2016) discussion of intergenerational silence is useful here because she argues that silence often becomes internalized by younger generations, producing what she terms a "double wall" between memory-holders and descendants. In *Salt Houses*, younger characters inherit not only fragmented memory but also hesitation regarding whether painful histories should be discussed at all.

While this first category demonstrates how silence restricts access to historical narration, the following section examines how silence becomes internalized affectively through emotional restraint and habitual quietness.

4.2 Inherited Silence as Emotional Restraint

The second finding addresses how inherited silence functions affectively within family relationships. Unlike the previous section, which focused primarily on restricted historical narration, this category examines how silence regulates emotional expression and becomes normalized as interpersonal behavior. This pattern appears in the scene: "...*All three stand in silence, the unsaid a living thing between them*" (Alyan, 2017, p. 22).

In this scene, hesitation and silence emerge during a family interaction between Atef, Mustafa and Salma. Although there is an opportunity for further discussion, Atef and Mustafa remain quiet, and certain thoughts are left unsaid. A few months prior to this interaction, Mustafa and Atef were arrested at a demonstration in Jerusalem because they were motivated by the mosque youths. Since then, Salma has prohibited them from becoming involved with the mosque youths (*shabab*) and from getting into trouble again.

This silence is constructed through metaphor and narrative emphasis. The phrase "the unsaid a living thing between them" personifies silence, transforming it into an active presence that occupies space, carries weight, and mediates relationships between characters. Rather than resolving tension through dialogue, the narrative sustains it through silence. Ephratt (2008) notes that silence may operate communicatively by conveying meaning indirectly through shared emotional awareness. In Alyan's novel, silence frequently performs this relational function.

This representation reflects trauma's indirect and delayed expression (Caruth, 1991). The silence shared between the characters reflects the presence of an experience that remains difficult to articulate, yet continues to shape their interaction. Importantly, this silence is not empty; it signals a mutual awareness of what cannot be fully expressed, indicating that communication operates at an affective level rather than through explicit language.

At the same time, this moment highlights the affective dimension of postmemory, where transmission does not rely solely on narrative content but also occurs through mediated and affective forms of inheritance (Hirsch, 2012). The younger generation, in turn, inherits not only fragments of the past, but also the conditions under which that past is encountered, often through absence, gaps, and displacement. In this way, memory is shaped by what cannot be fully reconstructed or coherently narrated, influencing how individuals relate to the past and to their own emotional experiences.

This pattern becomes more explicit in the statement: *"If it hurts, leave it"* (Alyan, 2017, p. 130). This moment occurs when Alia observes her daughter Souad reacting emotionally while watching a news report. Souad's outburst prompts Salma to remark that she has "her brother's blood," referring to Mustafa, Alia's brother who was killed during the war in Palestine. The comment draws an implicit connection between Souad's temperament and Mustafa's memory, reintroducing a figure whose presence has largely remained unspoken within the family. It is at this point that the narrative reveals that Mustafa's name is avoided for years at a time, following an unspoken agreement between Alia and Atef that painful subjects should not be discussed. The reference to Mustafa thus emerges only indirectly, triggered by resemblance rather than deliberate recollection, highlighting how his memory persists within the family despite the absence of open acknowledgment.

Silence is therefore articulated as a habitual and normative practice. The narrative reinforces this through the prolonged avoidance of Mustafa's name: *"Mustafa, whose name they go entire years at a time without speaking"* (Alyan, 2017, p. 130). This prolonged absence of speech is then codified in the directive, *"If it hurts, leave it,"* which condenses a potentially complex emotional reality into a simple rule. Its generalized structure, lacking a specific subject, gives it a universal quality, transforming a situational response into an internalized norm. This compression reflects a broader pattern of silence in the narrative, where emotional complexity is contained rather than elaborated, reflecting the indirect and mediated nature of transmission (Hirsch, 2012).

Silence becomes a learned response, transmitted across generations as both an emotional strategy and a communicative constraint. In this sense, what is inherited is not only memory, but the instruction to avoid engaging with it directly.

This dynamic becomes more visible in moments where articulation is possible but ultimately withheld. The phrase *"He wants to tell her everything... But there is only silence"* (Alyan, 2017, p. 238) highlights the tension between intention and expression, suggesting that silence here results not from absence, but from suppression at the moment speech becomes possible. This occurs after Manar regrets not asking her grandmother, Alia, about the family's past before her health declines. As the conversation turns to earlier life in Nablus, Atef appears ready to speak, but remains silent. Manar does not interrupt this silence, allowing the moment to pass. The scene thus shows that memory is emotionally present, yet remains unarticulated within the family.

This tension is created through the contrast between the expectation of speech and its eventual absence. The phrase *"He wants to tell her everything"* creates an anticipation of disclosure, suggesting that Atef's memories and emotions are ready to be expressed. This expectation is reinforced through the narration of his internal state—his tears, his awareness of his grandchildren, and his recognition of the significance of the moment, which positions him on the verge of speaking. However, when Manar addresses him and he responds, *"What?"*, that possibility of expression is immediately interrupted, as *"there is only silence."* This contrast between emotional readiness and verbal absence highlights a disconnect between internal experience and external expression. Rather than signaling incompleteness, the scene presents silence as withheld articulation: the meaning is present and emotionally formed, but remains unspoken, showing silence as an active constraint rather than a passive absence.

This aligns with the view that traumatic experience is not fully accessible at the moment it occurs and often emerges belatedly and indirectly (Caruth, 1991). Atef's recollection of his past with Alia is emotionally vivid and internally accessible, yet it cannot be translated into speech. The silence that follows is therefore not a sign of forgetting, but of the difficulty of articulating an experience that remains affectively present. These limits of articulation are shaped not only by individual experience but also by broader social and intergenerational conditions (Thambinathan et al., 2023).

This scene reveals a limit of transmission: memory persists, but transmission fails at the moment of articulation (Hirsch, 2012). Manar is positioned as a potential recipient and Atef as its bearer, yet the transfer does not occur. Silence thus marks a disruption in transmission, where memory remains present but unshared, raising the question not only of what is remembered, but whether it can be shared at all.

Importantly, Manar does not challenge Atef's silence. Instead, she accepts it and allows the conversation to end. This response suggests that emotional restraint has become internalized across generations. Silence is therefore sustained relationally: older generations withhold articulation, while younger generations learn not to disrupt that withholding.

These examples demonstrate that inherited silence gradually evolves from restricted narration into habitual emotional practice. What begins as avoidance of traumatic history becomes embedded within everyday interaction and emotional behavior. The result is a family environment in which emotional intensity remains present yet difficult to articulate openly.

These affective forms of silence ultimately contribute to epistemic uncertainty, where later generations inherit emotional traces of trauma without access to coherent explanatory narratives. This transition leads to the third category of analysis: inherited silence as not-knowing.

4.3 Inherited Silence as Not-Knowing

The final finding addresses how inherited silence produces epistemic gaps or forms of not-knowing that shape diasporic belonging formation. While the previous sections focused on restricted narration and emotional restraint, this category examines how accumulated silences affect later generations' ability to articulate historical belonging and cultural identity. This dynamic becomes evident when Manar is detained at the Tel Aviv airport while attempting to visit Palestine and is questioned about her family history, particularly her grandfather's displacement from Nablus. Unable to provide clear answers, she repeatedly responds, "*I don't know,*" *Manar said to the officer over and over*" (Alyan, 2017, p. 247).

The repetition of "I don't know" reflects more than personal uncertainty. It reveals the consequences of interrupted familial transmission. Manar has inherited emotional connections to Palestine, yet she lacks the historical narratives necessary to explain that connection in institutional or discursive terms. The interrogation therefore exposes a conflict between lived diasporic experience and external expectations that identity must be verifiable through coherent historical knowledge.

This illustrates Hall's notion of identity as discursively constructed and relational (Hall, 2023). Manar's inability to provide a coherent narrative does not indicate the absence of identity, but rather the difficulty of aligning her lived experience with the forms through which identity is recognized and validated.

This condition corresponds to what Harris (2020) describes as a “knowing–not knowing” relationship to traumatic history, where descendants remain emotionally aware of the past while lacking direct narrative access to it. Similarly, Leksana (2023) argues that silence does not necessarily indicate forgetting or repression, but may function as a way of navigating relationships with traumatic histories. Read together, these perspectives suggest that silence may sustain affective attachment to the past while simultaneously limiting access to narrative knowledge. The novel demonstrates that inherited silence shapes not only what later generations know but also the terms through which identity must be explained and recognized.

This pattern suggests that inherited silence does not simply limit what is known about the past, but shapes the very terms through which identity must be explained and recognized. Furthermore, this moment shows how inherited silence creates a gap between internal experience and the need to provide clear, communicable knowledge. In the interrogation setting, not-knowing becomes a point of pressure, as what remains unspoken within the family is exposed when clarity is externally required. Manar’s repeated “I don’t know” also suggests that silence has been internalized as a mode of response, where restraint takes precedence over assertion.

This condition is rooted in earlier patterns of silence. When asked about her grandfather, Manar recalls not stories, but his habitual quietness: “...entire evenings could go by without him speaking” (Alyan, 2017, p. 247).

Growing up, Atef rarely spoke about his life, and extended periods of time would pass without conversation or storytelling. The phrase “entire evenings” emphasizes duration and repetition, indicating that silence is not occasional but routine. Rather than inheriting stories, Manar inherits absence itself. Frosh (2019) argues that traumatic inheritance frequently occurs through indirect familial atmospheres and behavioral patterns alongside explicit narration. In Alyan’s novel, silence becomes one of those inherited atmospheres. This interpretation also resonates with Leksana’s (2023) discussion of postmemory, which suggests that silence does not necessarily signify forgetting or repression, but may shape how later generations relate to traumatic histories even when stories remain unspoken.

The effects of not-knowing become more explicit when Manar struggles to identify her grandparents’ origins: “Was it Nablus?... Had there been somewhere before that?” (Alyan, 2017, p. 247). Even foundational information about her grandparents remains unclear, and the addition of a question mark signals doubt about the accuracy of what she knows. This reflects how inherited silence disrupts the transmission of foundational knowledge, leaving individuals without a clear sense of origin.

This fractured representation significantly shapes identity formation in diaspora. Throughout the novel, identity emerges not as stable inheritance but as ongoing negotiation shaped by displacement, partial memory, and interrupted transmission. Hall’s theory of cultural identity is especially relevant here because identity is constructed through processes of positioning rather than fixed origins. However, *Salt Houses* demonstrates that these processes become more difficult when access to historical narratives is fragmented or incomplete.

This internal condition of not-knowing is further shaped by external perception, during her visit to the West Bank, Manar senses that others see her as “not like us.” (Alyan, 2017, p. 245). As she writes an email to her family and friends reflecting on her visit. In the

message, she describes how the Palestinians she has met have been consistently kind toward her, but she senses an underlying tone of pity in their behavior.

Importantly, no one explicitly states that she is “not like us.” Instead, this is Manar’s interpretation of how she is being perceived. Her assumption emerges from subtle social cues, kindness combined with distance, which she reads as an indication of difference. This again reflects identity as a process of positioning rather than fixed belonging (Hall, 2023). Manar’s sense of difference thus arises not only from what she knows, but from how she is read and situated by others in specific cultural contexts.

This sense of difference is further reinforced in the description of her background as “A mutt” (Alyan, 2017, p. 240). This moment reflects Manar’s awareness of how her identity is perceived across different contexts, particularly through markers such as accent. Her recognition as Lebanese rather than Palestinian highlights how identity is read and categorized externally, often through limited or visible signs. The reference to her background “Lebanese father, Palestinian mother, Paris, America” (Alyan, 2017, p. 240) emphasizes the multiplicity of her diasporic experience.

The label “mutt,” used casually by her close friend Seham, points to this multiplicity rather than a single, stable origin. While the term may appear informal or even affectionate, it also underscores how her identity is composed of overlapping affiliations that do not easily resolve into a unified category.

This reinforces the idea that cultural identity is not fixed, but continuously produced through displacement and difference (Hall, 2023). Manar’s identity is not located in a singular origin, but produced through multiple trajectories of displacement and cultural interaction. The tension in this moment arises not simply from hybridity itself, but from the difficulty of positioning that hybridity within dominant frameworks of representation.

Taken together, these findings suggest that inherited silence significantly influences diasporic identity formation in *Salt Houses*. Silence restricts access to historical narration, regulates emotional expression, and produces epistemic uncertainty regarding origin and belonging. As a result, identity becomes shaped not only by displacement itself but also by restricted access to familial memory and intergenerational knowledge.

More broadly, the novel suggests that silence in Middle Eastern diasporic literature should not be understood solely as absence or repression. Instead, silence may function as a narrative and affective structure through which memory, trauma, and belonging are mediated across generations. In contexts shaped by war, migration, and political rupture, disrupted continuity becomes part of how diasporic subjects encounter history and construct identity.

However, this analysis is limited to a single literary text and therefore may not fully represent the broader complexity of diasporic literature. Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate how inherited silence may function as an important mechanism shaping memory transmission and identity formation within contemporary Middle Eastern diasporic narratives.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that silence in *Salt Houses* functions as a structuring force that shapes memory, emotion, and diasporic identity across generations. The findings show that inherited silence operates through three interconnected patterns: avoidance and concealment of family history, emotional restraint, and epistemic gaps or forms of not-

knowing. Rather than interrupting transmission, silence mediates how memory, knowledge, and emotion circulate within the family, shaping the conditions through which the past becomes accessible and meaningful.

This study contributes to postmemory and trauma studies by identifying silence as a communicative mode of transmission, expanding existing frameworks beyond explicit narration and imagery. By shifting focus from memory content to transmission conditions, this study offers a novel lens for analyzing diasporic identity. The findings further suggest that silence should not merely be understood as absence within diasporic narratives, but as an active structure through which memory, identity, and historical consciousness are mediated across generations.

This insight may inform broader analyses of diasporic literature and cultural memory, encouraging scholars to consider silence as an active dimension of transmission. However, this analysis is limited to a single literary text and may not fully represent the broader complexity of diasporic literature. Future research could examine silence in other diasporic texts, particularly Lebanese, Syrian, or Iraqi narratives, to test the applicability of this framework across different cultural and historical contexts.

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GENDER PERFORMATIVITY AND MANIPULATION IN GILLIAN FLYNN'S *GONE GIRL*

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Abstract

This research analyzes Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012) to explore the construction of gender identity through manipulation in modern marriage. Marriage is presented not merely as a personal relationship, but as an institution shaped by social expectations and gender norms. This study examines manipulation not only as a behavioral tendency, but also as a form of gender performativity through which femininity may be strategically enacted within a patriarchal context. The research employs a qualitative method using two types of data: primary and secondary. The primary data source is Flynn's novel, while the secondary data consist of journals, articles, and other relevant references. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, the study suggests that gender performance can function as a means of negotiating power within intimate relationships rather than merely as a repeated social practice. The findings reveal that marriage in the novel frequently operates as a social performance, in which maintaining appearances becomes more important than the relationship itself. When this performance can no longer be sustained, conflict emerges, and manipulation becomes a strategic mechanism for negotiating control and public legitimacy. Thus, manipulation is effective because gender performance has already been socially accepted and normalized. Furthermore, the findings indicate that modern marriage can be understood as a space in which gender identity is continuously shaped and negotiated through social expectations and relational dynamics, suggesting that women are not merely passive participants, but also possess agency to influence and control the direction of the relationship.

Keywords: *feminism; gender identity; gender performativity; manipulation; modern marriage.*

1. Introduction

Amid the struggle for equality, women still face external barriers and internal stigmas that limit their opportunities and potential (Cin, 2026; García-Cid et al., 2025). These constraints persist not merely because of structural inequality, but because gender roles are continuously reproduced through socially accepted performances that normalize inequality (Aisyah & Prautomo, 2025). In many cases, women are often belittled, objectified, and seen as weak. This condition becomes more complex within marriage, women are seen as an

inferior object, obligated to obey their husband's authority and limited to domestic roles (Ali, McGarry & Maqsood, 2022). As a result, inequality operates subtly, often disguised as normative marital roles rather than explicit oppression.

Feminism is fundamentally concerned with dismantling gender-based oppression and advocating for women's rights, autonomy, and freedom of expression (Mohajan, 2022). It further seeks to promote gender equality by challenging social, cultural, and institutional forms of discrimination that perpetuate unequal power relations between men and women (Myesha & Puspitasari, 2025). Rather than approaching feminism solely as a historical or political movement, this study adopts Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, which conceptualizes gender not as a fixed or innate identity but as a socially constructed effect produced through repeated acts, behaviors, and discursive practices shaped by prevailing social norms and expectations (Utami, Siwi, & Suryani, 2022). From this perspective, gender is continuously constituted and reinforced through performance, whereby individuals repeatedly enact behaviors associated with culturally prescribed notions of femininity and masculinity. This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to the study of marriage, as marriage functions as a performative social institution in which gender identities, roles, and expectations are not merely expressed but actively negotiated, reproduced, and contested through everyday interactions.

Within literary studies, feminist criticism has long been used to explore how text reflect and challenge gender inequality. However, contemporary analysis increasingly shifts toward examining how gender identities are constructed and performed within specific social contexts, rather than merely portraying women as victims of oppression. Previous studies have examined female characters in literature as representations of resistance against patriarchy, such as in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Bekler, 2022), *Jane Eyre* (Widiatmi, 2017), and *The Handmaid's Tale* (Calvi, Rankin, Clauss, & Byrd-Craven, 2020). These works highlight women's struggle for autonomy and agency within restrictive systems. However, such approaches often emphasize resistance and victimhood, rather than exploring how women may also actively navigate and manipulate these systems.

Besides the novels that have been mentioned earlier, there is another work that addresses women's identity and gender equality. *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn, published in 2012. The novel also portrays oppression against women, but it especially explores how marriage can function as a shield through which women may seek equality. Unlike conventional feminist narratives, this novel presents a complex portrayal of marriage, where manipulation, performance, and gender expectations intersect in ambiguous ways.

Previous studies primarily position Amy Dunne as either a psychopathic manipulator or a femme fatale figure. However, limited attention has been given to how her manipulation functions as a performative strategy within patriarchal gender structures. This study argues that manipulation in the novel is not merely an individual psychological trait, but a strategic enactment of gender roles that are already socially normalized.

Drawing on Judith Butler's framework of gender performativity, gender is understood not as an inherent identity but as an effect of repeated and socially regulated acts that become normalized over time. These repeated performances create the illusion of a stable identity, making certain behaviors appear natural and unquestionable within society. Because these norms are already internalized and socially recognize, they can be strategically reproduced which allows individuals to operate within expectations while subtly negotiating power and control. Within the context of marriage, gendered behaviors are not

just maintained but also used to shape identity and enable manipulation within patriarchal systems.

In general, this novel tells the story of a marriage filled with manipulation, lies, and gender roles. More importantly, it reveals how marriage operates as a performative institution in which both partners must continuously enact idealized gender identities to sustain social legitimacy. Within this framework, manipulation becomes a tool through which individuals negotiate power and control. Therefore, this study focuses on examining manipulation as a performative strategy within modern marriage, particularly in relation to gender identity construction.

In doing this research, three research questions are proposed. The research questions are: How is modern marriage portrayed in *Gone Girl*? How does manipulation function within marital relationships in the novel? How is gender identity constructed through performative acts in the novel?

2. Literature Review

Several studies focus on Nick and Amy's marriage as merely a staged performance used to satisfy social expectation (Aditya, 2016; Kaushik, 2025; Osborne, 2017; Tyas, 2022). However, these studies tend to treat marriage primarily as a social façade without fully examining how such performances function as a strategic act that enable power negotiation within the relationship. In addition, other scholars interpret the novel through psychological and narrative lenses, framing manipulation as a deception used to construct false identities and gain public sympathy (Abdulrahman & Al-Abbasi, 2023; Bain, 2023; Kumar, Shukla, & Tiwari, 2025; Sutrisno, Ayuningsih, & Rachmawati, 2025). While insightful, these perspectives often reduce manipulation to individual pathology or narrative technique, overlooking its embeddedness within broader gender expectations. Besides that, studies examining Amy's charm and intelligence highlight her as a classic femme fatale figure (Subbi, 2019; Couch, 2022). These scholars frequently position her actions as deviant rather than as calculated responses shaped by patriarchal norms.

Taken together, previous studies predominantly interpret Amy's manipulation as psychological deviance, narrative strategy, manipulation, or archetypal femininity. However, these interpretations remain limited because they do not fully address how manipulation operates as a gendered performance rooted in socially constructed expectations. This creates a theoretical gap in understanding how gender norms themselves can be mobilized as tools of control rather than merely constraints imposed on women.

This study offers a different perspective by examining marriage as a strategic space in which gender roles are not only performed but deliberately manipulated to negotiate power, autonomy, and identity within a patriarchal framework. Rather than positioning women solely as victims of patriarchal oppression, this study argues that gender norms can be appropriated and reworked as instruments of agency. In doing so, it shifts the focus from resistance against patriarchy to the strategic utilization of its structure.

To gather enough data for this study, Judith Butler's feminist theory in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993) will be used. In general, Butler examines the idea of gender performativity and argues that gender identity is not something innate, but a series of repeated acts that create the illusion of a stable gender. Through this repetition, gender becomes intelligible within society, meaning that individuals must align their behavior with regulatory norms to be socially recognized as "normal" or acceptable. In this

sense, gender functions as a social script that structures behavior while simultaneously masking its constructed nature.

Butler also emphasizes that because gender is constituted through repetition rather than essence, it always contains the possibility of variation and subversion. This opens space for gender performative agency, where individuals may strategically repeat or manipulate gender norms to produce certain effects or advantages. Gender is therefore not only constraint but also a site of negotiation. In this regard, this study argues that Amy's action in *Gone Girl* demonstrate how femininity can be performed in ways that align with dominant expectations while simultaneously being used as a strategy of control, showing how gender norms can be appropriated rather than merely resisted.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach within the framework of literary criticism to analyze the selected data. Qualitative research enables researchers to examine an object comprehensively and holistically, allowing for an in-depth understanding of its underlying meanings and complexities (Putri, 2018). Rather than relying on numerical measurement, qualitative inquiry seeks to explore and interpret phenomena in relation to real-world issues and social contexts (Usman, Al-Hendawi, & Bulut, 2025). This approach is particularly appropriate for the present study, as the primary data consist of textual representations found in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*.

The study adopts feminist literary criticism as its principal analytical perspective and combines it with qualitative textual analysis to investigate the construction of gender identity, manipulation, and marital power relations within the novel. The analysis was conducted through a close reading of the text, which enabled a detailed examination of narrative elements, character interactions, and discursive representations of gender. Relevant textual passages were systematically selected based on their significance to the research focus, particularly those illustrating gender performativity, manipulation strategies, and the dynamics of power within marriage.

Following data collection, the selected textual evidence was coded and organized into thematic categories through an inductive analytical process. This procedure facilitated the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and narrative structures that contribute to the representation of gender relations in the novel. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity served as the primary interpretive framework, guiding the analysis of how repeated gendered acts and performances construct identity and function as mechanisms of manipulation and control within marital relationships.

The primary source of data is Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, while secondary data consist of scholarly books, journal articles, and other academic sources that provide theoretical and contextual support for the analysis. The research instrument employed in this study was an observation sheet used to record textual data in the form of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs relevant to the research objectives. Data collection was conducted through intensive reading, textual observation, and interpretive examination of the novel. Passages deemed relevant to the research questions were identified, documented, and classified according to their thematic significance.

The analytical procedure consisted of four interrelated stages: close reading, data selection, categorization, and interpretation. These stages functioned as an integrated process designed to reveal meaningful textual patterns associated with gender performance,

identity construction, and manipulation strategies within the narrative. The interpretation stage focused on examining how these patterns generate broader meanings and ideological implications within Butler's framework of gender performativity.

To ensure analytical rigor and interpretive consistency, continuous comparison was conducted between the coded data and the emerging thematic categories throughout the analytical process. Furthermore, theoretical triangulation was applied by relating textual findings to Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. This strategy enhanced the credibility, validity, and coherence of the interpretation by ensuring that the findings were consistently grounded in an established theoretical framework.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Portrayal of Modern Marriage in *Gone Girl* (2012)

In the novel *Gone Girl* (2012), Gillian Flynn presents marriage as one of the novel's central themes. It reflects the complexity of relationships in modern life, especially in marriage. Through the main characters, Nick and Amy, Flynn shows how marriage in modern society is often shaped by social expectations and cultural ideals that extend beyond the private sphere. This section conceptualizes marriage as a performative and regulatory institution, where identity is continuously produced through public visibility and gendered norms.

4.1.1 Marriage as Social Performance

In the novel *Gone Girl* (2012), marriage is not based solely on the mutual desires of both partners but also structured by the demand for public recognition. Both Nick and Amy actively construct and sustain the image of an ideal couple in the eyes of society, demonstrating a persistent drive to align with social expectations and gain public validation. As a result, their relationship is no longer fully private but instead becomes a visible and regulated performance that is continuously monitored and judged.

"...the need to remind people I wasn't a dick, I was a nice guy despite the affectless stare, the haughty, the douchebag face." (Flynn, 2012, p. 80)

That dialogue shows how Nick strategically regulates the public's perception of himself by producing a more socially intelligible persona. He becomes aware that his emotional expressions must correspond to culturally recognizable signs of grief in order to be accepted. Rather than expressing his true self, he repeatedly cites normative scripts of masculinity. Particularly the figure of the remorseful husband, in order to stabilize his identity within public discourse (Flynn, 2012, p. 9). This reflects Butler's notion of performative repetition, in which identity is constituted through the reiteration of socially sanctioned acts rather than originating from an internal essence. This aligns with Judith Butler's idea that individuals often project a socially acceptable version of themselves by performing certain identity frames in public (Butler, 1993, p. 257). Nick's behavior can therefore be understood as a citational practice, where he reproduces pre-existing gendered scripts that render him socially recognizable and legitimate. In this sense, marriage functions as a regulatory site in which identity is not merely expressed but materialized through repeated performances, producing the illusion of a stable and coherent self that is validated by public scrutiny.

4.1.2 Marriage and Gender Expectation

Modern marriage is not only shaped by social expectations but also by internalized gender norms that regulate individual behavior and define relational roles. However, in real life marriage, it often falls short of the ideal because of the conflict within individual interest. In *Gone Girl* (2012), the conflict that comes up within their marriage does not merely arise from personal incompatibility. But rather from Nick and Amy's failure to maintain the gender roles they built from the very beginning of their relationship.

"Men always say that as the defining compliment, don't they? She's a cool girl...Cool girls never get angry; they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner and let their man do whatever they want." (Flynn, 2012, p. 280)

"Do not blame me for this particular grievance, Amy. The Missouri grievance" (Flynn, 2012, p. 3)

The first dialog shows Amy who's having a conversation with herself, she shows critique with the stereotype of "Cool Girl", where woman is expected to be pleasing, passive, and shaped to fit male desire. The "Cool Girl" monologue illustrates how femininity is produced through discursive regulation that redefines which behavior are considered desirable and intelligible within patriarchal culture. Amy's reflection exposes how this identity is not natural but constituted through repeated acts that align with male desire, demonstrating the citational nature of gender performance. In the second dialogue, Nick's response reflects his reluctance to accept responsibility. His refusal to take full accountability signals a disruption in masculine intelligibility, particularly his inability to sustain the provider role that structures patriarchal expectations. Taken together, these moments reveal a breakdown in gender intelligibility, where both partners fail to align with dominant norms that define recognizable identities.

Since the beginning of their relationship, neither of them has fully been themselves. Instead, they have adjusted to their partner's expectations. Amy performs the role of the "Cool Girl", always pleasant and accommodating. While Nick, performs the image of a stable husband who can provide for the family. However, this performance begins to break down when both lose their jobs and face economic instability. Nick's inability to fulfill the provider role destabilizes his position within gender hierarchy, exposing the fragility of masculine identity. Simultaneously, Amy's shifting position disrupts normative femininity, revealing how gender roles are contingent rather than fixed. When these performative roles collapse, the conflict extends beyond interpersonal tension into a structural crisis of gender performance.

This kind of behavior is linked directly to Judith Butler's view on gender performances. Butler claims that gender arises from repetitive actions carried out to fit an acceptable social framework (Butler, 1993, p. 60). It regulated by dominant discourse that determine what is socially recognizable. Thus, the failure to sustain these repeated performances results not only in emotional dissatisfaction but also in the destabilization of identity itself. In this sense, gender identity becomes materialized through repeated and regulated performances, producing identities that appear natural while remaining structurally constrained by patriarchal norms.

4.2 Manipulation Represented within Modern Marriage in the Story

Flynn presents manipulation as a central element in shaping the dynamics of modern marriage. Through this couple, marriage is understood not only as an emotional relationship

but also as a space where strategic performance and discursive control are mobilized to achieve particular desires. Manipulation here does not operate in isolation but is closely tied to how identity and gender roles are constructed, performed, and regulated. Thus, manipulation in *Gone Girl* (2012) must be understood as a performative practice through which identity and social reality are actively produces rather than merely distorted.

4.2.1 Narrative Manipulation through Amy's Diary

One of the primary strategies used in this book to influence perception and construct social reality in marriage is through narrative manipulation. Through Amy, Flynn shows how a story can be strategically constructed to create a certain image and influence how others understand a relationship. This is most clearly demonstrated through Amy's diary as a discursive instrument.

"Well, now might be the right time. To start a family. To try to get pregnant" (Flynn, 2012, p. 239)

"He shoved me. Hard. Two days ago, he shoved me, and I fell and banged my head against the kitchen island, and I couldn't see for three seconds." (Flynn, 2012, p. 250)

Both dialogues illustrate how Amy deliberately constructs the narrative to influence public opinion regarding their marriage. In the first dialogue, Amy creates an image of herself as a wife who desires motherhood, reflecting the culturally intelligible image of the ideal woman shaped by social expectations. However, this desire does not originate from an internal essence but is performatively produced to align with normative expectations of femininity. In the second dialogue, she constructs Nick as an abusive husband, positioning herself as a recognizable victim of domestic violence. This narrative gradually leads the reader to see Nick as the one at fault. Amy manipulates both the facts and the public's perception through the repetition of carefully constructed personal narratives, demonstrating how repetition produces credibility. In this instance, Amy mobilizes dominant gender norms, where men are positioned as perpetrators and woman as victims, making her story more believable.

This narrative structure is consistent with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), which emphasizes that gender is constituted through performative repetition, where identity emerges not from an internal essence but through the reiteration of socially regulated norms. The diary operates through performative repetition by continuously reproducing the two identities of 'The Ideal Wife' and 'The Victim of Violence'.

Rather than simply constructing a narrative, Amy engages in a process of reiteration that stabilizes these identities as socially recognizable forms. Demonstrating how gender intelligibility depends on conformity to dominant expectations of femininity. By aligning her narrative with these norms, Amy ensures that her identity becomes intelligible within a discursively regulated framework that determines what can be accepted as truth. These norms function as mechanism of discursive regulation, shaping not only how her story is interpreted but also which identities are validated or dismissed within social field. Consequently, manipulation in modern marriage exceeds the distortion of facts, as it reveals how truth itself is produced through rather than merely represented. Through this process, Amy's repeated narrative and embodied performance contribute to the materialization of

identity. Where 'The Ideal Wife' and 'The Victim of Violence' cease to function as mere representations and instead appear as stable and culturally intelligible identities.

4.2.2 Manipulation through Female Stereotypes

In *Gone Girl* (2012), Amy manipulates the public by relying on established stereotypes about women in society. Flynn demonstrates how Amy deliberately regulates how her identity is perceived by appealing to stereotypes of women as helpless, sensitive, and victimized. In this way, these stereotypes do not function merely as social representations but rather become an effective tool for building a narrative that benefits her.

"Desi Collings took me. It was the morning of our anniversary" (Flynn, 2012, p. 465)

"I still have Desi's semen inside me from the last time he raped me, so the medical examination goes fine. My rope-wreathed wrist, my damage vagina, my bruised, the body I present them is textbook" (Flynn, 2012, p. 468)

Both dialogues show how Amy frames Desi as her kidnapper and rapist, even though her story is a deliberate construction she creates herself. She arranges the details of the story and her physical condition to fit a "convincing" victim image that is easy for the public and authorities to believe. In this case, Amy cites and reiterates the normative construction of women as inherently vulnerable. A framework that enables her identity to be immediately acceptable. As a result, her narrative becomes difficult to contest, since it aligns with dominant discursive expectations. Thus, stereotype functions as a mechanism of discursive regulation, shaping not only perception but also what is accepted as truth.

This aligns with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Butler argues that gender is not a fixed biological substance, but a material effect produced through repeated actions and regulatory discursive practice (Butler, 1993, p. 9-11). In Amy's case, she engages in performative repetition by continuously reproducing the identity of the female victim through narrative, language, and bodily representation. Through the deliberate inscription of physical wounds and detailed narrative construction, she materializes an identity that conforms to patriarchal expectations. Women are often perceived as weak and defenseless; this is a stereotype that ingrained social patterns and accepted as socially accepted as truth. This form of manipulation exceeds factual distortion, as it exploits structures of gender intelligibility that determine which identities are recognized as legitimate. Therefore, manipulation through female stereotypes does not only shape perception, but actively produces and stabilizes identity. It also allows the victim narrative to be accepted as real while directing how truth itself is constructed.

4.3 Gender Identity Represented within Modern Marriage in the text

Gender identity can be described as a person's deeply felt sense or inner understanding of their gender. In relationships, it can also be seen in the way men and women perform and reproduce their roles within socially intelligible frameworks. Rather than functioning as a fixed essence, gender works as a performative and regulatory mechanism that individuals use to manage power and control the direction of the relationship, in this case, their marriage.

In traditional marriage, patriarchal systems still tend to be strong, where men are the ones who determine the direction of the relationship. This is different from modern marriage, where women and men are no longer placed in rigid roles as in traditional constructions. Both have equal opportunities to shape the direction of the relationship, whether in maintaining it or breaking it. This suggest that marital dynamics are not determined by gender itself, but by the ability to sustain socially intelligible performance.

In the novel, we can see this dynamic play through how Nick and Amy both resort to manipulation, just in very different ways. Nick conceals his infidelity and puts on this 'devoted husband' act for the cameras once Amy goes missing and it puts up into a huge story. His acts of manipulation tend to be defensive and unstructured. On the other hand, Amy's manipulation is more structured and calculated.

"I don't think he does this to be mean, it's just how he was raised." (Flynn, 2012, p. 201)

The quote above comes from Amy's diary, which is intentionally written to build her image as a patient and understanding wife. Through this narrative, she slowly leads the reader of her diary to see Nick as a troubled husband, while placing herself in the position of the victim. However, the diary doesn't function as a personal reflection, but as a narrative tool designed to control how their marriage is understood by others.

Amy's actions in this story shows that she is able to manipulate people because she uses normative expectations of femininity that define what is recognizable and acceptable. She repeatedly performs the identity of the loyal yet victimized woman, an image people are already familiar with. Amy is using this image to shape what people think of her. This aligns with Butler's descriptions as a 'regulatory norms that materialize the gender body' (Butler, 1993, p. 12).

Amy is not merely performing a role, but reiterating gender norms through continuous repetition, making her identity appear natural and convincing. This repetition enables her identity to be stabilized within dominant discourse, making her narrative difficult to challenge. A crucial illustration of this dynamic emerges in Amy's accusation of abduction and sexual violence (Flynn, 2012, p. 458-477), which should be read not as narrative content but as a strategic occupation of culturally intelligible victim position. Thus, what is produced is not merely a story, but a materialized reality, where repeated performative acts stabilize the narrative as socially accepted truth. In contrast to inconsistent performances that fail to meet normative expectations, this controlled repetition enables the subject to maintain coherence within dominant structures of gender intelligibility.

This highlights how an individual could use their gender as a weapon to get what they want in marriage. Such agency does not exist outside discourse but is enacted through the reiteration of socially sanctioned norms, employing Butler's idea of performativity "There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that is identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions'" (Butler, 1993, p. 2). This can be understood as a process of performative repetition, in which the continuous enactment of victimhood stabilizes Amy's identity over time. Through this repetition, her identity becomes gender-intelligible, as it aligns with dominant norms that define femininity through vulnerability. This intelligibility is shaped by discursive regulation, which determines what is recognized as believable or true. As a result, the repeated performance becomes materialized as reality, rather than perceived as construction. Thus, power operates through

the ability to sustain identities that conform to these normative frameworks. Ultimately, this reveals that what is accepted as “truth” in the relationship is not discovered but produced through successful repetition of socially regulated gender performances.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that in *Gone Girl*, marriage functions as a performative social institution in which gender expectations, public image, and manipulation significantly shape relational dynamics. The findings reveal that marriage is not merely a private emotional bond but a socially regulated space where individuals continuously negotiate their identities in accordance with prevailing cultural expectations. These expectations extend beyond public appearances and become embedded within the relationship itself, influencing how spouses construct, perform, and sustain gendered roles.

Through the character of Amy Dunne, the novel illustrates how socially recognizable forms of femininity can be strategically performed to establish credibility, gain social legitimacy, and shape dominant perceptions of truth. Amy's actions demonstrate that manipulation operates not solely as an act of deception but as a performative practice that derives its effectiveness from widely accepted gender norms and cultural assumptions. The study further reveals that power within marriage is closely linked to the capacity to control and manage these socially intelligible performances.

Viewed through Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, the findings suggest that gender identity is not a fixed or essential characteristic but is continually produced and reproduced through repeated acts and behaviors. Moreover, these performative acts can serve as mechanisms through which individuals negotiate, maintain, and contest power within intimate relationships. Consequently, *Gone Girl* presents modern marriage as a dynamic arena in which gender identity, social expectations, and relational authority are continuously constructed, performed, and renegotiated. The study contributes to feminist literary criticism by highlighting how gender performances not only shape individual identities but also function as strategic instruments in the exercise of power and manipulation within contemporary marital relationships.

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PROMOTING AND PRESERVING MARGINALIZED LANGUAGES IN MULTILINGUAL AFRICAN SOCIETIES: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This article examines the sociolinguistic processes shaping the promotion and preservation of marginalized languages in multilingual societies in Africa, with particular focus on a linguistically diverse South African community. The community is linguistically diverse, with residents speaking Xitsonga, Northern Sotho, and Tshivenda, which are commonly used for communication in homes, schools, and local businesses. It investigated how social identity, community participation, and cultural contexts influenced language maintenance, intergenerational transmission, and revitalization. The study employed a mixed-methods ethnographic design, combining sociolinguistic surveys and in-depth interviews. The analysis further explored how speakers navigated sociocultural boundaries within complex multilingual networks and how dominant language ideologies shaped perceptions of legitimacy and value. Findings indicate that strong, dense social networks, particularly family, peer, and community interactions are the most significant predictors of language vitality. Participants embedded in supportive networks demonstrated greater linguistic engagement, cultural affiliation, and active transmission practices. Positive attitudes and linguistic pride supported preservation, while stigma and limited institutional support accelerated the language shift. Overall, the study demonstrates that language sustainability depends on both individual choices and broader social-structural conditions. The study recommends inclusive policies, community initiatives, and expanded opportunities for meaningful language use to safeguard endangered African languages.

Keywords: *Africa; marginalized languages; multilingualism; preservation; sociolinguistics.*

1. Introduction

Promoting and preserving marginalized languages in multilingual African societies is increasingly understood as a socially situated process beyond technical documentation. Sociolinguistics offers a critical framework for examining how languages are maintained, transmitted, and revitalized within the social, cultural, and political conditions that shape everyday communication. Norton (2013) demonstrates that language practices are tied to

identity, power, and community participation, challenging structural approaches to preservation. Access to meaningful interaction and linguistic capital is shaped by broader social forces. From this perspective, factors such as identity, social networks, social class, and community motivation emerge as central to the vitality of minoritized languages. Building on these foundations, sociolinguistic approaches emphasize that language sustainability is not solely an individual responsibility but a collective social process involving the negotiation of belonging, cultural heritage, and legitimacy. Speakers' willingness to transmit languages depends on authentic interaction opportunities and their position within social networks. However, these experiences are mediated by wider social variables, including age, gender, ethnicity, and class, as well as entrenched power relations in multilingual societies. Dominant languages typically receive greater institutional support, while marginalized languages face stigma and exclusion from formal domains. In South Africa, despite recognition of eleven official languages, colonial and apartheid legacies have entrenched English as the primary language of socioeconomic mobility. Despite the recognition of eleven official languages, colonial and apartheid legacies have entrenched English as the primary language of socioeconomic mobility, often at the expense of African languages. Such pressures intensify language shift while underscoring the importance of family, community networks, and local initiatives in sustaining linguistic heritage. Fishman (1991) emphasizes that intergenerational transmission and community-based practices are essential for reversing language shift. Although global interest in language revitalization is growing, empirical research on African sociolinguistic conditions remains limited. Addressing this gap is essential for developing inclusive and socially responsive frameworks for language policy and education. This study investigates how identity, networks, class, and community motivation shape the vitality of marginalized languages, offering evidence-based recommendations for safeguarding Africa's linguistic diversity.

2. Literature review

Africa is one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the world, with over 2,000 languages spoken across the continent. Multilingualism is therefore a normal and widespread feature of everyday communication in many African societies, where individuals often use several languages in homes, communities, schools, and workplaces. Scholars note that multilingual repertoires are developed through daily social interaction as well as formal education systems (Heugh, 2019). Despite this diversity, colonial history and postcolonial governance structures have contributed to the dominance of European languages such as English, French, and Portuguese in education, government, and economic domains. This linguistic hierarchy has led to the marginalization of many indigenous African languages. Recent sociolinguistic research increasingly frames language preservation as a matter of linguistic justice and educational equity. Scholars argue that when indigenous languages are excluded from education and official communication, speakers of those languages may experience reduced access to knowledge, social mobility, and political participation (Reilly, Chimbutane & Rubagumya, 2024). Consequently, promoting indigenous languages is not only a cultural concern but also an important strategy for addressing historical inequalities in multilingual African societies.

2.1 Sociolinguistic Theory and Linguistic Justice

Contemporary sociolinguistic theory emphasizes the relationship between language, power, and social inequality. In multilingual African societies, linguistic hierarchies often privilege globally dominant languages while marginalizing local languages spoken by rural or minority communities. Scholars argue that these hierarchies reproduce broader social inequalities because language is closely tied to access to education, employment, and knowledge production. Recent research highlights the concept of epistemic or linguistic justice, which emphasizes the importance of recognizing marginalized languages as legitimate mediums for knowledge and learning (Erling, Reilly & Chimbutane, 2024). Linguistic justice frameworks challenge colonial language ideologies that treat African languages as inferior or unsuitable for academic communication. In the context of African education systems, sociolinguists increasingly advocate for multilingual pedagogies that recognize learners' linguistic repertoires. Translanguaging practices where learners move flexibly between languages to construct meaning—have been shown to enhance participation and comprehension in multilingual classrooms (Chimbutane, 2018). Such approaches challenge traditional monolingual policies that require learners to abandon their home languages in favor of dominant languages such as English. Recent studies also emphasize the importance of language-supportive pedagogy, which integrates multiple languages into teaching practices to support conceptual understanding and academic literacy development (Deutschmann et al., 2024). These theoretical developments highlight the importance of viewing multilingualism as a resource rather than a barrier to education.

2.2 Language, Identity, and Cultural Heritage

Language plays a central role in shaping cultural identity, social belonging, and the transmission of cultural knowledge. In many African communities, indigenous languages serve as vehicles for oral traditions, historical narratives, traditional ecological knowledge, and cultural values. The decline of minority languages therefore often leads to the loss of cultural heritage and collective memory. Recent research on endangered languages emphasizes that language loss can have profound social and cultural consequences. Studies indicate that globalization, urbanization, and the dominance of major languages contribute significantly to language shift in minority communities (Awal, 2024). When younger generations adopt dominant languages in education and employment contexts, intergenerational transmission of indigenous languages may weaken. African case studies illustrate how language revitalization can strengthen cultural identity. For example, community-based initiatives to revive the siPhuthi language in Lesotho and parts of South Africa demonstrate how language documentation, orthography development, and community engagement can support language preservation. These initiatives involve local speakers in recording oral histories and developing educational materials, helping restore pride in linguistic heritage (Mohale, 2026). In South Africa, indigenous languages such as isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Tshivenda continue to function as important markers of identity despite the strong influence of English in education and professional environments. Scholars argue that strengthening these languages in schools and public institutions can help reinforce cultural identity and social inclusion.

2.3 Social Networks and Community Language Practices

Sociolinguistic research emphasizes that language maintenance depends not only on formal policies but also on everyday communication practices within communities. Families, social networks, religious institutions, and local media play important roles in sustaining minority languages across generations. In many African societies, community radio stations broadcasting in indigenous languages have become important platforms for cultural expression and language maintenance. These media spaces enable speakers to discuss local issues, share traditional knowledge, and promote linguistic pride. Social networks also facilitate informal language learning among children through storytelling, music, and community events. However, urbanization and migration have transformed language use in many African cities. Urban multilingual environments often encourage code-switching and hybrid linguistic practices, where speakers mix multiple languages in everyday communication. While these practices demonstrate linguistic creativity, they can also accelerate language shift toward widely used languages such as English or Kiswahili. Recent research on multilingual learning in Africa highlights how learners' linguistic repertoires can be integrated into classroom interaction through collaborative learning strategies and translanguaging practices (Probyn, 2024). Recognizing these multilingual practices allows educators to build on students' existing linguistic knowledge rather than suppressing it.

2.4 Language Policy and Multilingual Education

Language policy plays a critical role in determining the status and use of languages within national education systems. Many African countries have adopted multilingual language policies that formally recognize indigenous languages. However, implementation remains uneven due to limited resources, political priorities, and institutional constraints. Research consistently demonstrates that mother-tongue-based multilingual education improves learning outcomes and promotes linguistic inclusion. Learners who begin their education in their first language often demonstrate better comprehension, higher academic achievement, and greater participation in classroom discussions (Heugh, 2019). In South Africa, the constitution recognizes eleven official languages and promotes multilingualism in education. Despite this progressive policy framework, English remains dominant as the language of learning and teaching in many schools, particularly after the early grades. This transition can create learning difficulties for students who speak African languages at home. Comparative research across sub-Saharan Africa also highlights innovative approaches to multilingual education. Studies show that language-supportive pedagogies and multilingual curriculum frameworks can improve educational access while maintaining linguistic diversity (Deutschmann et al., 2024).

2.5 Language Revitalization and Contemporary Initiatives

Language revitalization refers to deliberate efforts to reverse language shift and promote the continued use of endangered languages. These initiatives often include language documentation, literacy programs, curriculum development, and digital language technologies. Technological developments are increasingly playing a role in supporting African languages. Recent projects have created multilingual datasets and language technologies capable of processing hundreds of African languages, helping increase their representation in digital communication and artificial intelligence systems (Adebara et al., 2022). Researchers also emphasize that successful language revitalization depends on community participation and

institutional support. Local communities must play a central role in language planning initiatives, including decisions about orthography development, educational materials, and language teaching programs. Universities, cultural organizations, and government institutions across Africa are increasingly involved in promoting indigenous languages through research programs, academic publishing, and curriculum reform. These initiatives reflect growing recognition that linguistic diversity is an important intellectual and cultural resource. Recent scholarship demonstrates that promoting and preserving marginalized languages in multilingual African societies requires a multidimensional sociolinguistic approach. Sociolinguistic theory highlights the relationship between language and power, while research on identity emphasizes the cultural significance of indigenous languages. Social networks and everyday communication practices influence language maintenance, while language policy and education systems shape the institutional status of languages. Studies published between 2018 and 2026 increasingly emphasize linguistic justice, multilingual pedagogy, and community-driven language revitalization as key strategies for addressing linguistic inequality in Africa. Strengthening indigenous languages in education, media, and digital spaces can therefore contribute to both cultural preservation and more inclusive knowledge systems.

3. Research Method

This study employed a mixed-methods ethnographic design to examine how identity, participation, and local practices influence language preservation. Ethnography captures lived sociocultural realities, while quantitative measures reveal patterns linking social variables to language vitality. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data allowed the study to document both everyday language use and measurable indicators of transmission, attitudes, and network strength. This design ensured a holistic account of how social environments enabled or constrained the sustainability of minoritized languages.

3.1 Research Setting and Participants

3.1.1 Setting

The study was conducted in a peri-urban community in Limpopo Province, South Africa, where Xitsonga, Sepedi, and Tshivenda coexist with English. Data were collected at a public secondary school and surrounding community spaces where local African languages (Xitsonga, Sepedi, and Tshivenda) were used alongside English in both formal and informal domains. This setting provided an appropriate site for examining intergenerational language use and shifting patterns of linguistic practice.

3.1.2 Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants who:

- a) were speakers of at least one marginalized African language,
- b) resided within the target community, and
- c) represented varying degrees of language use, attitudes, and involvement in heritage language activities.

3.1.3 Participants

The survey sample consisted of 84 participants, representing a substantial proportion of the eligible youth population within the study site. This number provided sufficient diversity of responses to identify patterns and trends relevant to the research questions. In addition, 18 focal participants were selected purposively for in-depth engagement. This smaller group enabled detailed qualitative exploration, and thematic saturation was reached as similar themes began to recur across interviews and discussions. The study focused on youth aged 15–18 because they represent the primary group directly engaged with the educational and social dynamics under investigation. This age group is also developmentally capable of reflecting on their experiences and articulating their perspectives. While the survey targeted youth participants, teachers and community elders were consulted through interviews and discussions to provide contextual insight and to help interpret the experiences reported by the youth. Their perspectives complemented the youth data by offering broader institutional and cultural viewpoints.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

3.2.1 Sociolinguistic Surveys (Quantitative)

The survey measured frequency of heritage language use, attitudes, transmission, and social network strength. Network-mapping questions included: “Who do you speak your home language with daily?”, “How often?”, and “In which settings?” Network strength was operationalized through frequency, multiplexity, and functional diversity of ties. Such measures have been shown to predict language sustainability (Kircher & Zipp, 2022).

3.2.2 In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews (Qualitative)

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with learners, teachers, and community elders to obtain diverse perspectives on language identity, challenges to language maintenance, and strategies for language revitalization. The semi-structured format allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes while ensuring consistency across interviews. By incorporating multiple stakeholder groups, the interviews facilitated data triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the findings through the comparison and validation of perspectives regarding language use, transmission, and preservation efforts.

3.2.3 Ethnographic Observation and Fieldnotes

Ethnographic observations over 8–10 weeks documented classroom, home, and community language practices. Fieldnotes documented naturally occurring language practices, peer interaction, and cultural events. Selected activities were audio-recorded to capture authentic language use, consistent with contemporary ethnographic approaches to language vitality research (Hult & Johnson, 2021).

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

3.3.1 Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative survey data were analyzed using statistical techniques to identify patterns and relationships among variables. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages,

means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize participant responses. Inferential analysis was conducted using Pearson correlation to examine relationships between key variables, while regression analysis was employed to explore the extent to which selected factors predicted youth outcomes. These analyses strengthened the reliability of the findings by providing measurable evidence of relationships within the dataset.

3.3.2 Qualitative Analysis

Coding was cross-checked by multiple researchers to ensure reliability. This process enabled systematic interpretation of participants' experiences and meanings attached to language maintenance.

3.3.3 Integration of Findings

A triangulation strategy integrated quantitative and qualitative strands including statistical patterns were interpreted alongside narrative accounts to explain how network density and positive attitudes supported everyday language use. Convergent and divergent findings were compared to producing a comprehensive understanding of sociolinguistic influences on preservation.

3.4 Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Ethical clearance, informed consent, anonymisation, and member checking ensured credibility and trustworthiness. These procedures enhanced credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the quantitative findings from the sociolinguistic survey and community social network analysis (SNA), followed by qualitative insights from interviews and ethnographic observations. Results are interpreted through contemporary scholarship on language vitality, language policy, and community-based revitalization in African multilingual contexts. Specifically, the discussion draws on recent work linking language maintenance to identity, network density, and institutional support (De Korne, 2021; Kircher & Zipp, 2022; Makoni & Pennycook, 2020).

4.1 Summary of Quantitative Findings

Correlation Coefficients between Key Variables

Variables Compared	Correlation (r)
Social Network Strength ↔ Heritage Language Use	0.64
Home Exposure ↔ Heritage Language Use	0.58
Peer Interaction Frequency ↔ Language Vitality	0.55
Positive Language Attitudes ↔ Transmission Intentions	0.49
Media/Local Content Engagement ↔ Language Use	0.52

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between social and environmental factors and heritage language vitality among youth participants ($N =$

84). Statistical significance was evaluated at 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$). The results indicate several moderate to strong positive relationships between the examined variables. Social network strength showed the strongest correlation with heritage language use ($r = 0.64$), suggesting that youth embedded in stronger social networks are more likely to maintain regular use of the heritage language. Home exposure also demonstrated a strong relationship with heritage language use ($r = 0.58$), highlighting the importance of family environments in language maintenance. Peer interaction frequency correlated positively with language vitality ($r = 0.55$), indicating that peer communication plays a role in sustaining language use. Positive language attitudes were moderately associated with intentions to transmit the language to future generations ($r = 0.49$). Engagement with local media and culturally relevant content also showed a moderate positive relationship with language use ($r = 0.52$). Overall, these findings suggest that social networks, home environments, and peer interactions are significant factors influencing heritage language vitality among youth.

To ensure clarity and analytical consistency, key variables used in the correlation analysis were operationally defined based on composite survey items measured using Likert-scale responses. These variables capture social, environmental, and attitudinal factors influencing heritage language vitality among youth participants.

a. Social Network Strength

This variable refers to the extent to which participants interact with family members, relatives, friends, and community members who regularly use the heritage language. It was measured through survey items assessing the frequency of communication in the heritage language within social networks, including conversations with parents, siblings, extended family, and peers.

b. Home Exposure

Home exposure measures the level of heritage language use within the household environment. Survey items assessed how often the language was spoken at home, whether parents or guardians actively encouraged its use, and the presence of everyday interactions conducted in the heritage language.

c. Peer Interaction Frequency

This variable captures how frequently participants communicate with friends or classmates using the heritage language. It includes both informal conversations and social interactions in school, community spaces, or social gatherings.

d. Positive Language Attitudes

Positive language attitudes refer to participants' perceptions, pride, and emotional connection to the heritage language. This variable was measured through statements evaluating whether participants value the language, believe it is important to maintain, and feel motivated to preserve it for future generations.

e. Transmission Intentions

Transmission intentions measure participants' willingness and intention to pass the heritage language on to their future children or younger family members. This variable reflects long-term commitment to language preservation.

f. Media/Local Content Engagement

Media and local content engagement refers to participants' interaction with media produced in or promoting the heritage language. This includes listening to local radio broadcasts, watching television programs, engaging with music, storytelling, community announcements, and interacting with social media or online videos created in the heritage language. Survey items measured how frequently participants accessed or engaged with these forms of content.

g. Heritage Language Use

Heritage language use refers to the frequency with which participants speak the heritage language in daily life across different contexts, including home, peer interactions, community activities, and media consumption.

h. Language Vitality

Language vitality reflects the overall strength and sustainability of heritage language use within the youth community. In this study, it was assessed through indicators such as frequency of use, peer communication patterns, and engagement with language-related cultural practices. This clarification ensures that each variable used in the statistical analysis is clearly operationalized, strengthening the methodological rigor and interpretability of the correlation findings.

4.2 Social Networks and Language Vitality

Dense social networks were the strongest predictor, confirming but also extending prior findings. Participants who interacted frequently with family members, peers, and community elders in their heritage languages reported higher daily usage and stronger intentions to transmit the language to younger generations. Survey responses showed that 62% used their home language predominantly within family domains, while 48% reported regular use with peers. Interview narratives confirmed that everyday interpersonal contact normalized language use:

"At home we always speak Tshivenda. Even my younger brothers answer in it. It feels natural." (P11, Female, 16)

These findings align with recent sociolinguistic research demonstrating that language sustainability depends on strong community networks that embed languages within routine practices rather than formal instruction alone (Kircher & Zipp, 2022). Regular interaction provides spaces where linguistic competence and cultural meanings are reinforced.

4.3 Identity, Attitudes, and Linguistic Pride

Positive attitudes correlated with transmission intentions, while stigma reduced usage. Approximately 57% of participants expressed strong pride in their heritage language, while 21% perceived it as less useful than English. Positive attitudes correlated moderately with intentions for intergenerational transmission ($r = 0.49$). To ensure participant confidentiality, all interview quotations were anonymized using participant identification codes. The letter “P” refers to “Participant,” followed by a numerical identifier (e.g., P01–P18). These codes correspond to individuals who participated in the qualitative component of the study and do not reveal any personally identifiable information. Interview accounts revealed that identity affirmation increased usage:

“Xitsonga is who we are. If we stop speaking it, we forget ourselves.” (P06, Male, 17)

Conversely, stigma or perceived lack of economic value reduced use:

“People think English is the language of success, so some children stop using Sepedi.” (Teacher 2)

These patterns reflect contemporary understandings that language preservation is closely tied to symbolic value and identity negotiation. Makoni and Pennycook (2020) argue that African languages gain vitality when speakers perceive them as resources rather than obstacles to mobility. Thus, pride and legitimacy are key drivers of sustainability.

4.4 Socioeconomic Inequality and Access to Domains of Use

Exposure to English-dominant schooling and media reduced heritage language use, while cultural participation supported maintenance. Participants from households with stronger cultural participation such as attending traditional ceremonies or consuming local-language media reported greater use. In contrast, those with higher exposure to English-dominant schooling and digital environments showed reduced reliance on heritage languages.

“Most shows we watch are in English, so my little sister answers me in English even when I speak Sepedi.” (P19, Female, 15)

These findings suggest that structural inequalities and institutional language hierarchies shape everyday practices. Research indicates that without formal support in education and media, marginalized languages lose domains of relevance (De Korne, 2021). Thus, preservation depends not only on community will but also on broader policy environments.

4.5 Community Practices, Code-Switching, and Revitalization Strategies

Code-switching and translanguaging were observed in 45% of participants, functioning as adaptive strategies that sustain heritage language presence. Such practices align with recent perspectives that view hybrid repertoires as adaptive strategies that maintain linguistic presence in multilingual spaces (De Korne, 2021). Flexible multilingual practices such as code-switching and translanguaging help speakers navigate boundaries while preserving identity. Community festivals, local media, and storytelling empower speakers to sustain and transmit heritage languages.

4.6 Synthesis and Theoretical Contribution

Findings support network-based models, extend identity research, highlight structural constraints, and validate community-driven revitalization. This section emphasizes social networks, identity, attitudes, inequality, code-switching, revitalization.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights that promoting and preserving marginalized languages in multilingual African societies is a complex, multifaceted process extending beyond education and policy. Language vitality is not determined solely by individual effort but is embedded within the social, cultural, and structural environments in which speakers live. Active use in homes, peer networks, and public spaces strengthens intergenerational transmission, while reduced opportunities accelerate language shift. The study has demonstrated that social networks, encompassing both strong ties within families and weak ties across broader community connections, play a central role in sustaining daily language use and facilitating the sharing of linguistic and cultural knowledge. Consistent interaction fosters competence, cultural affiliation, and ownership of heritage languages. Identity and attitudes also emerged as critical factors in language maintenance. Speakers' pride in their linguistic heritage, coupled with a sense of legitimacy and relevance in daily life, strongly influenced their willingness to use and transmit their languages. Conversely, social stigma, perceptions of limited utility, and the dominance of global languages can reduce motivation and weaken intergenerational transmission. These findings underscore that language preservation is intimately connected to social perceptions, community norms, and the recognition of cultural value. When speakers perceive their languages as respected, useful, and meaningful, they are more likely to invest time and energy in sustaining them. Socioeconomic and structural factors were found to mediate access to language-rich environments. Households and communities with greater access to media, cultural programming, and educational resources provide more frequent opportunities for heritage language use. In contrast, inequalities in infrastructure, schooling, and social mobility can limit interactional contexts and accelerate language erosion. This illustrates that efforts to maintain minority languages must address not only individual behaviour but also broader social and institutional conditions that shape language use. The study further highlighted the importance of community-led and contextually grounded initiatives. Cultural festivals, local media, storytelling sessions, and collaborative educational programs serve as spaces where languages are actively practiced, valued, and transmitted. Such initiatives empower communities to assert ownership over their linguistic heritage while fostering intergenerational engagement and broader social visibility. Additionally, the strategic use of flexible multilingual practices, including code-switching and translanguaging, can enable speakers to navigate complex social boundaries while preserving linguistic identity. Promoting marginalized languages requires holistic strategies integrating social networks, identity, equitable resources, and community-driven initiatives. Sustainability is a shared societal responsibility essential for safeguarding cultural heritage and linguistic diversity.

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AGE-RELATED ARTICULATORY VARIATIONS OF ARABIC /d^ɖ/: ACOUSTIC ANALYSIS IN ELDERLY NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

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Abstract

Age-related decline in speech motor control affects older adults' ability to pronounce Arabic phonemes accurately. While prior studies examined working-age native speakers, this study addresses non-native older adults to map the specific articulatory challenges they face in pronouncing /d^ɖ/ and investigate aging's effect on acoustic stability. We employed descriptive and comparative phonetic analysis, evaluating four older adults (ages 51–73) with varying educational backgrounds (Islamic boarding, elementary, junior high, and senior high schools). Data were acoustically compared to native speaker standards using Praat software to measure the duration, fundamental frequency, intensity, and formant patterns of /d^ɖ/ in initial, medial, and final word positions. Findings indicate that Islamic boarding school education does not ensure later-life articulatory precision; rather, overcompensation led to velarization failure due to prolonged articulation. In contrast, participants with junior and senior high school backgrounds produced acoustic qualities closer to native speakers. Although motor limitations restrict airflow endurance, cognitive retention of articulation points remains well-preserved. Ultimately, none of the elderly participants matched native speaker standards due to physiological decline rather than phonological memory loss. Consequently, evaluations of elderly Quranic recitation should emphasize articulation point accuracy rather than energetic performance.

Keywords: acoustic phonetics; /d^ɖ/ phoneme; phonetic analysis; older adults; Praat.

1. Introduction

Accurate pronunciation of Arabic sounds is essential for proper Quranic recitation. Linguistic accuracy serves as a primary prerequisite to ensure the Quran's meaning is conveyed clearly to readers and listeners. As emphasized by Al Farisi (2023), the acceptability of a Quranic text, whether in the form of translation or oral transmission, is highly contingent upon aspects of accuracy and clarity; consequently, even the slightest deviation at the phonetic level can impede the delivery of the intended meaning within the source text.

The ability to accurately pronounce Arabic phonemes in accordance with established phonetic rules is a fundamental aspect of Arabic language learning. Pronunciation errors not

only affect articulation but also potentially induce semantic shifts, which in turn impact the quality of comprehension and the solemnity of worship (Maulani & Alwan, 2023; Nasikin et al., 2023). A profound understanding of phonetic sounds and pronunciation rules is crucial for accurate communication in Quranic recitation (Maskuri et al., 2023; Musthofa et al., 2024).

Articulatory inaccuracies often lead to phonetic errors such as vowel mispronunciation, incorrect duration, or consonant substitution. These errors can significantly alter word meanings. Examples include the failure to distinguish between the letters *ص* and *س* or between *خ* and *غ* (Jamil & Maulidah, 2023). These difficulties generally emerge with hijaiyah (Arabic alphabet) letters that lack equivalents in the Indonesian language, particularly specific consonant groups such as *ع, ق, ص, ذ, ش, خ, ث, ض, ط, ظ*, and *غ* (Nurshafnita & Zainuddin, 2023). Therefore, the study of phonetics (*'ilm al-aṣwāt*) serves as the primary foundation to ensure that Arabic pronunciation occurs accurately and according to phonetic rules.

Phonetic analysis provides an objective basis for identifying phonetic errors that frequently arise in Arabic language learning. Phonemic deviations, such as impaired vowel quality, durational differences, and consonant substitutions, have direct implications for semantic shifts. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the pronunciation of *hijaiyah* letters that possess specific articulatory characteristics not found in the Indonesian phonological system, such as emphatic consonants (*ص, ض, ط, ظ*) and guttural consonants (*ع, غ, خ*). The identification of these inaccuracies serves as the initial step in systematically mapping pronunciation barriers, as highlighted in the aforementioned studies (Nurshafnita & Zainuddin, 2023).

Prior studies have extensively examined Arabic pronunciation errors in students and working-age populations, often focusing on mother tongue interference and instructional methods (Ali et al., 2023; Musthofa et al., 2024; Rifai & Suharto, 2020). Specifically, the /d^ʕ/ phoneme demonstrates a higher degree of complexity than other Arabic phonemes. A study by El-Khaissi (2022) investigated whether the vowel compensation strategy (emphatic spreading) often employed by advanced learners to navigate the pronunciation difficulties of the /d^ʕ/ phoneme also occurs in older adults who possess different articulatory motor capabilities. This study addresses the gap by analyzing the articulatory complexity and acoustic distortion of /d^ʕ/ among older non-native learners, offering a novel focus on /d^ʕ/ pronunciation errors among older adults, an underexplored demographic in Quranic phonological research. While previous research, such as Kalaldeh and Al-Shdaifat (2019), focused on working-age native speakers, the phonetic challenges faced by elderly learners remains underexplored.

Although numerous phonemic error studies have been conducted on students (santri), university students, and speakers from specific linguistic backgrounds, research specifically highlighting older adults remains relatively limited. This limitation exists because older adults possess distinct physiological characteristics compared to other age groups, such as decreased elasticity of the tongue muscles, weakened coordination of the articulatory organs, and reduced concentration, all of which have the potential to significantly affect the precise pronunciation of Arabic phonemes (Muliatno, 2023; Sholihin, 2020).

In Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) such as Indonesia, the older adult population is defined as individuals aged 50 years and older, reflecting an earlier onset of age-related physiological changes linked to a lower life expectancy compared to high-income nations (Lestari et al., 2019). While extensive research has been conducted on the /d^ɕ/ phoneme, previous literature is predominantly dominated by analyses of native speakers within the working-age demographic. Therefore, the present study expands upon the existing literature by focusing specifically on non-native older adults. This particular phoneme demands significant tongue dominance and entails high articulatory complexity, making it highly susceptible to sound substitution. This is especially true for older speakers due to the previously mentioned physiological changes. Thus, there is a distinct need for research that specifically identifies and analyzes the errors associated with the /d^ɕ/ phoneme among older adults, utilizing native speaker pronunciation as the standard benchmark.

For the purposes of this study, *majelis taklim* a form of non-formal Islamic education was selected as it serves as the primary avenue for older adults to learn and refine their Quranic recitation. Its flexible and accessible learning characteristics, coupled with a predominantly older demographic, render *majelis taklim* a highly appropriate context for observing phonological errors in the pronunciation of *hijaiyah* letters. Several studies have indicated that the effectiveness of Quranic learning for older adults in *majelis taklim* can be enhanced through the application of suitable instructional methods, such as the Iqra method, repetition, andragogical approaches, and the Tsaqifa method (Munirah, 2023; Ni'mah et al., 2025).

This research presents a distinct novelty by focusing the analysis on the errors of the /d^ɕ/ phoneme among older adults, a demographic that remains significantly underexplored within Quranic phonological research utilizing acoustic analysis. Against this backdrop, the primary objective of this study is to map and analyze the articulatory challenges of the /d^ɕ/ phoneme in older adults, specifically examining how the physiological processes of aging influence the stability of the produced sounds, as measured and evaluated through Praat software.

2. Literature Review

Prior studies show that phonetic errors, including phonetic alterations and sound shifts, remain prevalent among Arabic learners (Ali et al., 2023). This phenomenon is influenced by mother tongue interference, as well as other internal and external factors (Musthofa et al., 2024; Rifai & Suharto, 2020). From the perspective of text acceptability, acoustic accuracy is essential to prevent semantic distortion, particularly in sacred texts (Al Farisi, 2023). Specifically, the /d^ɕ/ phoneme exhibits a higher degree of articulatory complexity compared to other phonemes. El-Khaissi (2022) investigated vowel compensation strategies employed to navigate the pronunciation difficulties of /d^ɕ/ among speakers with articulatory motor limitations. This study addresses the gap by analyzing /d^ɕ/ pronunciation among older non-native learners, a group rarely examined in prior research (Kalaldeh & Al-Shdaifat, 2019).

2.1 Physiological Characteristics and Articulatory Disorders in Older Adults

Older adults exhibit physiological characteristics distinct from other age groups, such as decreased elasticity of the tongue muscles, weakened coordination of articulatory organs, and reduced concentration capabilities. Muliatno (2023) and Sholihin (2020) elucidate that these physical conditions have the potential to significantly impact the precise pronunciation of hijaiyah letters. In Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) like Indonesia, older adults are classified from the age of 50 and above, aligning with the earlier onset of these physiological declines due to a lower average life expectancy (Lestari et al., 2019). This functional decline results in disrupted sound transitions and reduced acoustic stability compared to native speakers.

2.2 The Articulatory Complexity of the /d^ʕ/ Phoneme

According to Aldamen and Al-Deaibes (2023), the /d^ʕ/ phoneme possesses high articulatory complexity as it involves a secondary articulation mechanism. This characteristic demands dominant tongue motor control; thus, in older speakers, this complexity potentially triggers sound substitution corresponding with the decline in articulatory function. The /d^ʕ/ phoneme requires secondary articulation involving lateral tongue edges against upper molars, producing emphatic resonance (Marlina, 2019; Ulpah et al., 2025). Failure to produce emphatic resonance is marked by weakened spectral features in the formant patterns (Alihuddin et al., 2022).

2.3 Acoustic Phonetics as an Objective Evaluation Instrument

This study is novel in applying Praat-based acoustic analysis to older adults' Quranic recitation. Ghani et al. (2024) state that acoustic analysis can provide a more accurate representation of pronunciation segmentation characteristics compared to subjective assessments alone. Praat measures duration, frequency, and formant patterns to objectively evaluate recitation accuracy.

2.4 The Context of Andragogical Learning in *Majelis Taklim*

Majelis taklim provides a flexible learning environment for older adults, where andragogical methods such as repetition and Iqra enhance pronunciation refinement (Munirah, 2023). Considering the existing physiological barriers, Ni'mah et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of instructional guidance that incorporates an andragogical perspective, ensuring that the process of pronunciation refinement does not induce mental pressure on older adults. Consequently, this research contributes to the existing literature by providing an objective, Praat-based acoustic evaluation of /d^ʕ/ pronunciation challenges, specifically tailored to the physiological and andragogical contexts of older learners.

3. Research Method

This study employed descriptive and comparative methods within a content analysis design to describe and evaluate /d^ʕ/ pronunciation among older adults at the Miftahul Amanah *majelis taklim*. The acoustic characteristics of recitations from selected Surahs in *Juz 30* were analyzed using Praat software. The results were subsequently compared with native speaker pronunciation standards to establish a baseline for evaluating articulatory accuracy. Pronunciations were compared to a native speaker benchmark (Kaltoum Zerrad, Moroccan

qāri'ah). Purposive sampling was applied to select respondents meeting specific criteria (Berndt, 2020).

Table 1.

Research Sample Profile

Indicator	Sample Profile
Gender	Female
Age	≥ 50 years
Educational background	1. Elementary school graduate 2. Junior high school graduate 3. Senior high school graduate 4. Islamic boarding school graduate
Name	Majelis taklim miftahul amanah
Native speaker	Kaltoum zerrad, moroccan qāri'ah

Description:

NS : *Native Speaker*

R1 : Respondent with Elementary School background

R2 : Respondent with Junior High School background

R3 : Respondent with Senior High School background

R4 : Respondent with Islamic Boarding School background

Table 2.

Position of the /d^ɕ/ Phoneme within Words

Letter	Position		
	Initial	Medial	Final
ض	صَاحِكَةٌ (Surah 'abasa: 39)	تَضْلِيلٍ (Surah al-fiil: 2)	وَالْأَرْضَ (Surah an-nazi'at: 30)

3.1 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted by recording the respondents' recitations of selected Quranic verses containing the /d^ɕ/ phoneme. This specific phoneme was selected because it represents a sound frequently subject to phonetic errors among non-native Arabic learners due to its lack of a phonological equivalent in Indonesian (Fudhaili et al., 2023). Although the /d^ɕ/ phoneme requires complex apico-dental articulation, these elements were strictly analyzed through acoustic parameters rather than subjective observation. The recorded data were processed using Praat software (version 6.4.26), where spectrograms were used to analyze key phonetic features, specifically sound duration, fundamental frequency, and intensity (Al Farisi et al., 2025; Ghani et al., 2024).

3.2 Data Analysis Techniques

Praat analysis compared the respondents' /d^ɕ/ pronunciation with native speaker standards, focusing on duration, frequency, and formant patterns. This comparison aimed to identify age-related articulatory influences on /d^ɕ/ pronunciation among the older adults. As the final step, the data were transcribed into International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols

(Brierley & Heselwood, 2022). This transcription step ensured an objective representation of phonetic accuracy relative to the reference standard.

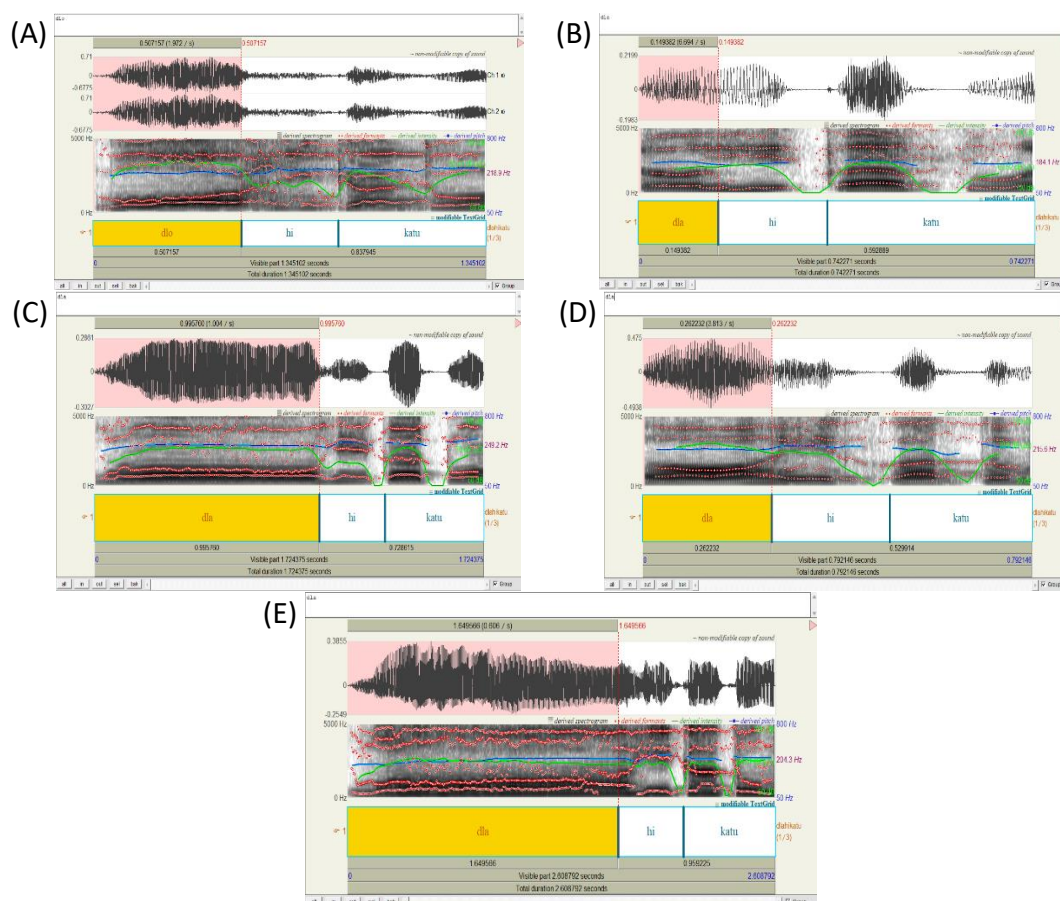
4. Results and Discussion

The acoustic analysis of the /d^ɛ/ phoneme among older adult respondents revealed distinct articulatory patterns when compared to the NS benchmark. Evaluated through Praat spectrograms, the data highlight varying degrees of phonetic accuracy and sound distortion across different word positions. Rather than detailing each spectrogram individually, the following subsections synthesize the primary articulatory challenges specifically concerning duration, formants (F1-F2 narrowing), and intensity to evaluate the impact of age-related physiological changes and educational background on emphatic consonant production.

4.1 Acoustic Interference of the /d^ɛ/ Phoneme in Word-Initial Position

Figure 1-5.

Spectrogram Visualizations of /d^ɛ/ in Initial Position across Respondents



Note. NS = Native Speaker, R = Respondent. (A) NS. (B) R1. (C) R2. (D) R3. (E) R4.

As summarized in Table 3, the acoustic realization of the /d^ɛ/ phoneme in the word-initial position reveals significant articulatory variations among the older adult respondents compared to the NS. The primary acoustic marker for the /d^ɛ/ phoneme's emphatic resonance is velarization, indicated by the narrowing distance between the first (F1) and second (F2) formants (Aldamen & Al-Deaibes, 2023). The NS demonstrated optimal

articulatory control, establishing a benchmark duration of 0.507 seconds and a distinct F1-F2 narrowing, reflecting highly stable secondary articulation. Instead of repeating these foundational acoustic concepts for each recording, this benchmark serves as the primary metric for evaluating the respondents articulatory precision.

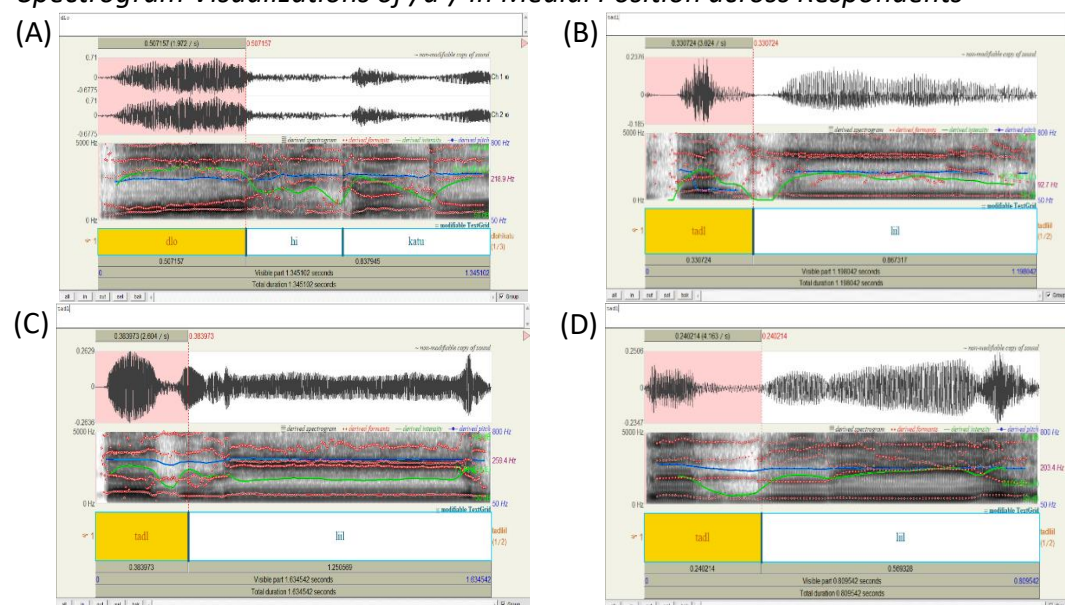
Figures 2 through 5 illustrate the contrasting acoustic outputs of the four respondents. Notably, respondents with general education backgrounds (R2 and R3) produced acoustic characteristics closest to the NS benchmark. Despite their shorter articulatory durations (0.995s and 0.262s, respectively), both maintained coherent F1-F2 narrowing and stable intensity. This pattern indicates preserved phonological memory and efficient airflow control. Conversely, R4 despite having an Islamic boarding school background, exhibited severe articulatory overcompensation. As seen in Figure 5, R4 excessively prolonged the articulation to 1.649 seconds. While the acoustic energy was dense, this prolonged duration disrupted the natural resonance, demonstrating that excessive articulatory effort does not equate to phonetic precision.

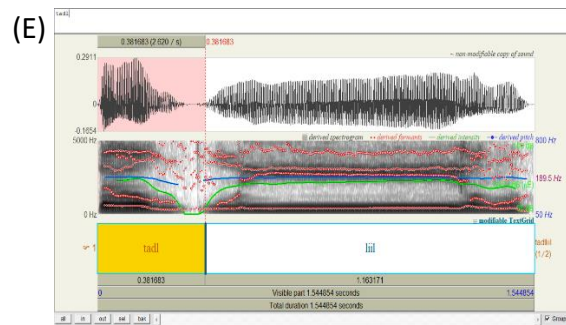
This comparative evidence highlights a critical intersection between physiological aging and linguistic background. R4's overcompensation likely reflects a deliberate attempt to bypass age-related physiological constraints such as decreased tongue muscle elasticity through brute force, ultimately resulting in velarization failure (Muliarno, 2023; Sholihin, 2020). In contrast, the stability observed in R2 and R3 suggests that while the physiological degradation of articulatory organs restricts airflow endurance, the cognitive retention of the articulation point (*makhraj*) remains intact. Therefore, phonetic inaccuracies in older adults in this position stem primarily from motor control limitations rather than a loss of phonological knowledge. From a pedagogical perspective, this implies that instructional methods for older adults should emphasize the precision of articulation points rather than demanding prolonged absolute energetic perfection (Munirah, 2023; Ni'mah et al., 2025).

4.2 Acoustic Interference of the /d^c/ Phoneme in Word-Medial Position

Figure 6-10

Spectrogram Visualizations of /d^c/ in Medial Position across Respondents





Note. NS = Native Speaker, R = Respondent. (A) NS. (B) R1. (C) R2. (D) R3. (E) R4.

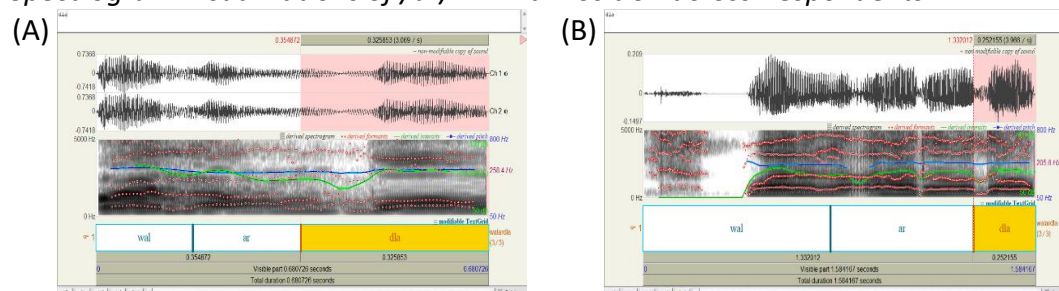
In the word-medial position, the articulatory challenge shifts from initiating the emphatic sound to executing a smooth transition into the subsequent long vowel "lil". As detailed in Table 3, the NS benchmark for this position established a duration of 0.433 seconds with a fluid pitch contour and distinct F1-F2 narrowing. Unlike the highly variable outputs observed in the word-initial position, Figures 7 through 10 demonstrate that the phonetic environment of a medial position facilitates significantly greater articulatory consistency among all older adult respondents. The acoustic data reveals that R1, R2, R3, and notably R4, all successfully maintained the requisite F1-F2 narrowing that signifies proper velarization. Although minor fluctuations in intensity during the airflow closure phase were observed (particularly in R3 and R4), the subsequent transition to the vowel segment effectively stabilized their acoustic resonance, a phenomenon consistent with the acoustic correlates of energy transition and plosive voicing (Misnadin & Kirby, 2020).

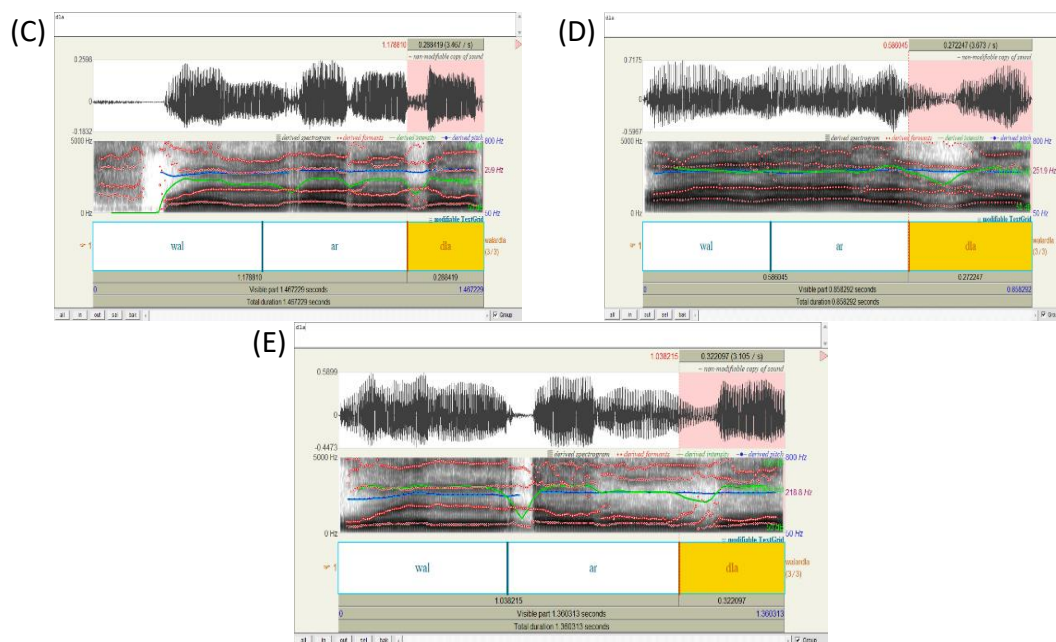
This uniformity suggests that being flanked by vowels provides a phonetic "anchor" that assists the aging articulatory organs in managing complex secondary articulations. Even R4, who struggled with overcompensation in the initial position, produced a controlled duration (0.381s) and clear emphatic resonance when aided by the momentum of the surrounding vowels. From a pedagogical standpoint, this finding carries a significant implication for andragogical Quranic instruction: when introducing complex emphatic consonants to older adults, educators should initiate practice within vowel-flanked medial positions rather than isolated or initial positions. This approach leverages the phonetic environment to bypass motor control limitations, thereby facilitating a smoother and less physically demanding learning process (Ni'mah et al., 2025).

4.3 Acoustic Interference of the /dʕ/ Phoneme in Word-Final Position

Figure 11-15.

Spectrogram Visualizations of /dʕ/ in Final Position across Respondents





Note. NS = Native Speaker, R = Respondent. (A) NS. (B) R1. (C) R2. (D) R3. (E) R4.

Concluding an utterance with the /d^c/ phoneme alters the articulatory dynamics, shifting the demand toward sustaining the emphatic resonance as the airflow ceases. As indicated in the summary data in Table 3, the NS maintained a stable duration of 0.325 seconds with a sharp F1-F2 narrowing, demonstrating optimal articulatory stamina at the end of the utterance. When comparing the respondents, Figures 12 through 14 reveal that R1, R2, and R3 successfully retained this phonetic trait, exhibiting consistent F1-F2 narrowing and stable intensity. This indicates that their articulatory control remained intact through the final phase of the word. Conversely, R4 once again exhibited notable phonetic distortion. While R4's duration (0.322s) closely matched the NS, the acoustic spectrogram Figure 15 displayed a distinct lack of sharpness and a widening F1-F2 distance (F2 rising to 1300–1400 Hz), which is visual evidence of an imperfect velarization process and weakened spectral features (Alihuddin et al., 2022).

This acoustic failure in the final position provides a crucial interpretive insight regarding the physiological constraints of older adults. While the medial position provided a phonetic "anchor" through flanking vowels, pronouncing an emphatic consonant at the end of a word requires independent muscular retention to halt the airflow while simultaneously elevating the tongue root. R4's inability to maintain this dual-action suggests the presence of articulatory fatigue a natural consequence of aging where the stamina of the articulatory organs diminishes at the end of an utterance (Muliatio, 2023; Sholihin, 2020). Pedagogically, these findings suggest that when older adults recite Quranic verses, evaluators and instructors should anticipate end-of-word articulatory fatigue. Instructional focus should therefore prioritize the accuracy of the initial point of articulation (makhrāj) rather than demanding absolute, sustained energetic perfection at the end of phrases, which may be physiologically unattainable for the elderly (Hidayat, 2022; Maulana Haryadi & Marlina, 2025).

Table 3.

Acoustic Analysis Results Table

Respondent	Phoneme Position	Duration (s)	Pitch (Hz)	Intensity (dB)	F1	F2
NS	Initial	0.507	218.9	82.43	500-600	1050–1150
	Medial	0.433	266.7	74.84	550-600	1100–1200
	Final	0.325	258.4	77.56	500-600	1100–1200
R1	Initial	0.149	184.1	69.62	600-700	1150–1250
	Medial	0.330	92.7	57.29	600-700	1100–1200
	Final	0.211	205.6	69.11	500-600	1050–1150
R2	Initial	0.995	249.2	76	500-600	1050–1150
	Medial	0.383	259.4	73.33	500-600	1050–1150
	Final	0.288	259.0	71.76	500-600	1150–1250
R3	Initial	0.262	215.0	788	500-600	1100–1200
	Medial	0.240	203.4	64.09	500-600	1000–1100
	Final	0.322	251.9	78.65	500-600	1100–1200
R4	Initial	1.649	204.3	74.24	500-600	1050–1150
	Medial	0.381	189.5	69.74	450-550	1000–1100
	Final	0.322	251.9	76.91	600-700	1300–1400

5. Conclusion

This study is novel in applying acoustic analysis to elderly non-native learners, an underexplored demographic in Quranic phonology. Praat analysis confirmed native speakers' stability across all acoustic parameters of the /d^ʕ/ phoneme. Conversely, age-related physiological decline significantly disrupts articulatory stability among older adults. Acoustic analysis revealed that *pesantren* education did not ensure native-like precision in later life. In fact, *pesantren* graduates frequently showed articulatory overcompensation, leading to distorted resonance. On the other hand, despite neurological constraints, learners with general educational backgrounds often demonstrated near-native precision. This contrast suggests that articulatory motor memory persists longer than muscular endurance. Ultimately, age-related physiological decline outweighed the benefits of prior religious training.

Pedagogically, the findings of this study offer crucial recommendations for andragogical Quranic instruction. Instruction for elderly learners should prioritize articulation point accuracy and adapt to physical limitations. Evaluators and instructors at *majelis taklim* should prioritize the precision of initial articulation points (*makhraj*) over demanding prolonged, absolute energetic perfection, which is often physiologically unattainable for the elderly. To bypass motor control limitations and articulatory fatigue, educators are advised to initiate the practice of complex emphatic consonants within vowel-flanked medial positions. This phonetic environment provides an 'anchor' that facilitates a smoother and less physically demanding learning process for older adults. Broadly, these findings contribute to phonetic research on aging and inform pedagogical strategies in non-formal Islamic education.

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POSTCOLONIAL MIMICRY AND ETHNIC HIERARCHIES IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER*

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Abstract

This study analyzed Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) to expose the legacy of colonial authoritarianism and racial hierarchies that exist within ethnic tensions. Ethnic hierarchies and authoritarian power structures often have deep historical roots and are sustained in institutions in many multi-ethnic societies, making them seem natural in social life. This research examines the representation of ethnic hierarchies in the novel, the construction of the authoritarian legacy, and its reflection on Afghanistan's broader ethnic conflict. This analysis employed a qualitative method, using Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory of mimicry as the analytical framework. Primary data were drawn from the novel, supported by secondary scholarly sources. Previous studies have discussed trauma, racism, and ethnic oppression in the novel; however, limited attention has been given to how colonial authoritarian ideology is reproduced through postcolonial mimicry. This study contributes to postcolonial literary criticism by demonstrating how mimicry operates not merely as cultural imitation but as a mechanism for reproducing authoritarian violence. The findings reveal how the ethnic hierarchy is reinforced through religious discrimination, physical stereotyping, and structural exclusion. Entrenched ethnic hierarchies and authoritarian legacies reproduced through mimicry and institutionalized by Taliban governance. The conclusion reveals how the colonial legacies continuously reproduce structures of power and racial inequality, which affirms that as a literary text, *The Kite Runner* reflects both personal redemption and the persistence of colonial legacies in sustaining ethnic oppression. This study is limited to textual analysis and does not address broader historical complexities.

Keywords: *authoritarianism; colonial legacy; ethnic hierarchy; mimicry; postcolonialism.*

1. Introduction

Ethnic conflict remains one of the most persistent socio-political challenges in multi-ethnic societies. The term "ethnic conflict" is used in a situation where different ethnic groups get tangled in a conflict massively affected by ethnic identity (Güven, 2024). Ethnic conflict is caused by the separation between ethnic groups, which leads to tension and physical abuse (Karar, 2022). Such conflicts often emerge when one ethnic group dominates political power, causing tension and power struggle between different ethnic groups. In this

context, ethnicity itself is not the inherent cause of conflict, but is rather a shared identity used by the elites as a tool for seizure of power and resources (Manea, 2024: 11–12). Domination is further reinforced through classification, where groups that are prominently defined tend to view themselves as superior to others (Nwagboh, 2022).

Authoritarianism compounds these dynamics by institutionalizing ethnic hierarchy. It is not merely a governance system, but also a mindset of control ingrained in the logic, language, and action of rulers (Koch, 2022: 2). Domination by the majority enables them to have rights to punish marginalized groups, especially those who are believed to have crossed a boundary thought to be universal (Osborne et al., 2023). In multi-ethnic states, this pattern produces compounding discrimination. The dominant groups consolidate political and economic control while marginalized communities face exclusion, structural violence, and displacement. Crucially, authoritarian regimes also justify and reinforce racial and ethnic superiority through laws and social practices.

In some countries, ethnic groups compete for power through ethnic-based parties, while dominant groups discriminate to maintain control, leading to domination and abuse of marginalized groups. Afghanistan presents a particularly acute illustration of this dynamic. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic country, consisting of about fifty ethnic groups. Among those, the Pashtun is the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, followed by Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimaq, Turkmen, Baluch, and other small ethnic groups (Adhikary, 2021). At the end of the 19th century, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan led the violent act which causes massacre, slavery, and displacements of around 60% of the Hazara population (Hakimi, 2024). This violence established an ethnic hierarchy encoded in social memory, institutional practice, and political legitimacy, one that subsequent regimes would inherit and reproduce. Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, conflicts among *Mujahideen* factions caused extreme political and social chaos that enabled the Taliban to rise to power (Kakar et al., 2025). Under Taliban rule, policies and governance were largely centered on the interests of the Pashtun majority (Ashrafian, 2023).

These historical conditions form the material and ideological context of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003). The novel narrates ethnic discrimination against Hazara people through social exclusion, targeted bullying and sexual violence. Explicitly through the character of Hassan, a Hazara boy subjected to systemic abuse within an Afghan society. The antagonist Assef articulates this hierarchy explicitly, positioning Hazara people as racially inferior and socially illegitimate within the Afghan nation. As a postcolonial literary text, *The Kite Runner* not only reflects ethnic oppression but also examines how authoritarian ideology is produced and sustained through every social relation and institutional power.

However, many previous studies have examined with Hazara oppression, class conflict, and trauma, but has not examined how colonial authoritarian legacies are reproduced through mimicry. This study investigates dominant groups imitate and perpetuate colonial structures of racial hierarchy through social practice and institutionalized power. This gap carries significant theoretical implications. Conventional political approaches tend to reduce authoritarianism to a structural system of governance, treating it as a set of institutional arrangements that concentrate power and suppress dissent. While this framing offers a useful foundation, it remains limited in explaining how authoritarian ideology continues to operate beyond formal political institutions. It cannot fully account for the ways such ideology becomes internalized, normalized, and reproduced

through discourse, identity formation, and everyday social relations. Postcolonial theory addresses precisely this dimension. Postcolonialism refers not only to the period after colonialism, but also to the continuing influence of colonial legacies and hierarchical systems of power in contemporary society (Zhang, 2023). A postcolonial reading examines how authoritarian logic is reproduced, circulated, and internalized by the very subjects it subordinates.

Within this framework, Homi K Bhabha concept of mimicry (1994) is especially productive. Mimicry describes how colonial authority is sustained not through direct imposition alone but through ambivalent imitation. In the Afghan context, Pashtun dominance over the Hazara cannot be reduced to Taliban coercion alone. It is reproduced through everyday social performances of superiority and institutional structures that encode racial difference as political fact. Mimicry is significant in this context because it explains how colonial patterns of authority continue to operate through imitation, ambivalence, and ideological reproduction.

This study investigates: (1) identify racial hierarchies in Afghanistan as represented in the novel; (2) analyze how authoritarian legacies are constructed; and (3) explore how the ethnic conflict reflects authoritarian reproduction.

2. Literature Review

In postcolonial studies, the term “postcolonial” refers not only to the period after colonialism, but also the continuing influence of neo-colonial domination, social inequality, and hierarchical systems of power in post- independence societies (Ashcroft et al., 2024). As a multidisciplinary field, it incorporates different elements such as Marxism, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, feminism, and poststructuralism. Moreover, postcolonialism critiques how colonial literature reinforced the subjugation of colonized peoples (Bartiza & Zrizi, 2022). (Bhandari, 2022) identifies four models of resistance, ranging from rewriting colonial narratives to transforming material and cultural circumstances, which inform this study’s focus on mimicry as a site where colonial subjects negotiate and destabilize imposed identities.

As the pioneer of postcolonialism as a paradigm, Homi K. Bhabha argues that postcoloniality serves as a helpful reminder of the international division of labor and the enduring “neo-colonial” ties under the “new” world order (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha’s framework accepts the difficulties of poststructuralism to stable or fixed identities by allowing attention to the ways that roles, gender, community, and nationality interact. He highlights these several points of interaction, in the production of culture and identity, as well as emphasizing that the process of constructing the past and present is still continuous and unfinished.

Within postcolonialism, mimicry exemplifies how colonial legacies reproduced through ambivalent imitation, a framework central to analyzing ethnic hierarchies in Afghanistan. This framework provides a lens to examine Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of mimicry as the analytical framework that is based in the instability of the colonial discourse itself. Homi K. Bhabha proposes concepts such as hybridity, ambivalence, third space, and mimicry, which all correlates to one another. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha states that mimicry describes how colonized subjects imitate the colonizer’s language and values,

appearing 'almost the same but not quite,' thereby exposing the instability of colonial authority.

According to Homi K. Bhabha, mimicry is based on ambivalence; mimicry must continuously produce its excess, difference, and slippage in order to be effective. A double articulation, a complex reform, regulation, and discipline strategy that "appropriates" the Other while envisioning authority, is thus what mimicry is a symptom of. The desire to appear "authentic" through imitation is the final irony of imperfect representation. Imitation will constantly highlight the differences, strengthening the postcolonial subjects' unstable sense of belonging in the diasporic setting rather than facilitating full assimilation (Siddiq et al., 2026). In this sense, mimicry contributes to the continuation of ideological violation.

This study positions mimicry as a political mechanism through which authoritarian ideology and ethnic hierarchy are continuously reproduced within postcolonial society. Mimicry becomes a mechanism of political violence when colonial logic is institutionalized through governance, law, and enforced social hierarchy. When dominant ethnic group adopt racial classifications and authoritarian practices from colonial processors, mimicry becomes structurally coercive. In the Afghan context, this process is visible in the way Pashtun political authority produced and institutionalized imperialism, transforming ethnic distinctions into instruments of systematic oppression against the Hazara. The Taliban governance, in particular, exemplifies how authoritarian rule can function as an institutionalized form of mimicry. The Taliban replicate and intensify colonial structures of domination under the guise of indigenous political authority. Racial classifications become institutionalize through their repeated citation across successive political formations, each iteration rendering hierarchy more natural and less contingent (Bhabha, 1994). What appears as a nativist or religious order is therefore, in Bhabha's terms, mimicry of colonial domination. It is the same logic of racial subjugation, authorized through different ideological registers. This framework provides a lens to examine how ideological domination and ethnic hierarchy are represented in *The Kite Runner*.

Previous research related to *The Kite Runner* discussed Hazara oppression and systemic ethnic hierarchy rooted in Pashtun domination (Shaikh et al., 2025; Wagle, 2023), as well as racism and the dehumanization of Hazara communities (Hakim, 2022). Furthermore, some studies have shed light on the class conflict and social gap (Ergasheva, 2025; Srivastava et al., 2025), the psychological trauma of Hazara group (magsi et al., 2024; Mukta & Sumona, 2022), and Amir's traumatic consequences of his regret which pushed his self-redemption (Bhattarai, 2024; S. Khan et al., 2021; Narzary, 2024). Similar study examined colonial violence and the continuation of oppression from the Soviet invasion to Taliban governance through Frantz Fanon's theory of violence (Naveed, 2024). While these studies provide important insights into marginalization, few have applied mimicry theory to Afghan ethnic hierarchies as represented in *The Kite Runner*.

Taken together, Bhabha's concept of mimicry establishes the theoretical foundation for the present study. Mimicry provides a framework for examining how ideological domination, ethnic hierarchy, and authoritarian power are reproduced through ambivalent imitation within postcolonial society. Through this perspective, *The Kite Runner* is positioned as a postcolonial text that reveals the normalization of ethnic violence and hierarchical domination within Afghan society. Accordingly, mimicry guides the study's analytical lens in interpreting how authoritarian ideology and ethnic hierarchy operate throughout the novel.

3. Research Method

A qualitative approach was chosen to analyze social aspects in a literary text, allowing interpretation of colonial authoritarianism and ethnic hierarchies. It focuses on the way ideological mimicry and ethnic identity are negotiated within the narrative. Qualitative methods help researchers understand complex social phenomena by focusing on people's experiences, perspectives, and the meanings they attach to their social realities (Lim, 2025). Because this research analyzes social aspects in a literary text, the qualitative method is considered appropriate for identifying and interpreting how the legacy of authoritarianism and ethnic hierarchies are formed in the story.

3.1 Research Design

This research utilized a descriptive qualitative design grounded in postcolonial literary analysis, with Homi K. Bhabha's theory of mimicry serving as the primary interpretive framework. Within this framework, mimicry explains the process by which subjugated subjects imitate dominant authority in an ambivalent and imperfect manner. It functions as the central analytical lens through which character behavior, power relations, and ethnic conflict in the novel are examined. The researcher maintained reflexivity throughout by acknowledging as an academic interpreter of a culturally and historically specific text.

3.2 Data Sources

Primary data were drawn from *The Kite Runner* (2003), including all narrative passages, dialogue, and descriptive language relevant to the research questions. For instance, passages depicting the Pashtun-Hazara hierarchy illuminate how racial stratification is normalized within social space; and scenes involving Taliban rule demonstrate how authoritarian power is performed and internalized. Data selection was purposive and criterion-based: words, sentences, and extended passages were selected based on their thematic and linguistic engagement with ethnic stratification, authoritarian behavior, and the reproduction of colonial power structures. Secondary data included scholarly articles, journals, and theoretical texts on postcolonialism, mimicry, and Afghan history. Data were gathered using an observation sheet during close reading, focusing on words, phrases, and passages relevant to the research questions.

3.3 Data Collection

The data collection method was guided by textual analysis sheet to record the data as the result of close reading and interpretation of the novel *The Kite Runner* (2003). Each textual unit was noted for both its surface meaning and its deeper ideological implications within the postcolonial framework. Primary instrument used in this study was textual analysis sheet designed for systematic close reading. The sheet was structured to gather: (1) the textual unit in the form of a quotation or paraphrase, (2) the page reference, (3) the thematic category, and (4) the theoretical relevance based on Bhabha's concept of mimicry. This instrument ensured that data collection remained focused and consistent throughout the entire reading process.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed descriptively and interpretively across three stages. The first stage involved textual coding, identifying its key and ideological feature. The second stage involved thematic categorization, in which related codes were grouped into broader analytical clusters corresponding to the study's research questions. The third stage involved interpretive analysis, in which each thematic cluster was examined through Bhabha's theory of mimicry.

3.5 Validity

Data credibility was ensured through triangulation with secondary sources and theoretical consistency. This study employed triangulation by comparing textual findings from *The Kite Runner* with scholarly and historical sources discussing Afghan ethnic conflict, authoritarianism and postcolonialism. Interpretation was guided by Bhabha's theory of mimicry, focusing on ambivalence and imperfect imitation as mechanisms of authoritarian reproduction. Repeated reading and cross-checking of the textual evidence were also conducted to strengthen interpretive reliability and academic rigor.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Representation of Ethnic Hierarchies in *The Kite Runner*

Ethnic hierarchy in *The Kite Runner* is a structural foundation. Hosseini represents Hazara marginalization as a condition that is produced rather than naturally existing. Bhabha (1994) identifies this production as the work of the colonial stereotype: a discursive mechanism that fixes racial difference as knowable, stable, and inevitable. Pashtun is the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, while Hazara is the marginalized ethnic group. In the novel, this fixity operates through four interlocking systems: historical violence, religious difference, physical stigmatization, and enforced class position. The historical dimension is established early. Amir recounts how Pashtuns subjected Hazaras to massacre, land seizure, and the enslavement of women (Hosseini, 2003: 9). Historically, this oppression could be traced back to Abdur Rahman Khan's governance in 1890-1893, which led to the Hazara rebellion (Hakimi, 2024: 86). This past violence sets the foundation for present hierarchy in the novel.

Religious difference also compounds this hierarchy. Hazaras are predominantly Shi'a in a Sunni dominant society. The Shi'a and Isma'ili communities are considered *kafir* (infidels) by Sunni Pashtuns (Hakimi, 2024: 85). In the novel, this difference is institutionalized through the *mullah's* classroom teachings, which frame Shi'a identity as false and degraded (Hosseini, 2003: 10). The mullah's statements do not only accuse Shi'a of false martyrdom, they strip Hazara identity of humanity by presenting it as something contemptible and beneath serious consideration. It is the normalization of ethnic contempt through institutional authority, where the classroom becomes a *situ* for reproducing hierarchy as religious truth.

Physical difference reinforces this further. Hazara is the descendant of Genghis Khan's soldiers and have historically been regarded as non-indigenous to Afghanistan (Khan, 2024: 11–12). In the novel, the people of Hazara are described to have Mongoloid physical features and are often tied with Mongols, who are said to be similar to Chinese people (Hosseini, 2003: 9). Moreover, class position consolidates all of these distinctions. Hassan and Ali, a Hazaras, occupy a permanently subordinate domestic role, their labor encoding

their ethnic position in everyday spatial terms (Hosseini, 2003: 49). Their limited access to education, economic mobility, and authority reflects systemic inequality embedded within everyday social relations.

4.2 Legacy of Authoritarianism in Afghanistan Constructed in The Story

4.2.1 Western Influence and Elite Mimicry in Reproducing Imperial Ideology

There are broader influences that shaped Afghanistan's authoritarian political system. The legacy of authoritarianism in *The Kite Runner* is not constructed through direct colonization, but rather through forms of imperial influence. Imperialism does not always require physical residence, but rather works through economic, military, and cultural domination (Said, 1994: 9–10). In the novel itself, traces of imperialism show itself subtly through the representation of "The West", and more clearly defined through the characters who adopt and apply those ideologies.

In the novel, Baba embodies this process. He is known as a rich, generous, principled man and came from an educated family. Baba reflects values that are often associated with the West modernity, such as individualism, secularism, and social mobility. In 1963, Afghanistan had an elite ruler who is open-minded, modernist, and secular, and the majority of his members have pursued higher education in West countries (Jalali, 2024). Even though modernization was debated, by the 1970s Afghanistan had become modern and fairly secular state (Nawabi & Kolozi, 2022). Additionally, the relationship between Afghanistan with the United States strengthens this influence since the ear of Zahir Shah (Khalid et al., 2025). Together, those factors account the historical formation of Afghan's elite class.

In the novel, Baba is depicted as a successful businessman in Kabul with a carpet business, an apothecary, and a restaurant (Hosseini, 2003: 15). He also adopts a consumptive lifestyle by owning a luxurious house, holding big parties, to owning a car such as the Ford Mustang often linked to popular culture in The West (Hosseini, 2003: 5 & 27). He has a moral framework built on personal integrity rather than collective religious or tribal obligation (Hosseini, 2003: 17). He dismisses the *mullahs* as intellectually hollow and declares alcohol permissible. That reflect liberal individualism rather than Afghan cultural or religious norms and signs that the elite class of Afghanistan has become associated with the capitalism and consumerism values of The West.

Read through Bhabha's framework, Baba exemplifies mimicry. He performs and reproducing the logic of Western modernity as the standard of sophistication and authority. The capitalism and the secular moral code are performances of a Western identity that positions Baba within modernity. Yet Baba's mimicry remains partial. He speaks the ethical language of Western liberalism, but within a society whose structural hierarchies he does not fundamentally challenge. His household still depends on Hazara servants. His moral individualism coexists with the ethnic order he never directly contests. This ambivalence is precisely what Bhabha identifies as the structural condition of mimicry: the imitation is never complete, and its incompleteness exposes the contradiction between the values performed and the hierarchies sustained.

4.2.2 Ideological Mimicry and Racial Supremacy in Authoritarian Violence

If Baba represents the subtle form of imperialism, then Assef represents a more extreme example. Rather than imitating the civility, he the violent side of power, especially

racial supremacy and ethnic domination. He appropriates Western supremacist ideology, explicitly modeling his vision of ethnic purity on Adolf Hitler (Hosseini, 2003: 40). He frames Hazaras as racial pollutants and Afghanistan as exclusively Pashtun territory, reproducing the logic of racial purity, marginalization, and legitimized violence that characterizes Nazi ideology. Assef did not derive this worldview from Afghan tradition. He consciously absorbed it from an external model of racial domination and transplanted it onto a different ethnic landscape.

Bhabha explained, mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other: a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite (Bhabha, 1994: 122). Mimicry reproduces its structure of power while generating difference in the process. The Nazi ideological structure is reproduced, but in a different cultural context, directed at a different ethnic target, and authorized through different historical grievances. The novel reveals how supremacist ideology is reproduced through mimicry, preserving authoritarian logic while displacing it onto a different cultural and ethnic context.

Bhabha argues that the colonial stereotype operates through fixity. This fixity is paradoxical because it simultaneously demands a stable, ordered presentation of racial difference while also producing images of degeneracy, disorder, and demonic repetition. In other words, colonial discourse cannot maintain a single, stable stereotype without constantly revealing its own instability and anxiety (Bhabha, 1994: 94). Assef's construction of the Hazara as racial pollutants is a fixed representation. Assef's later alignment with the Taliban demonstrates how this logic is institutionalized. He retains the same ideology of ethnic domination, that reauthorized through religious absolutism. The label shifts from Nazi racial supremacy to Islamic extremism, but the authoritarian structure of fixity, dehumanization, and legitimized violence remains constant.

4.3 The Legacy of Authoritarian Reflected in Afghanistan Ethnic Conflict

The Taliban's emergence in *The Kite Runner* is not represented as a purely indigenous political development. Hosseini situates it within a longer arc of foreign intervention and proxy warfare that partially shaped Afghanistan's political culture before the Taliban ever seized power. Most of Taliban people are Pashtuns, with Islamic education taught in madrasa (Sakhi, 2022). Way before the Taliban held full authority, Afghanistan had become the battleground of foreign interests. During The Cold War, the USA saw Afghanistan as a strategic site to hinder the Soviet expansion. The relationship between America and Afghanistan shifted from economic and diplomatic cooperation into geopolitical rivalry that turned Afghanistan into a proxy battlefield (Yawar, 2024).

The Mujahideen were trained in guerilla warfare and military operations under US policy through collaboration between the US and Pakistan's ISI, with financial support from Saudi Arabia and Egypt to resist the Soviet and Kabul governments (Imran & Xiaochuan, 2016). *Mujahideen* had learned their battle skills either directly from CIA training programs or from *Mujahideen* commanders trained by the CIA itself (Armajani, 2021: 257) The United States recruited young Muslim men to fight in Afghanistan, framing their participation as *jihad* to serve American geopolitical interests (Prescott, 2021). This effort was formalized when President Carter approved a covert CIA program supplying the Mujahideen with military weapons, ammunition, and material support (Zanchetta, 2025). The Taliban emerged specifically from Pashtun Mujahideen factions who received training in Pakistani

madrasas (Kakar et al., 2025). Such military training could act as an authoritarian model which will be imitated by the *Mujahideen*.

In the novel, the Taliban's arrival is initially welcomed precisely because the Northern Alliance had governed through comparable brutality (Hosseini, 2003: 200). It suggests that public support for the Taliban emerged less from ideological acceptance than from the desire to escape a previous form of authoritarian violence. The Taliban installed a governance of fear: strict social controls, public punishment, and the violent regulation of private life (Hosseini, 2003: 198–253). Critically, this order was sustained without functioning legal institutions or administrative infrastructure, substituting religious edict for law (Ameyaw-Brobbe, 2023). The Taliban reproduced the authoritarian logic of absolute power and enforced compliance, but stripped of its institutional form, their authority depended entirely on the continuous performance of violence.

This aligns with Bhabha theory of mimicry. Bhabha argues that colonial power operates through a strategy of reforming, regulating, and disciplining the colonized subject, projecting a vision of what authority should look like and training subjects to reproduce it, while mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, and its difference in order to remain effective (Bhabha, 1994: 122). The Taliban reliance on spectacle such as, public executions, stadium violence, the performance of punishment as governance, show this excess. It is the sign of an authority that cannot stabilize itself through institutions and must therefore restate itself through force. The interference of The West earlier could be an authoritarian model that Afghanistan would later imitate. The Taliban is almost the same as the authoritarian imperial model that shaped them. They implement absolute control, demand unconditional compliance, and utilizes fear and punishment as the governance instruments.

In the novel, Assef, as a Taliban representation, makes this logic explicit at the individual level. He frames the massacre of Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif as ethnic cleansing and God's work, means a civilizing mission to purify the nation of its racial pollutants (Hosseini, 2003: 277). He practiced the Nazi ideology which he idolized in the governance. It mirrors the colonial justification of violence as necessary order, now reauthorized through religious absolutism. The ideological structure of racial hierarchy, dehumanization, and legitimized extermination is the same one Assef absorbed from Hitler in childhood, now institutionalized through Taliban governance. This is a reflection of a parallel between the Nazi ideology and the ethnic hierarchy that exist between Pashtun and Hazara, as both operate through the notions of purity, superiority, and the legitimization of violence to those deemed inferior.

The Taliban deployed Islamic radicalism to legitimize their rule and project an image of authentic renewal. Yet as Bhabha argues, the attempt to appear authentic through imitation ultimately reveals the irony of partial representation (Bhabha, 1994: 126). In seeking to reproduce the authoritarian model they inherited, the Taliban positioned themselves as legitimate sovereign power, believing that mimicking the colonizer's structures of control would confer validity and authority. Instead, mimicry exposed their inefficacy. They could not fully become what they imitated, and in the process of imitation they distanced themselves from the legitimacy of their own cultural and religious tradition. What presented itself as Islamic governance was neither authentically Islamic nor fully authoritarian in the inherited imperial sense. It occupied an unstable space between the two, sustained only through the continuous performance of violence.

Yet the mimicry ultimately exposes its own failure. The turn from mimicry to menace is the consequences of authoritarianism without system and legitimacy. When the performance of authority exceeds its institutional basis, Bhabha argues, the insignia of authority becomes a mask, a mockery (Bhabha, 1994: 172). The Taliban's claim to authentic Islamic governance collapse under the weight of its own excess. The spectacle of public violence, the ethnic massacres justified as divine mandate, and the governance that produces nothing but fear that revealed. The Taliban is a reproduction of imperial authoritarian logic wearing religious language as camouflage. The mockery lies in the gap between the claim to authenticity and the reality of imitation. The Taliban attempted to be the legitimate successor to both Islamic tradition and Afghan sovereignty but achieved neither, becoming instead a distorted echo of the imperial models that shaped them. Their governance upholds nothing of the authentic Islamic tradition and partially shaped by inherited structures of militarized control dressed in religious language.

This analysis extends Naveed's (2024) study on colonial violence through Fanon's framework by demonstrating how *The Kite Runner* represents Taliban governance as the reproduction of authoritarian ideology through mimicry. Through Bhabha's framework, the novel reveals not only violence against Hazara communities, but also how authoritarian logic is reproduced, transmitted, and destabilized by its own incompleteness.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzed the legacy of colonial authoritarianism and also the racial hierarchies that exist in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003). The novel is presented as a personal narrative of guilt and redemption, yet it simultaneously reveals how in Afghanistan's social and political structure, ethnic oppression and authoritarian power play a big part in the social and political structure. By using Homi K. Bhabha's concept of mimicry, this study analyzed how authoritarianism is reproduced through imperial influence, ethnic supremacy ideology, and institutionalized systems of control. The findings demonstrate that ethnic hierarchy in the novel is a historically constructed system maintained through religion, physical differences, and social exclusion. Hazara marginalization is depicted through every day practices, highlighting systemic inequality. The indirect imperial influence, especially through military training and ideology, shaped the legacy of authoritarianism. This analysis reveals Baba and Assef as two forms of mimicry: Baba adopts Western values as his life style, while Assef turns supremacist ideologies into violence. Both Assef's mimicry and Nazi's ideology rely on ideas of purity, superiority, and the justification of violence towards those deemed inferior, showing us that there is a direct parallelism between the two. The Taliban exemplifies institutionalized authoritarianism, where mimicry evolves into coercive governance.

As a reflection, this study finds that the authoritarianism in *The Kite Runner* is applied subtly and is deeply integrated in everyday social structures, which makes it appear natural and unquestioned. Bhabha's concept of mimicry assisted in revealing that such power is not original, but is instead inherited and endlessly reproduced. However, the findings are limited by the single-text focus and reliance on one theoretical framework, which may restrict generalizability. Future studies could examine other Afghan or South Asian texts, or apply alternative postcolonial frameworks such as hybridity or subaltern theory. This study encourages readers to critically engage with literary texts as reflections of power, identity, and inequality shaped by colonial legacies.

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DEEP LEARNING IN THE BAMl ARABIC INSTRUCTION METHOD

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Abstract

Arabic language learning practices at Integrated Islamic Schools (SIT) are often dominated by textual memorization and formal grammatical rules, which frequently hinder the development of functional communication skills. This study analyzes the implementation of the BAMl Method (*Bahasa Arab Metode Insantama*) through a deep learning perspective, focusing specifically on the pedagogical transition from surface-level theory to functional conversation (*hiwar*). A qualitative approach with a reflective-phenomenological design was employed to capture the essence of the learning transformation. The research involved 20 participants, consisting of one Arabic language teacher and 19 female 11th-grade students at SMAIT Insantama Bogor. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, direct classroom observations, and questionnaires. Findings reveal that 78.9% (n=15) of students reported high satisfaction, correlating the method's success with the synergy between contextual teaching and the daily realities of boarding school life. Key results indicate that systematic scaffolding and mindful strategies, such as visual associations and oral exercises, accelerate the internalization of linguistic meaning more effectively. Concurrently, 36.8% (n=7) of students also noted facing challenges in independent practice due to psychological barriers like shyness and physical fatigue during morning sessions. This study concludes that the BAMl Method effectively aligns linguistic mastery with holistic deep learning principles. These findings suggest that integrating more joyful learning elements can further optimize student autonomy and interactive engagement in Arabic pedagogy.

Keywords: *Arabic language curriculum; BAMl method; deep learning approach.*

1. Introduction

Arabic language learning at the Integrated Islamic School (SIT) in Indonesia holds a strategic position, serving not only as a functional communication tool but also as the primary key to deeply understanding the Qur'an. Its pedagogical success is no longer measured solely by technical grammatical aspects but by students' ability to interpret and internalize the values contained therein (Al-Faruqi & Syaifuddin, 2024). In this ecosystem, the choice of instructional methods becomes a crucial variable determining the quality and cognitive depth of students' learning (Arifin, 2022). However, reality shows that Arabic instruction is still confined to monotonous conventional approaches, such as mechanical

vocabulary memorization and repetitive grammar exercises. Kamal (2025) asserts that this deadlock stems from an irrelevant curriculum and the dominance of the grammar-translation method (*thariqah al-qawaid wa al-tarjamah*), which is disconnected from the linguistic reality of modern society. This pattern tends to produce shallow technical skills lacking a reflective dimension (Rahmawati & Yusuf, 2021); thus, the urgency to shift toward a communicative-reflective approach is inevitable in facing the demands of 21st-century education, which emphasizes critical thinking and the internalization of Islamic character (Meirina et al., 2023).

To address these conventional weaknesses, recent academic discourse has shifted toward the Deep Learning paradigm. This approach emphasizes solid conceptual understanding by integrating new information into existing cognitive structures, aiming to transform learning outcomes through the principle of "teaching less, learning more" (Ahmad Syafi'i & Darnaningsih, 2025; Duan, 2022). Theoretically, the effectiveness of this paradigm is rooted in Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism, where language serves as a cognitive mediating tool through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding (Creswell & Poth, 2023). While various studies by Wibowo et al. (2025) and Nithideechaiwarachok et al. (2024) have demonstrated how scaffolding supports student activities through socio-cultural mediation, there remains a critical debate on how these theoretical frameworks specifically the pillars of meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning can be concretely operationalized within a specialized boarding school environment. The primary challenge lies in synchronizing high academic demands with the need for reflective value internalization, which has often been overlooked in previous research.

One innovation within the SIT environment attempting to bridge this gap is the BAMI Method (Arabic Language Insantama Method) in Bogor. Unlike traditional textbooks that are often abstract, BAMI integrates active, contextual, and Islamic approaches through materials highly relevant to students' daily lives, such as dormitory activities, leadership, and school culture. The method utilizes a systematic text-oriented approach, moving gradually from basic linguistic elements like *isim nakirah* and *ma'rifah*, *mudzakkar* and *muannats*, toward the mastery of complex unvocalized texts. However, the success of such an integrated method does not depend solely on the quality of the textbook as the primary medium, but on the teacher's role as a facilitator capable of providing contextual enrichment (Mustafa et al., 2022). Teachers are required to possess high competence in creating an interactive classroom atmosphere, connecting lesson content to students' life experiences, and integrating supplementary activities, such as vocabulary reinforcement through the Student Council, for a comprehensive learning experience.

Despite the significant potential of the BAMI Method, a significant challenge persists in its practical implementation: the weak integration of deep learning principles into daily Arabic activities. Many educators in SIT environments are still trapped in using literal translations without guiding students to explore textual meanings deeply and contextually. Consequently, students' reading skills develop technically but fail to achieve the expected reflective understanding (Rahmawati & Yusuf, 2021). Although previous research has explored deep learning in various subjects such as mathematics education, which has proven to increase student engagement (Siregar et al., 2025) very few studies have specifically investigated how these principles are operationalized in Arabic teaching at Integrated Islamic High Schools (SMAIT). This empirical gap leaves significant questions regarding the

effectiveness of deep learning pedagogy at the secondary education level, which possesses different cognitive and social characteristics than the primary level.

Furthermore, while the deep learning paradigm is acknowledged for its ability to internalize values and enhance higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), there is a distinct research gap regarding the transformation of grammar-oriented instruction into functional communication (*hiwar*) through structured scaffolding practices. Little attention has been given to how social interaction in a dynamic boarding environment can catalyze 21st-century competencies through linguistic mediation (Sharma, 2024). This study fills that gap by specifically examining the BAMl Method through the lens of deep learning at the SMAIT level, an area that has not been widely explored. Using a reflective-phenomenological approach, this research explores the direct experiences of teachers and students in cultivating mindfulness when facing practical challenges, such as the heterogeneity of student abilities (Ahmad Syafi'i & Darnaningsih, 2025). By reconstructing these findings, the research aims to evaluate the suitability of BAMl for modern demands and provide strategic recommendations for a more holistic, interactive, and adaptive Arabic pedagogy.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of this research is built upon the evolution of Arabic language learning methods, which have shifted from traditional *talaqqi*-based models toward communicative and reflective approaches that position language as a medium for thinking and internalizing Islamic values. Within the modern educational paradigm, an effective learning method must balance linguistic and semantic aspects so that students do not merely understand grammatical structures but also grasp the essence of meaning and the depth of its contextual use. Deep learning in education transcends surface-level memorization by emphasizing conceptual mastery and the integration of new information into existing cognitive schemas. This paradigm is operationalized through three interconnected pillars: meaningful learning, which links content to real-life experiences; mindful learning, which fosters full cognitive presence and reflection; and joyful learning, which minimizes language anxiety through positive engagement. Within this framework, metacognition plays a vital role as students are encouraged not just to know the language technically but to understand the underlying logic behind the grammatical structures being studied.

Theoretically, this research is also grounded in Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism, which posits that knowledge is co-constructed through dynamic social interaction. Central to this framework are the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding, where teachers provide temporary support to help students move from their current ability toward independent proficiency. In the context of the BAMl method, scaffolding is manifested through systematic sentence dissection and oral drilling that effectively bridges the gap between abstract theory and functional application. This serves as an antithesis to traditional Arabic pedagogy, which has long been criticized for its over-reliance on the grammar-translation method and rote memorization, often resulting in technical proficiency without sufficient communicative competence. Modern shifts now favor communicative Arabic teaching and contextual learning, where language is taught as a primary medium for thinking and expressing values within the students' specific social and cultural environments.

Previous empirical studies have explored various dimensions of Arabic language acquisition from diverse perspectives. For instance, Khalid et al. (2021) conducted an in-depth analysis of semantic and grammatical errors to understand student translation patterns, while Rahmawati and Yusuf (2021) emphasized that effectiveness in Arabic learning is only achieved when instruction is rooted in meaningfulness and active engagement. However, despite these significant findings, critical gaps remain in the current literature. Most research on deep learning has been conducted in other academic fields, such as mathematics, leaving its application in secondary-level Arabic instruction under-researched and under-documented. While studies by Ahmad Syafi'i & Darnaningsih (2025) provide a solid conceptual basis for mindful and meaningful learning, there is a notable lack of empirical evidence on how these principles are operationalized within the unique context of Indonesian boarding schools (SIT). This study intervenes by analyzing the BAMI method's process, moving beyond simple error analysis to examine the holistic transformation of the learning process itself.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design to explore the essence of teachers' and students' experiences in implementing the BAMI Method in Arabic language learning at an integrated Islamic school. The phenomenological design was chosen specifically for its capacity to facilitate a deep analysis of the subjective experiences of participants in internalizing the BAMI Method, thereby comprehensively revealing the essence of the transformation of Arabic language learning toward the deep learning paradigm. This design allows for a profound understanding of educational phenomena from the perspective of participants directly involved in the learning process (Creswell & Poth, 2023), enabling the researcher to interpret how these shared experiences shape the understanding of reflective practices. In line with qualitative principles, this study seeks to understand phenomena within their natural context at SMAIT Insantama Bogor, emphasizing the description of the essence of learning rather than hypothesis testing or generalization (Moleong, 2021; Moustakas, 1994).

The participants for this research were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that the data obtained was strictly relevant to the research objectives. The research subjects consisted of one male Arabic language teacher and 19 female students from the 11th grade, aged between 16 and 17 years. The primary inclusion criterion was active involvement in the implementation of the BAMI Method for at least two semesters, ensuring a mature cognitive foundation and depth of experience for reflection. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide, direct classroom observations to capture the dynamics of the transition from surface theory to functional conversation (*hiwar*), and a documentary study to strengthen credibility through verifiable written evidence (Bowen, 2021). The instruments were specifically designed to identify the integration of deep learning dimensions including meaningful, mindful, and joyful learning which transform the learning experience into a more reflective and holistic process (Andayanie et al., 2025; Alim et al., 2025).

The interview procedure was executed with high precision, with each session lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Single sessions were conducted for each student, while the teacher participated in two separate sessions to allow for a more comprehensive exploration of instructional strategies. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to

ensure data accuracy. The data analysis process followed a systematic phenomenological approach, beginning with the *epoché* technique (suspension of preconceptions), where the researcher set aside personal assumptions about the effectiveness of the BAMl Method to allow the authentic essence of the participants' experiences to emerge. The next step involved horizontalization, which included cataloging every significant statement from the interview transcripts and field observation notes without assigning prior value or judgment.

The coding stages progressed transparently from open coding to identify initial concepts, followed by thematic categorization that grouped significant statements into units of meaning. The researcher developed textural descriptions concerning what students experienced during linguistic analysis and structural descriptions regarding how the boarding school context influenced those experiences. The synthesis of these descriptions resulted in an essential description that captures the universal meaning of implementing the BAMl Method as a deep learning phenomenon. To ensure data validity, the researcher employed technical triangulation by comparing interviews, observations, and documents, alongside member-checking techniques to validate that the findings accurately reflected the participants' perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 2021). Ethical considerations were strictly upheld; all participants provided informed consent, and their identities were kept confidential through total anonymity to protect data integrity (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Students' Perceptions and Achievement of Independent Competencies in the BAMl Method

Quantitative data from the questionnaire indicates that 78.9% (n=15) of students perceived the BAMl method as a highly helpful instrument for understanding sentence structure and interacting with Qur'anic texts contextually. This positive response reflects a shift from mere mechanical memorization toward deep textual comprehension, where students began to feel a direct relevance between linguistic rules and the meaning of the messages they studied. This high satisfaction level indicates that integrating materials closely related to daily life can enhance students' cognitive engagement in processing language structures that were previously considered abstract.

However, the study also identified a significant challenge: 36.8% (n=7) of respondents acknowledged that their independent practice skills remained at a beginner level. During an interview, one student (Participant 3) expressed her psychological barrier: *"I actually understand the rules when the teacher explains them in front of the class, but I still feel very shy and often stumble when I have to speak spontaneously (muhadatsah) in front of my peers."* This finding suggests a gap between cognitive understanding and expressive courage, exacerbated by media preferences where students preferred visual aids over physically exhausting writing tasks during morning sessions.

4.1.2 Learning Observation Report: The Phenomenon of Hiwar-Oriented Transition and Grammatical Logic Internalization

Observations conducted in the 11th-grade class at SMAIT Insantama Bogor showed that the heterogeneity of Arabic proficiency presented a primary instructional challenge, especially for graduates of general junior high schools who felt a heavier cognitive load

compared to boarding school graduates. Nevertheless, a "collective learning culture" emerged where more proficient students naturally assisted their peers in understanding grammatical logic. The teacher reinforced this process through a "sentence dissection" strategy that emphasized functional understanding: *"Don't just memorize the pattern; look at how the verb (fi'il) changes when we talk about activities in the dining hall (math'am) compared to the classroom. Feel the difference."*

The use of authentic dormitory contexts, such as the sentence *"Taqrourth-tholibatu al-ma'tsurota fil-math'am,"* effectively minimized the psychological distance between learners and the material. Observations highlighted the use of the term *al-mahmul* (laptop) as a substitute for mobile phones banned by the school, making the material feel highly personal and real for students. In the final stage, an affective transformation occurred where students, initially low-volumed, became highly confident and loud in responding to spontaneous quizzes. This reflects the success of the transition from surface-level theoretical understanding to applicable and independent functional proficiency.

4.1.3 Pedagogical Transformation and Full-Presence-Based Classroom Management Strategies

In-depth interviews with the Arabic teacher revealed that the emphasis on the *hiwar* method was a direct response to previous evaluations regarding overly theoretical and less applicable instruction. The teacher consciously minimized mental translation by using visual associations: *"I use image slides of a whiteboard for the term 'Sabburah' so they stop translating in their heads and start thinking directly in Arabic."* This strategy aims to build new neural pathways that connect objects directly to the target vocabulary without going through the medium of the mother tongue.

Additionally, the teacher implemented a mandatory writing strategy as a mindfulness tool to overcome morning drowsiness and physical fatigue. This writing activity ensures that even when energy levels are low due to the packed boarding school schedule, students remain physically and cognitively engaged in organizing information in their memory. The synchronization between written and oral exams at the end of the learning period became a key strategy to measure linguistic spontaneity, ensuring that the competencies built were not merely static memorization but real communication skills.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Synergy Between the BAMI Method and Dormitory Life in Promoting Deep Understanding

The results suggest that the BAMI method successfully bridges the gap between theoretical mastery and applied skills by rooting lessons in students' daily realities. This finding aligns with Hamidiyyah et al. (2024) regarding the transformation of experience into meaningful knowledge. By simplifying theoretical abstractions into tangible experiences in the dining hall (*math'am*) or dormitory, the method effectively mitigates the "Cognitive Overload" described by Sweller (2024). This proves that emotional closeness to the material can accelerate the process of assimilating new knowledge.

This integration reflects the principle of Meaningful Learning, where new grammatical information is logically anchored to existing cognitive structures in students' long-term memory. As emphasized by Hibatullah et al. (2026), language success at the secondary level depends heavily on the instructional ability to build cognitive bridges

between theory and reality. The success of 78.9% of students in understanding sentence structure shows that when language is taught as a reflection of students' identity and social activities, learning barriers can be significantly reduced, and understanding becomes more enduring.

4.2.2 Integration of Technology and Adaptive Curriculum Strategies in Modern Pedagogy

The readiness of an adaptive curriculum at SMAIT Insantama is proven to be inseparable from technological integration relevant to school policies. As noted by Almelhes (2024), flexible curricula and multimedia tools are essential for modern Arabic instruction to meet 21st-century competency standards. The use of the laptop (*al-mahmul*) is not merely an aid but a functional pillar of the deep learning ecosystem that allows students to practice the language independently and creatively in completing academic tasks or editing activity videos.

The synchronization between the mobile phone ban, digital device availability, and the *hiwar* method creates a learning environment that supports the massive acceleration of target language proficiency. This supports the findings of Kadarismanto & Sari (2025) that properly used digital tools can strengthen memory retention of complex linguistic structures. Thus, technological integration in the BAMl method is not just about modernization but a strategy to create a more holistic and relevant learning experience for students' character development in the digital age.

4.2.3 Analysis of Psychological Barriers and Cognitive Management Strategies in the Morning

The 36.8% of students struggling with independent mastery indicates that the transition to functional proficiency requires intense internal motivation and emotional support. The lack of "Joyful Learning" elements in morning sessions dominated by "heavy" cognitive strategies is a hindering factor, given that students' energy is often depleted by the boarding schedule. Without an enjoyable atmosphere, students' affective filters tend to rise, which according to Gungenci and Yildiz (2024) can hinder students' confidence in attempting to communicate spontaneously without teacher guidance.

Therefore, classroom management strategies need to be balanced with activities that can stimulate dopamine to counter physical fatigue. As suggested by Istiqomah & Sopian (2025), the use of interactive media and language games is crucial to lower language anxiety. If joy elements are systematically integrated, morning physical fatigue can be mitigated through kinesthetic activities, thereby reducing psychological barriers like shyness and allowing student autonomy in using the target language to grow more optimally.

4.2.4 The Perspective of Social Constructivism and Implications for Curriculum Development

Theoretically, the implementation of BAMl reflects a practical application of Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism, where language is positioned as the primary cognitive mediating tool. Through scaffolding and the utilization of the ZPD, teachers successfully guide students from basic vocabulary understanding to independent sentence synthesis. The dormitory environment in this case is not merely a physical backdrop but an active element

that reinforces the language internalization process through functional interactions that occur daily outside formal lesson hours.

Pedagogical implications from this study emphasize the importance of balancing grammatical accuracy with students' psychological comfort. Adding recreational elements such as word-chain games or flashcards is predicted to strengthen students' engagement more holistically. As concluded by Widyastuti et al. (2025), sustainable pedagogical innovation must enable students to feel safe and confident within their social environment. This ensures that Arabic language mastery is not merely an academic achievement but an internalized functional communication tool within students' character.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of the BAMI Method at SMAIT Insantama Bogor has successfully facilitated a fundamental transformation in Arabic language pedagogy, moving from a surface-level theoretical orientation toward deep functional communication skills (*deep learning*). The findings indicate that the key to this success lies in the powerful synergy between Contextual Teaching strategies and the daily realities of boarding school life, supported by a substantial student satisfaction rate of 78.9%. Through systematic sentence analysis, students logically integrated new grammatical information into their cognitive structures, leading to a more meaningful and enduring understanding compared to traditional rote memorization. Furthermore, the strategic integration of technology via laptops (*al-mahmul*) and the utilization of authentic settings like the dining hall (*math'am*) significantly enhanced memory retention and cognitive engagement in understanding complex linguistic structures.

Theoretically, this study validates the effectiveness of social constructivism and Meaningful Learning principles within the secondary school curriculum, where real-world contexts, such as the mandatory Al-Ma'tsurat reading activity, serve as a strong cognitive bridge for learners. Nevertheless, certain challenges remain regarding student autonomy in independent practice (36.8%), which is influenced by physical barriers like morning fatigue and psychological barriers such as shyness. Consequently, integrating a Joyful Learning approach through interactive media and language games is highly recommended to reduce learning anxiety and maintain concentration during intensive sessions. In summary, the BAMI Method serves as a holistic pedagogical model that successfully harmonizes linguistic mastery with the internalization of Islamic character, effectively meeting the complex demands of 21st-century education.

However, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged for a balanced interpretation of the findings. First, the investigation involved a limited number of participants, consisting of only one teacher and 19 students, which limits the breadth of the data. Second, the research was conducted within a single institutional setting at SMAIT Insantama Bogor, which may restrict the transferability of the results to different educational or cultural environments. Finally, the qualitative scope of this study focuses on in-depth essence description rather than broad statistical generalization. To address these limitations, future research should consider conducting multi-site investigations or comparative studies across different types of integrated Islamic schools. Additionally, longitudinal research is needed to track the long-term sustainability of language proficiency, while experimental studies could provide a more robust quantitative measure of the BAMI Method's effectiveness compared to other conventional instructional models.

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE DOMINANCE AND ITS IMPACT ON SEPEDI ORAL PROFICIENCY: A CASE STUDY OF GRADE 11 LEARNERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) on the oral proficiency of Grade 11 Sepedi Home Language learners in South Africa. Situated within sociocultural and multilingual education perspectives, the study explores how the dominance of English influences learners' use of Sepedi, pronunciation patterns, vocabulary use, and overall oral proficiency. A qualitative case study design was employed involving eight purposively selected Grade 11 learners. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and oral assessment tasks and analyzed using deductive thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the dominance of English reduces opportunities for meaningful use of Sepedi in academic contexts, contributes to phonological transfer, and increases learners' reliance on English vocabulary during communication. Participants also perceived English as significantly influencing their everyday use of Sepedi. These patterns suggest that sustained exposure to English as the dominant language of instruction may limit the development and maintenance of Sepedi oral proficiency. The study highlights the importance of additive multilingual educational practices that promote the meaningful use of both English and indigenous languages in schools. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on multilingual education, language maintenance, and educational equity in South Africa.

Keywords: *additive multilingualism; English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT); language dominance; oral proficiency; Sepedi; South Africa; multilingual education.*

1. Introduction

English remains the dominant language of teaching and learning in South African schools despite the country's multilingual policy framework. This dominance persists in a multilingual education system where indigenous African languages, including Sepedi, are officially recognized yet often marginalized in practice. The legacy of colonization and apartheid entrenched English as the language of power, opportunity, and social mobility, resulting in continued unequal educational outcomes across linguistic lines (Mhlauli et al., 2015; Makalela, 2022). Although Section 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) grants official status to twelve languages, including Sepedi, and the Language-in-

Education Policy promotes mother-tongue instruction, most schools continue to use English as the primary medium of instruction (Ramothwala, 2024; Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025).

Research indicates that the early and often abrupt transition to English as the language of learning and teaching, particularly in under-resourced schools where learners have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, may undermine both English acquisition and the development of African home-language skills (Cummins, 2021; Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025). While substantial research has examined the effects of English dominance on literacy development, academic achievement, and multilingual education, significant gaps remain. Few studies have specifically investigated its impact on oral proficiency in indigenous languages, particularly among secondary school learners. This study addresses that gap by focusing on oral proficiency in Sepedi among Grade 11 learners.

Oral proficiency is particularly important because it forms the foundation for effective communication, cognitive development, cultural identity, and deeper conceptual understanding. Strong oral skills in the mother tongue support rather than hinder the acquisition of additional languages and broader academic success (Cummins, 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). Grade 11 learners represent a critical stage in their educational development as they prepare for the National Senior Certificate examination and transition towards higher education or the workforce. At this stage, confidence and proficiency in both home and additional languages become increasingly important for academic participation and future opportunities.

Sepedi deserves specific attention as one of South Africa's official indigenous languages spoken by millions of people, yet it remains under-researched in the context of contemporary English-medium education. Furthermore, growing concerns regarding the dominance of English in multilingual educational settings have highlighted the need to understand how sustained exposure to English influences learners' use of indigenous languages, particularly in relation to oral communication, pronunciation, and vocabulary development (Makalela, 2022; McKinney & Tyler, 2024). This study therefore investigates the effects of English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) on the oral proficiency of Sepedi-speaking Grade 11 learners. By examining learners' experiences and language practices, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on multilingual education, language maintenance, and educational equity in post-apartheid South Africa.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) influence Sepedi oral proficiency among Grade 11 learners?
2. How does English affect learners' pronunciation and vocabulary use in Sepedi?
3. What are learners' perceptions of the influence of English on their use of Sepedi?

In line with these research questions, the objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the effect of English as the Language of Learning and Teaching on Sepedi as a home language.
2. To determine the impact of English on learners' oral proficiency in Sepedi.
3. To propose measures to address the effects of English as the Language of Learning and Teaching on Sepedi.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language, Cognition, and Academic Proficiency

Language plays a central role in cognitive development, social interaction, and academic learning. Through language, learners construct meaning, organize thought, and

participate in socially mediated learning processes that foster higher-order thinking and knowledge development (Vygotsky, 1978). In multilingual educational settings, language proficiency significantly influences learners' academic achievement because it mediates access to knowledge and classroom participation (Cummins, 2021). Furthermore, in the digital and multicultural era, language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a tool for negotiating cultural identities and engaging with global knowledge networks (Efrizah, 2025). Academic language proficiency, or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), extends beyond Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and encompasses the specialised linguistic demands of schooling, including abstract reasoning, argumentation, and content-area mastery (Cummins, 2021). In multilingual contexts, strong foundational skills in the mother tongue (L1) support rather than hinder additional language acquisition. According to Efrizah et al. (2024), strengthening learners' first language can support vocabulary development and facilitate subsequent learning in additional languages. Cummins' (2021) interdependence hypothesis maintains that cognitive and academic skills transfer across languages when learners reach adequate proficiency thresholds. However, in educational environments characterised by subtractive bilingualism, where a dominant second language such as English gradually displaces the first language (Sepedi), learners may experience reduced development of their home language, which can negatively affect identity formation, cognitive engagement, and academic achievement (Cummins, 2021; Makalela, 2022). Contemporary multilingual education scholars further argue that limiting learners' full linguistic repertoires may constrain opportunities for meaningful learning and participation in multilingual contexts (García & Otheguy, 2020).

2.2 Mother-Tongue Education, Language Maintenance, and Linguistic Identity in Multilingual Contexts

Mother-tongue-based multilingual education fosters cognitive development, cultural identity, and stronger academic achievement (Cummins, 2021; Baker et al., 2020). In South Africa, Sepedi is one of the most widely spoken indigenous languages and holds official status. Nevertheless, despite constitutional recognition of linguistic diversity, the continued dominance of English in educational settings contributes to language shift, challenges in indigenous language development, and weakened linguistic identities among learners (Mabela & Ditsele, 2024; Ramothwala, 2024). From a sociolinguistic perspective, language maintenance is not merely a pedagogical issue but also a matter of power, identity, and social reproduction. The dominance of English-medium education often reinforces colonial language ideologies, marginalises indigenous linguistic resources, and limits opportunities for meaningful multilingual learning and oral language development (McKinney & Tyler, 2024; Probyn, 2024; Plüddemann, 2015).

2.3 English as Medium of Instruction and Language Policy

The Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) serves as the primary medium through which curriculum content is delivered, accessed, and assessed in schools (Ramothwala, 2024). Although the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and related language-in-education policies advocate linguistic equality and multilingualism, English continues to function as the dominant LOLT in most schools beyond the Foundation Phase, particularly in rural and township communities serving Sepedi-speaking learners (Manyike & Lemmer, 2014; Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025; Tshotsho, 2013). Recent studies indicate that the continued dominance of English in education often constrains the

development of indigenous languages and may contribute to difficulties in maintaining strong home-language proficiency among learners (Beckmann, 2024; Diko & Celliers, 2024). Code-switching and translanguaging have consequently become common classroom practices in multilingual South African contexts. However, sociolinguistic research suggests that these practices emerge partly in response to linguistic hierarchies that position English as the language of academic success and social mobility while marginalizing indigenous linguistic resources (Hendricks & Xeketwana, 2024; McKinney & Tyler, 2024).

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Sociolinguistic Perspectives Integrating Constructivism, Translanguaging, and Ubuntu

This study adopts sociolinguistic theory as an overarching lens to examine language use, power relations, identity, and communicative practices in multilingual educational settings. Sociolinguistic perspectives emphasise the fluid, socially constructed, and ideologically mediated nature of language practices while challenging monoglossic language policies that fail to reflect the heteroglossic realities of multilingual speakers (García & Li Wei, 2014; Makalela, 2022). The framework is further informed by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which highlights the mediational role of language and social interaction in cognitive development and learning. These perspectives are complemented by Cummins' (2021) work on multilingual education, linguistic interdependence, and the educational value of maintaining learners' home languages alongside additional languages.

3. Research Method

Research methodology refers to the systematic approach and rationale underlying the methods and procedures used to address a research problem and answer research questions (Kothari & Garg, 2019). This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore learners' experiences, perceptions, and language practices within their real-life educational context. A qualitative case study enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena by examining them within their natural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). This design was particularly suitable because it allowed the researcher to investigate learners' lived experiences, perceptions, and language practices regarding English as the medium of instruction and its effects on Sepedi oral proficiency.

The population of the study consisted of 60 Grade 11 learners enrolled in Sepedi Home Language. From this population, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants who could provide relevant and information-rich data. The final sample comprised eight learners who were selected based on specific criteria, including their academic performance in Sepedi and their prolonged exposure to English as the language of teaching and learning. Although the sample size was relatively small, it was appropriate for an in-depth qualitative case study. The sample size was justified on the basis of data saturation, whereby additional data no longer generated new themes or insights (Guest et al., 2020), as well as the qualitative research principle that prioritizes depth of understanding, contextual richness, and detailed exploration of participants' experiences over statistical representation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data were collected using two instruments: a qualitative questionnaire and a pre-assessment oral task. The qualitative questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses regarding learners' experiences with English as the language of teaching and learning, its influence on their Sepedi oral proficiency, and their language-use practices in both classroom and social contexts. The questions were developed

based on the research objectives, literature review, and theoretical framework. Content validity was established through expert review by two language education specialists who evaluated the relevance, clarity, and alignment of the questions with the study objectives. The instrument was subsequently pilot-tested with three Grade 11 learners who did not form part of the main sample, and the feedback obtained was used to refine the wording and sequencing of questions for clarity and relevance.

In addition, a pre-assessment oral task in the form of an unprepared speech was administered to assess learners' oral proficiency in Sepedi. Each participant delivered a three-to-five-minute speech on a familiar topic. The oral assessment was guided by the official CAPS (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement) rubric for Home Language oral performance. Learners' performances were assessed using the CAPS rating scale, which evaluates fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, coherence, and content relevance. To enhance reliability, two independent raters, namely the researcher and a Sepedi Home Language educator, assessed the recordings separately. Inter-rater consistency was strengthened through independent scoring followed by discussion and consensus regarding scoring discrepancies. The combination of questionnaire responses and oral assessment data enabled methodological triangulation and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Data were analyzed using deductive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) framework. Patterns and themes were identified in relation to the study objectives and theoretical framework. Themes were generated and organized according to concepts derived from the sociolinguistic framework underpinning the study and the research objectives. The analysis involved data reduction, data organization, and interpretation, thereby facilitating the identification of recurring themes related to language use, code-switching, and oral proficiency.

The trustworthiness of the study was ensured by drawing on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework, which encompasses credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources and member checking, whereby participants were afforded the opportunity to review and verify the accuracy of transcribed data and emerging interpretations (Birt et al., 2016). Transferability was supported through the provision of thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and procedures. Dependability was achieved through consistent data collection procedures and careful documentation of the research process, while confirmability was promoted through reflexive practice and by ensuring that findings were grounded in participants' accounts rather than researcher bias. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant Research Ethics Committee of the University of Limpopo. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Effect of Language of Learning and Teaching on Sepedi Home Language

The findings indicate that the dominance of English as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) significantly reduces learners' use of Sepedi in academic contexts. Participants consistently reported that English is the primary medium of communication across subjects, limiting opportunities to engage with Sepedi beyond the home language classroom. For instance, one participant stated: "All subjects are taught in English. We use

English more often in the classroom as well as outside than Sepedi. We only speak Sepedi during the period of home language.”

This evidence suggests that Sepedi is functionally restricted within the school environment, reducing learners’ exposure to and active use of the language. The limited use of Sepedi consequently constrains the development of oral proficiency, as language acquisition is closely associated with frequency of use and meaningful interaction. Analytically, this pattern reflects broader postcolonial language hierarchies and educational power relations in South Africa, where English continues to enjoy high prestige as the language of academic success, socioeconomic mobility, and access to opportunities. Such dominance often marginalises indigenous languages and contributes to reduced domains of use and weakened linguistic identities among learners (Makalela, 2022; McKinney & Tyler, 2024). The finding aligns with previous studies showing that the dominance of English as the language of learning and teaching limits opportunities for home-language use and development in South African schools (Sibanda & Tshehla, 2025; McKinney & Tyler, 2024). This pattern reflects a predominantly subtractive rather than additive bilingual environment. Furthermore, the finding can be interpreted through Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasises that language development occurs through social interaction and meaningful communicative practice. When learners predominantly interact in English, opportunities for developing Sepedi oral proficiency become restricted. This interpretation is further supported by Cummins’ (2021) theory of multilingual education, which argues that academic language proficiency develops through sustained exposure, use, and support across different domains of communication.

The dominance of English therefore creates an imbalance that disadvantages Sepedi language development.

4.2 The Influence of English on Pronunciation of Sepedi

The findings reveal that English significantly influences learners’ pronunciation patterns in Sepedi. Participants reported adopting English phonological features when speaking Sepedi. One participant explained: “English affects my pronunciation of Sepedi words because I sometimes pronounce them in an English manner.”

This evidence indicates the presence of cross-linguistic influence, whereby features of a dominant language affect the pronunciation and production of another language (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). Such interference reflects a gradual shift in linguistic competence, as learners become increasingly aligned with English phonological patterns rather than those of their home language. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this phenomenon highlights the role of language prestige and linguistic identity. Learners may unconsciously orient towards English phonology because English continues to hold symbolic power within a postcolonial educational system that privileges English as the language of academic achievement and social mobility (Makalela, 2022; McKinney & Tyler, 2024).

The findings further suggest that frequent exposure to English as the dominant language of learning and teaching contributes to phonological transfer from English to Sepedi. This pattern is consistent with theories of second-language influence, which propose that repeated use of a dominant language can reshape aspects of speech production in another language through sustained linguistic contact (Cook, 2016; Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). Consequently, learners may internalize English phonetic features more strongly than those associated with Sepedi, resulting in changes in pronunciation and oral language performance.

4.3 The Influence of English on Sepedi Oral Proficiency

The findings further indicate that the dominance of English negatively affects learners' overall oral proficiency in Sepedi. Participants reported difficulty expressing themselves fluently in Sepedi without incorporating English words. For example, one participant noted: *"English affects how I speak Sepedi because I end up forgetting Sepedi words and adopting English words."*

This evidence suggests a growing reliance on English vocabulary and indicates possible gaps in learners' Sepedi lexical repertoires. Learners frequently substituted Sepedi words with English equivalents, which disrupted fluency, coherence, and the natural flow of communication in their home language. The frequent insertion of English may reflect the increasing dominance of English in academic and social domains, thereby reducing opportunities for learners to develop and use advanced Sepedi vocabulary. Such patterns are consistent with research on language shift, multilingualism, and the marginalization of indigenous languages in South African educational contexts (Makalela, 2022; Mabela & Ditsele, 2024).

The findings can further be interpreted as evidence of limited lexical development in Sepedi resulting from insufficient exposure and opportunities for meaningful language use. As learners become increasingly proficient in English, their reliance on English lexical resources may increase, leading to greater dependence on code-switching and lexical borrowing during communication. From a sociolinguistic perspective, these practices reflect broader language hierarchies in which English enjoys greater prestige and functional value than indigenous languages in educational settings (McKinney & Tyler, 2024). The findings are also consistent with Cummins' (2021) theory of multilingual education, which emphasizes the importance of sustained exposure to and use of the home language for continued linguistic development. The results suggest that the dominance of English may undermine additive bilingual development and contribute to reduced proficiency in Sepedi, particularly in oral communication contexts.

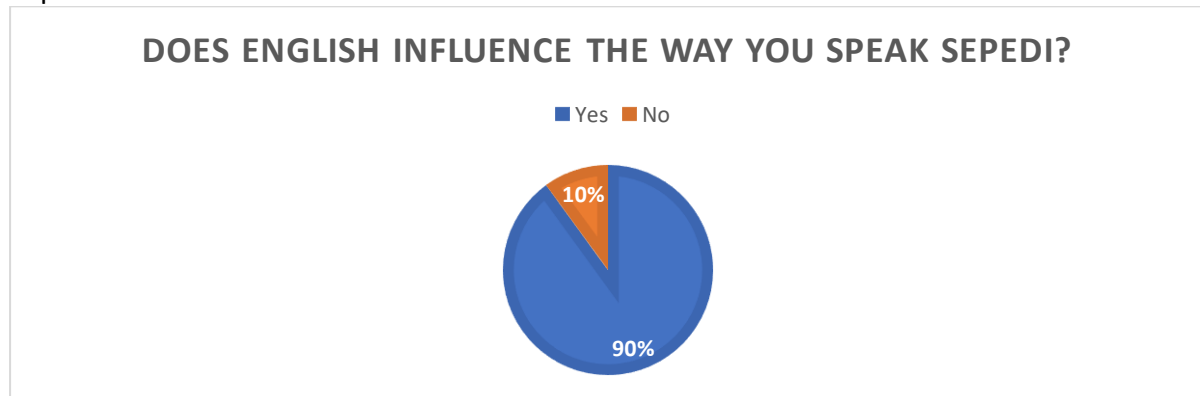
4.4 Perceived Influence of English on Sepedi Language Use

The findings indicate that the majority of participants perceive English as having a direct influence on their use of Sepedi. Out of the eight participants, six reported that English influences how they speak Sepedi, while only two indicated otherwise. This evidence highlights a strong perception among learners that English shapes their linguistic behavior. The majority response suggests that English is not only dominant in formal educational settings but is also embedded in everyday communication practices.

This pattern may indicate tendencies towards language shift, whereby a dominant language gradually influences and reshapes the use of a home language across different communicative domains (Makalela, 2022). The frequent use of English reinforces its status and normalizes its incorporation into Sepedi speech. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the findings reflect broader language hierarchies in which English occupies a position of greater social, educational, and economic value than indigenous languages (McKinney & Tyler, 2024). As a result, learners may increasingly orient themselves towards English as a language of opportunity and prestige while reducing their reliance on Sepedi in certain contexts.

The findings are also consistent with contemporary perspectives on multilingualism, which recognize that dominant languages often exert considerable influence on the linguistic practices of multilingual speakers and may contribute to the marginalization of indigenous languages when adequate support for home-language maintenance is lacking (García &

Otheguy, 2020; Makalela, 2022). The results therefore suggest that English dominance extends beyond the classroom and influences learners' perceptions and everyday use of Sepedi.



4.5 Synthesis of Findings

Across all themes, the findings consistently demonstrate that English, as the dominant language of learning and teaching, shapes learners' linguistic behavior in ways that negatively affect Sepedi oral proficiency. The findings reveal that the predominance of English reduces opportunities for meaningful use of Sepedi, influences learners' pronunciation patterns, and contributes to increasing reliance on English vocabulary during communication. These patterns suggest that learners experience challenges in maintaining and developing Sepedi oral proficiency within an educational environment where English occupies a dominant position. Collectively, the findings indicate that English dominance extends beyond classroom instruction and influences learners' everyday language practices, perceptions, and linguistic identities. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the results reflect broader language hierarchies that privilege English while limiting the functional domains of indigenous languages such as Sepedi (Makalela, 2022; McKinney & Tyler, 2024). The findings further support Cummins' (2021) argument that sustained exposure to and use of a language are essential for its continued development, while also aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and language use in cognitive and linguistic development. Overall, the study demonstrates that the dominance of English within the educational environment contributes to reduced opportunities for Sepedi language maintenance and oral proficiency development among Grade 11 learners.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the effects of English as the language of learning and teaching on the oral proficiency of Grade 11 Sepedi Home Language learners. The evidence indicates that the dominance of English influences learners' use of Sepedi in several ways, including reduced opportunities for Sepedi use, phonological transfer, and increased reliance on English vocabulary during communication. These factors contribute to challenges in maintaining and developing Sepedi oral proficiency within the school environment.

The overall pattern observed suggests that English dominance extends beyond classroom instruction and shapes learners' everyday language practices and perceptions. Consistent with sociolinguistic perspectives on language hierarchy and multilingualism, the study demonstrates how the privileged status of English may limit the functional use of indigenous languages such as Sepedi, thereby affecting learners' linguistic development and language maintenance. The present findings also support sociocultural and multilingual education perspectives, which emphasize the importance of sustained language use and

meaningful interaction in developing proficiency. Taken together, these insights point to the need for educational practices that support additive multilingualism by creating greater opportunities for the use of Sepedi alongside English in teaching and learning contexts. Strengthening the implementation of multilingual language policies and promoting the meaningful use of indigenous languages in schools may contribute to improved oral proficiency, language maintenance, and educational equity. Future research could extend this investigation by involving larger samples and multiple school contexts to further explore the relationship between language of instruction and home-language development.

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NEEDS ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC ENGLISH SKILLS AMONG ETHIOPIAN POLICE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study investigates the academic English language needs of first-year students at the Ethiopian Police University (EPU), aiming to inform the design of a discipline-sensitive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curriculum. English functions as the medium of instruction at EPU. However, many students experience difficulties with the academic literacy skills essential for success in policing, law enforcement, and criminal justice education. The study employed a mixed-methods research design grounded in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), EAP, and Needs Analysis (NA) frameworks. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to 200 students and 30 instructors, as well as semi-structured interviews with selected 10 students and five teachers. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis to identify patterns in perceived academic language challenges and required competencies. The findings indicate that six core skills—listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary—emerged as critical for academic success. The analysis also revealed perception gaps between teacher emphasis on academic reading and writing and student prioritization of oral communication. These results highlight a misalignment between institutional expectations for advanced academic literacy and students' current proficiency levels. Based on the findings, the study recommends the development of a structured, needs-based EAP curriculum that strengthens academic literacy, enhances student performance, and aligns language instruction with the disciplinary demands of policing and criminal justice education.

Keywords: *academic literacy; curriculum design; English for academic purposes; Ethiopian police university; needs analysis; policing education; target situation analysis.*

1. Introduction

English functions as the dominant language of academic communication worldwide, including in Ethiopia, where it serves as the medium of instruction in higher education and professional universities such as the Ethiopian Police University (EPU). In this context, English plays a crucial role in supporting teaching, research, and scholarly communication across disciplines (Hyland, 2018; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). Its role extends beyond general communication to encompass academic literacy skills essential for disciplinary learning and knowledge production (Wingate, 2015; Hyland, 2016). Consequently, students in English-

medium universities must develop the linguistic and cognitive competencies necessary to engage with academic knowledge and disciplinary discourse.

Students entering higher education are expected to perform complex academic tasks in English, including reading discipline-specific texts and writing analytical assignments. They must also participate in seminars, deliver presentations, and engage in research-based projects. Successfully completing these tasks requires grammatical competence alongside proficiency in academic genres, rhetorical conventions, critical thinking, and discipline-specific discourse (Hyland, 2006; Wingate, 2015). As a result, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has developed as a specialized branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that focuses on supporting students' academic literacy development for participation in higher education (Basturkmen, 2010; Hyland, 2016).

A central principle in EAP research is that effective language instruction should be based on a systematic understanding of learners' academic language needs. Needs analysis therefore plays a critical role in curriculum development by ensuring alignment between course content and disciplinary requirements through identifying academic tasks, assessing learners' current proficiency, and examining learning challenges (Long, 2005; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Contemporary studies of academic literacy also emphasize that academic language practices vary across disciplines, and therefore EAP instruction must reflect the discourse conventions and communicative practices of specific fields of study (Hyland, 2016; Basturkmen, 2019).

At the Ethiopian Police University (EPU), English is the medium of instruction across programs including policing, criminal justice, forensic studies, leadership, and security studies. Students are expected to engage with various academic materials such as textbooks, legal documents, policy reports, and research articles in English. They must also complete written assignments, examinations, presentations, and research projects as part of their academic training.

Within these programs, students are required to engage with specialized genres such as case study analyses, legal commentaries, investigative reports, and research proposals. These tasks demand the ability to interpret complex texts, synthesize information, and present arguments in an academically appropriate manner.

However, many students enter the university from diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds in which English instruction often emphasizes grammar and examination preparation rather than academic literacy development (Mekonnen, 2020). As a result, students often struggle with interpreting texts, constructing arguments, and applying discipline-specific vocabulary and conventions, which may hinder their academic performance.

Although English courses are offered at EPU, they tend to remain general in scope and may not sufficiently address the discipline-specific demands of policing education. More importantly, there is a lack of systematic and context-specific empirical evidence examining the academic English language needs of EPU students, particularly from both student and instructor perspectives. In addition, the extent to which current instructional practices align with these needs has not been clearly established. This indicates a significant research gap in understanding how academic language instruction can be effectively tailored to the specific requirements of policing and criminal justice education.

Therefore, this study investigates the academic English language needs of first-year students at the Ethiopian Police University. Specifically, it examines the academic tasks students are expected to perform, evaluates their current academic language proficiency,

and explores the challenges they encounter when using English in their studies. The study also considers instructors' perspectives in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of academic language requirements. The findings aim to generate empirical evidence that can inform the development of a discipline-sensitive EAP curriculum, thereby supporting academic success and professional readiness in policing education.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What academic English language skills are perceived as most important by first-year students and instructors at Ethiopian Police University?
2. What discrepancies exist between students' and instructors' perceptions of academic language needs?
3. What implications do these findings have for the development of a discipline-specific EAP curriculum?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Needs Analysis in English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

Needs analysis (NA) is widely recognized as the foundation of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), as it systematically identifies the academic literacy practices and discourse competencies required in higher education (Long, 2005; Hyland, 2006). However, rather than functioning as a purely technical procedure, NA should be understood as an interpretive process that connects language use to specific institutional and disciplinary contexts. While previous studies emphasize the distinction between EAP and general English (Basturkmen, 2010; Hyland, 2016), they often underexplore how these distinctions operate in specialized professional settings.

In English-medium higher education environments, students engage with complex academic genres such as essays, research reports, presentations, and seminar discussions. Yet, as Hyland (2006) argues, academic language is not merely a set of discrete skills but a socially situated practice shaped by disciplinary conventions. Despite this recognition, much of the literature assumes relatively homogeneous academic contexts. In contrast, professional institutions such as the Ethiopian Police University (EPU) present unique demands, where academic literacy must support both theoretical understanding and practical communication. Limited proficiency in academic English, therefore, does not only affect academic performance but may also constrain students' ability to engage with legal, criminological, and research-based knowledge, highlighting the need for context-sensitive analysis.

2.1.1 Target Situation Analysis (TSA)

Target Situation Analysis identifies the academic tasks students are expected to perform; however, its role extends beyond listing tasks to examining how these tasks reflect disciplinary and institutional priorities. While earlier studies (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Long, 2005) highlight activities such as essay writing and seminar participation, they tend to generalize across contexts. In professional institutions, academic tasks may integrate operational and discipline-specific communication practices, suggesting that TSA should be applied with greater sensitivity to contextual variation.

2.1.2 Present Situation Analysis (PSA)

Present Situation Analysis (PSA) evaluates learners' current proficiency in relation to academic demands, but its analytical value lies in interpreting the gap between existing

abilities and required competencies. Although research (Chemir & Kitila, 2022) emphasizes this gap, limited attention is given to how contextual factors influence both learner performance and expectations. Therefore, PSA should not only measure proficiency levels but also critically relate them to the specific academic and professional requirements of the institution.

2.1.3 Learning Situation Analysis (LSA)

Learning Situation Analysis examines learners' motivations, strategies, and contextual constraints; however, its contribution depends on how these factors are integrated into program design. While Basturkmen (2019) highlights the importance of combining TSA, PSA, and LSA, many studies treat them as separate components rather than interconnected dimensions. A more analytical perspective considers how learning conditions, institutional expectations, and learner goals interact to shape academic literacy development, particularly in specialized educational environments.

2.2 Academic English Skills and Needs Analysis

Academic English skills are commonly described as a set of literacy competencies required for higher education. However, EAP research increasingly conceptualizes these skills as integrated and context-dependent practices embedded in disciplinary knowledge construction (Hyland, 2006; Wingate, 2015). Although needs analysis is widely acknowledged as essential (Long, 2005), much of the literature is based on general university contexts. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how academic skills function in professional institutions, where academic communication is closely linked with occupational practices, indicating a gap addressed by this study.

2.3 Academic Listening Skills

Academic listening is often defined as the ability to understand lectures and identify key information (Rost, 2011), yet such definitions risk oversimplifying the skill. In practice, listening involves interpreting extended discourse, recognizing organizational patterns, and processing discipline-specific terminology. In professional contexts, such as policing education, listening may also include understanding procedural instructions and applied discussions, suggesting that academic listening should be examined in relation to its contextual demands rather than as a generalized ability.

2.4 Academic Speaking Skills

Academic speaking is typically associated with discussions and presentations (Bygate, 2018), but this characterization does not fully capture its contextual variability. In specialized institutions, speaking may involve structured briefings, formal reporting, or argumentation within professional frameworks. This indicates that academic speaking competence extends beyond general communicative ability to include context-specific discourse practices, which are often underrepresented in existing literature.

2.5 Academic Reading Skills

Academic reading is widely recognized as cognitively demanding, requiring inference, synthesis, and evaluation (Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Alderson, 2000). However, its nature varies across disciplines. While general descriptions emphasize comprehension strategies, reading in fields such as policing involves interpreting legal texts, analyzing evidence, and evaluating

theoretical perspectives. This suggests that academic reading should be understood as a discipline-sensitive activity shaped by both textual complexity and professional relevance.

2.6 Academic Writing Skills

Academic writing is often considered the most challenging skill due to its complexity (Hyland, 2006; Wingate, 2015), but such generalizations may obscure important contextual differences. In professional programs, writing tasks frequently include reports, case analyses, and research assignments that combine academic conventions with practical applications. Therefore, academic writing should be viewed not only as a linguistic skill but also as a form of professional communication shaped by disciplinary expectations.

2.7 Grammar for Academic Discourse

In EAP contexts, grammar is treated as a resource for constructing meaning rather than a set of isolated rules (Biber et al., 2011). Although features such as nominalization and passive constructions are commonly highlighted (Hyland, 2006), their use varies depending on disciplinary norms. This suggests that grammar instruction should move beyond general descriptions to consider how grammatical choices function within specific academic and professional discourses.

2.8 Academic Vocabulary Development

Academic vocabulary is essential for effective comprehension and communication (Nation, 2013), yet the distinction between general academic vocabulary and discipline-specific terminology is often insufficiently addressed. In professional contexts, learners must acquire vocabulary that reflects both academic discourse and operational practices. This highlights the need for a more contextualized approach to vocabulary development that aligns with learners' academic and professional needs.

2.9 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

2.9.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in the intersection of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and Needs Analysis (NA). These interrelated frameworks collectively provide a robust lens through which academic language instruction is conceptualized as responsive to the disciplinary literacy demands of higher education. By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, the study establishes a principled foundation for designing English instruction that aligns specifically with the academic requirements of Ethiopian Police University (EPU) students.

2.9.2 Conceptual Framework

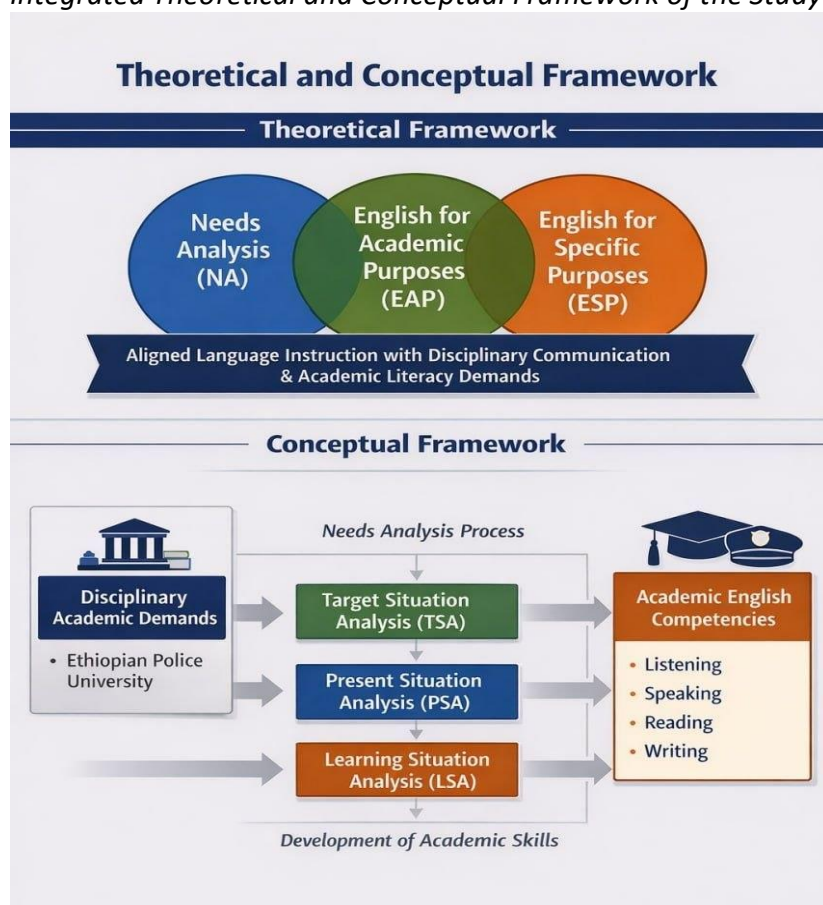
The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the relationship between academic disciplinary demands, needs analysis, and the development of academic language competencies at the Ethiopian Police University (EPU). The academic context of EPU serves as the primary independent variable, encompassing undergraduate programs in policing, criminology, law, leadership, and security studies, all delivered in English. These programs create specific literacy demands, including reading scholarly texts, writing analytical and research-based assignments, interpreting legal documents, and participating in academic discussions (Hyland, 2016; Wingate, 2015).

These demands are examined through three mediating components of needs analysis: Target Situation Analysis (TSA), Present Situation Analysis (PSA), and Learning Situation Analysis (LSA). TSA identifies required academic tasks such as essay writing, case analysis, and research reporting; PSA assesses students' current academic English proficiency; and LSA explores instructional conditions and learner expectations. Together, they reveal gaps between academic requirements and existing competencies.

The findings inform the development of essential academic English skills, including critical reading, academic writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, and grammar. Consistent with Nation and Macalister (2013) and Hyland (2016), the framework positions needs analysis as the bridge to a discipline-sensitive EAP curriculum aligned with policing education.

Figure 2.1

Integrated Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study



Source: Developed by the researcher (2026)

2.10 Summary

While the literature consistently underscores the central role of needs analysis in EAP (Long, 2005; Hyland, 2006), it largely reflects perspectives derived from general academic contexts. As a result, insufficient attention has been given to how academic language needs are shaped within professional institutions, where academic literacy is closely intertwined with occupational communication practices. This limitation highlights a significant gap in context-specific research.

To address this gap, the present study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework combining Needs Analysis (NA), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which collectively emphasize aligning language instruction with disciplinary and professional communication demands. Correspondingly, the conceptual framework demonstrates how disciplinary academic requirements at the Ethiopian Police University inform needs analysis processes—Target Situation Analysis (TSA), Present Situation Analysis (PSA), and Learning Situation Analysis (LSA)—which in turn guide the development of academic English competencies.

By linking theoretical perspectives with a context-driven conceptual model, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of EAP needs in professional higher education settings.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

The study aimed to investigate the academic English needs of first-year students at the Ethiopian Police University in order to inform the development of a discipline-sensitive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curriculum. To accomplish this objective, the study employed a mixed-methods research design integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Specifically, the research adopted a convergent mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and integrated during the interpretation stage. This design enabled the researcher to compare, corroborate, and synthesize findings derived from both datasets. The mixed-methods approach was selected because contemporary EAP needs analysis research highlights the importance of combining statistical patterns with in-depth contextual insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Paltridge & Starfield, 2016). Quantitative data obtained through questionnaires provided broad insights into students' perceived academic language challenges and required competencies, whereas qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews offered deeper understanding of students' academic experiences and literacy-related difficulties (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Kvale et al., 2020).

The integration of both approaches strengthened methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility, trustworthiness, and overall validity of the findings.

3.2 Theoretical Orientation

The study was grounded in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and Needs Analysis (NA) frameworks.

The study employed three needs analysis frameworks to guide the methodological orientation and instrument design. Target Situation Analysis (TSA) identified the academic tasks students were expected to perform, including essay writing, research reporting, academic reading, lecture comprehension, and seminar participation (Hyland, 2016; Basturkmen, 2019). Present Situation Analysis (PSA) examined students' current academic English proficiency in relation to these tasks, while Learning Situation Analysis (LSA) explored contextual and learner-related factors influencing academic literacy development (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Long, 2015). The participants consisted of 200 first-year students and 30 instructors at the Ethiopian Police University. The student participants were first-year undergraduate students enrolled in Communicative English Skills courses across different academic programs. From a total population of 396 first-year students, 200 were selected

using simple random sampling, representing approximately half of the population. The students consisted of 180 males and 20 females aged between 25 and 35 years. First-year students were selected because they represent a critical transition stage into English-medium academic study. The teacher participants included 30 instructors comprising English language and subject-area teachers. Among them, 28 were male and 2 were female; 2 held PhD degrees, while 28 held MA or MSc degrees. All instructors had at least eight years of teaching experience, indicating substantial professional expertise. A census sampling technique was employed for teachers due to the manageable population size. Multiple instruments were used to ensure comprehensive data collection, including students' questionnaires, teachers' questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with both students and teachers. The students' questionnaire gathered data on academic tasks and perceived language challenges through Likert-scale and open-ended items, while the teachers' questionnaire examined instructors' evaluations of students' academic English proficiency and course demands. In addition, semi-structured interviews with selected students provided in-depth insights into academic literacy challenges, whereas interviews with instructors explored their perspectives on students' academic language performance.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis combined quantitative and qualitative procedures. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, analyzed using SPSS (version 23). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), involving coding and identification of emerging themes.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were maintained throughout the study. Participants were informed of the study purpose and assured of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Written informed consent was obtained.

3.5 Reliability and Validity of the Study

Table 3.1

Reliability of the Instrument

Skill	Students α	Teachers α	No. of Items	Reliability
Major English Language Skills	0.835	0.838	6	Good
Listening	0.810	0.964	19	Good–Excellent
Speaking	0.790	0.781	15	Acceptable
Reading	0.949	0.801	10	Excellent–Good
Writing	0.713	0.954	9	Acceptable–Excellent
Overall (All Skills)	0.819	0.868	59	Good–Very Good

Source survey data 2026

The reliability analysis indicates that the instrument demonstrates satisfactory to excellent internal consistency across the major English language skills for both students and teachers. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.713 to 0.949 for students and from 0.781 to 0.964 for teachers, suggesting acceptable to excellent reliability across subscales.

In addition to reliability, several measures were taken to ensure instrument validity. Content validity was established through careful alignment of questionnaire items with EAP and needs analysis frameworks. The instruments were reviewed by subject experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness. Furthermore, pilot testing was conducted with a small group of participants to refine item wording and improve consistency before the main data collection.

Based on these procedures, the instrument is both reliable and valid for assessing listening, speaking, reading, writing, and overall English language skills, and is appropriate for use in the main study.

4. Results and Discussion

This study examined the academic English language needs of first-year students at Ethiopian Police University (EPU) based on questionnaire responses from teachers (N = 30) and students (N = 200). Descriptive statistics were used to determine the perceived importance of major academic English skills and their sub-skills. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The discussion is informed by contemporary scholarship in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which emphasizes that curriculum design should be grounded in systematic needs analysis and aligned with disciplinary literacy practices (Basturkmen, 2019; Hyland, 2018; Wingate, 2022). Importantly, each finding is interpreted in relation to relevant theoretical perspectives to strengthen the analytical depth of the study.

4.1 Overall Academic English Needs

Table 4.1

The Importance Levels of the Major Academic English Skills

No.	Skill / Category	Teacher Mean	Teacher SD	Teacher N	Student Mean	Student SD	Student N
1	Speaking	4.467	0.5713	30	4.64	0.493	200
2	Listening	4.300	0.4661	30	4.62	0.508	200
3	Writing	3.867	0.5074	30	4.65	0.510	200
4	Reading	4.500	0.5085	30	4.58	0.534	200
5	Grammar	4.000	0.4549	30	4.55	0.499	200
6	Vocabulary	3.933	0.5208	30	4.52	0.549	200
7	Overall Average	4.21	0.53	30	4.57	0.49	200

For each sub-skill ranking, 5 indicates very important and 1 indicates not very important. The higher the mean, the more important the skill is.

The findings reveal that all six core components of academic English—listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary—were perceived as highly important by both instructors and students. Teachers reported an overall mean score of 4.21, while students rated the importance even higher at 4.57. This convergence suggests a shared recognition of English as a foundational academic tool.

This finding aligns with EAP theory, which emphasizes that academic success depends on the integration of macro-skills supported by grammatical competence and discipline-specific vocabulary (Hyland, 2018; Nation, 2013). Furthermore, the slightly higher student

ratings may reflect heightened awareness of linguistic challenges during transition to university study, supporting research that learners often recognize language demands when directly experiencing academic tasks (Wingate, 2022). Thus, the results reinforce the theoretical view that comprehensive language proficiency is central to academic achievement.

In the qualitative phase, interview participants ranked major academic language skills based on their perceived importance. Most instructors prioritized reading and writing, followed by listening and speaking.

This prioritization reflects established theoretical perspectives that position reading and writing as central to knowledge construction and assessment in higher education (Hyland, 2019). However, variation among instructors—particularly those emphasizing listening—suggests contextual influence, especially in lecture-based environments. This supports the argument that academic literacy is not uniform but shaped by institutional practices and instructional modes.

Students generally agreed with instructors, indicating alignment between perceived and actual academic demands. However, minor variations suggest that perceptions are influenced by immediate academic experiences. This finding supports needs analysis theory, which highlights that learner perceptions are dynamic and context-dependent (Basturkmen, 2019).

4.2 Academic Listening Needs

Table 4.2

Academic Listening Sub-Skills

No.	Listening Sub-Skill	Teacher Mean	Teacher SD	Teacher N	Student Mean	Student SD
1	Listening skills	4.00	0.871	30	4.42	0.524
2	Understanding instructions during training sessions	3.73	0.980	30	4.60	0.530
3	Comprehending police radio communication	4.20	0.805	30	4.58	0.515
4	Conversations with colleagues/superiors	4.00	0.910	30	4.49	0.540
5	Details in witness statements/interviews	4.00	0.947	30	4.58	0.506
6	Understanding accents or dialects	4.13	0.937	30	4.62	0.487
7	Active listening for key information	4.00	0.947	30	4.60	0.501
8	Everyday conversations	3.87	1.008	30	4.45	0.582
9	Discussions/seminars/presentations	3.87	1.074	30	4.59	0.523
10	Instructions and information requests	3.90	0.923	30	4.61	0.530
11	Lectures for general understanding	3.97	0.890	30	4.59	0.542
12	Listening for specific information	4.10	0.995	30	4.51	0.618
13	Asking questions in lectures	3.93	0.980	30	4.54	0.557
14	Understanding lecture main ideas	4.07	0.980	30	4.54	0.510
15	Recognizing supporting ideas	4.00	0.983	30	4.53	0.520
16	Lecture organization	4.13	0.819	30	4.60	0.531

17	Taking brief notes	3.67	0.994	30	4.48	0.575
18	Identifying different views	3.97	1.098	30	4.55	0.538
19	Understanding key vocabularies	3.83	0.913	30	4.62	0.518
20	Overall Average	3.97	0.95	30	4.55	0.54

Academic listening sub-skills were rated highly important by both teachers ($M = 3.97$) and students ($M = 4.55$), with students assigning consistently higher importance. Key sub-skills included understanding lecture organization, identifying main ideas, listening for specific information, and note-taking.

The higher student ratings suggest strong awareness of listening demands in academic contexts, particularly in lecture-based instruction. This finding aligns with listening theory, which conceptualizes academic listening as an active, strategic process involving interpretation of discourse structure and key information (Field, 2018; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Moreover, the emphasis on note-taking and lecture comprehension supports the theoretical view that listening is closely integrated with other academic skills, especially writing. This reinforces the argument that explicit instruction in listening strategies is essential for academic success (Rost, 2011).

4.3 Academic Speaking Needs

Table 4.3

Academic Speaking Sub-Skills

No.	Speaking Sub-Skill	Teacher Mean	Teacher SD	Teacher N	Student Mean	Student SD	Student N
1	Giving clear and concise instructions	4.63	0.556	30	4.49	0.576	200
2	Conducting interviews or interrogations	4.13	0.860	30	4.45	0.582	200
3	Explaining procedures to non-native speakers	4.63	0.490	30	4.48	0.558	200
4	Responding appropriately in emergency situations	4.07	0.691	30	4.45	0.574	200
5	Presenting case findings or reports orally	4.60	0.563	30	4.48	0.609	200
6	Interviewing and interrogations	4.73	0.450	30	4.44	0.598	200
7	Participating actively in discussions in English	4.67	0.479	30	4.45	0.565	200
8	Asking and answering questions in English	4.43	0.626	30	4.48	0.549	200
9	Making presentations / Presenting oral reports	4.43	0.728	30	4.42	0.620	200
10	Giving oral instructions	4.63	0.556	30	4.33	0.708	200
11	Talking to colleagues and instructors in the class	3.90	0.759	30	4.39	0.678	200
12	Speaking from notes	4.30	0.794	30	4.39	0.670	200

13	Communicating ideas confidently	4.17	0.747	30	4.32	0.684	200
14	Speaking clearly (pronunciation)	4.40	0.621	30	4.37	0.666	200
15	Communicating ideas fluently	4.53	0.571	30	4.44	0.607	200
16	Overall Average	4.43	0.64	30	4.43	0.63	200

Academic speaking skills were rated equally important by both teachers and students ($M = 4.43$). Highly ranked sub-skills included participating in discussions, asking and answering questions, presenting reports, and communicating ideas clearly and fluently.

This strong agreement reflects the interactive nature of academic environments, where communication plays a central role in learning. The findings align with communicative competence theory, which emphasizes fluency, clarity, and pragmatic appropriateness in academic discourse (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Hyland, 2018).

Additionally, the importance of presentations and discussions supports the view that speaking contributes to knowledge construction through interaction, consistent with socio-constructivist perspectives on learning (Wingate, 2022).

4.4 Academic Reading Needs

Table 4.4

Academic Reading Sub-Skills

No.	Reading Sub-Skill	Teacher Mean	Teacher SD	Teacher N	Student Mean	Student SD	Student N
1	Reading professional/academic textbooks	3.97	0.928	30	2.36	0.924	200
2	Reading for general and specific info (skimming/scanning)	4.37	0.669	30	2.06	0.765	200
3	Reading journal/magazine/newspaper articles	4.13	0.776	30	2.69	0.870	200
4	Reading instruction manuals/guides	4.10	0.960	30	2.67	0.796	200
5	Reading course handouts to get information	3.97	1.033	30	2.65	0.743	200
6	Reading instructions for assignments/projects	3.83	0.747	30	2.40	0.868	200
7	Reading instructions for labs/field trips	4.03	0.850	30	2.09	0.852	200
8	Reading lecture/study notes	3.93	0.740	30	2.35	0.901	200
9	Reading reference books (encyclopedia, dictionaries)	4.13	0.819	30	1.99	0.811	200
10	Interpreting graphs/diagrams/tables	4.27	0.740	30	2.02	0.773	200
11	Overall Average	4.07	0.83	30	2.33	0.83	200

A substantial discrepancy was observed between teachers and students regarding academic reading. Teachers rated reading highly ($M = 4.07$), whereas students reported significantly lower importance ($M = 2.33$).

This discrepancy suggests a misalignment between perceived and actual academic literacy demands. It indicates that students may underestimate the importance of reading in university study. This finding aligns with previous research showing that novice students often fail to recognize the central role of academic reading during the transition to higher education (Wingate, 2015).

Theoretically, academic reading involves complex processes such as critical evaluation, inferencing, and interpretation of multimodal texts (Grabe & Stoller, 2019; Hyland, 2018). The gap identified in this study highlights the need for explicit instruction in reading strategies, supporting the argument that academic literacy must be taught rather than assumed.

4.5 Academic Writing Needs

Table 4.5
Academic Writing Sub-Skills

No.	Writing Sub-Skill	Teacher Mean	Teacher SD	Teacher N	Student Mean	Student SD	Student N
1	Writing laboratory reports	4.50	0.682	30	2.58	0.964	200
2	Writing assignment	4.73	0.450	30	2.74	1.082	200
3	Writing field trip reports	4.47	0.571	30	2.65	1.032	200
4	Writing paragraphs/essays	4.20	0.714	30	2.56	1.035	200
5	Writing descriptions of experiments	4.40	0.675	30	2.60	1.027	200
6	Writing project/field reports	4.23	0.774	30	2.59	1.052	200
7	Writing notes in lecture / note-taking	4.30	0.794	30	2.69	1.040	200
8	Preparing presentations	4.47	0.681	30	2.68	1.065	200
9	Writing summary	4.50	0.630	30	2.58	0.979	200
10	Overall Average	4.42	0.66	30	2.63	1.03	200

A similar gap was observed in academic writing. Teachers rated writing as highly important ($M = 4.42$), while students reported lower importance ($M = 2.63$).

This divergence suggests that students may underestimate the significance of writing or lack confidence in performing academic writing tasks. The finding supports research indicating that novice learners often struggle with genre-specific writing conventions and academic expectations (Wingate, 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, academic writing is a socially situated and genre-based practice requiring explicit instruction and scaffolding (Flowerdew, 2016; Hyland, 2018). The identified gap therefore reinforces the need for structured writing instruction, including practice in argumentation, summarization, and report writing.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that academic English proficiency is widely recognized as essential for first-year students at Ethiopian Police University. Both instructors

and students assigned high importance to the six core academic language skills—listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary—indicating a shared awareness of English as more than a medium of instruction. Rather, it functions as an epistemic tool through which disciplinary knowledge is accessed, constructed, and communicated. Within English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) frameworks, this supports the argument that language programs must be grounded in systematic needs analysis and aligned with disciplinary practices (Basturkmen, 2019; Hyland, 2018). In this context, the study further shows that academic English proficiency operates as a gatekeeping mechanism influencing both academic success and professional readiness in policing and security education.

Despite this general agreement, a significant divergence emerged between teachers' and students' perceptions, particularly regarding academic reading and writing. Teachers rated these skills as critically important, whereas students assigned them comparatively lower value. This discrepancy reflects a deeper gap between institutional expectations and students' academic socialization. Consistent with EAP research, novice learners often prioritize immediate communicative skills over less visible but cognitively demanding literacy practices (Wingate, 2015; 2022). The findings therefore reinforce the view that academic literacy is not a neutral or transferable skill but a socially situated practice that must be explicitly taught and contextualized within disciplines (Hyland, 2018).

In contrast, both groups strongly emphasized the importance of academic listening and speaking, particularly in relation to lecture comprehension, interaction, and oral communication. This alignment suggests that students are more attuned to the immediate and performative aspects of academic communication than to critical reading and writing. While this reflects socio-constructivist perspectives that emphasize interaction in learning, it also indicates a potential imbalance in academic literacy development, which may limit students' ability to critically engage with and produce disciplinary knowledge.

Grammar and vocabulary were also highly valued, highlighting their foundational role in supporting all language skills. However, their importance should be understood in relation to meaning-making practices. Effective instruction should integrate linguistic form with disciplinary communication, ensuring that grammar and vocabulary function as tools for constructing academic meaning rather than as isolated components.

Overall, the study confirms the central role of English proficiency in academic success, while also revealing a critical misalignment between students' perceptions and actual academic demands. This has important pedagogical implications. Needs-based curriculum design should not only identify required skills but also reshape students' awareness of academic literacy practices. In this sense, needs analysis should be viewed as both a diagnostic and transformative framework supporting students' academic development.

This study contributes to the EAP literature by extending needs analysis research to the under-explored context of policing and security education, offering insights into discipline-specific literacy demands. However, the study is limited to a single institutional setting and relies on self-reported data, which may affect generalizability and overlook actual classroom practices.

Future research should adopt more diverse methodologies, including classroom observation, discourse analysis, and corpus-based studies of student writing. Such approaches would provide deeper insight into how academic literacy is enacted and how

instructional strategies can better bridge the gap between perception and performance in EAP contexts.

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ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS AND MOTIVATIONAL FUNCTIONS IN DR. JILL BOLTE TAYLOR'S TED TALK *MY STROKE OF INSIGHT*

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Abstract

This study investigates how illocutionary acts function as motivational strategies in Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor's TED Talk *My Stroke of Insight*. While previous studies have primarily focused on classifying speech acts, limited attention has been given to how illocutionary force contributes to the construction of motivational discourse in public speeches. Addressing this gap, the present research analyzes the intersection between linguistic action and motivational intent. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, 139 purposively selected utterances were examined based on their identifiable illocutionary force and motivational meaning. The analysis integrates Searle's speech act framework with concepts of motivational communication, including emotional engagement, cognitive reframing, inspirational direction, supportive encouragement, and the strengthening of self-efficacy. The findings reveal that representative acts are the most dominant type, indicating the speaker's emphasis on conveying information and personal insight. Emotional appeal appears as the most frequent motivational function, reflecting the talk's strong affective orientation. Common combinations such as Representative + Emotional Appeal and Directive + Encouragement demonstrate how linguistic forms work synergistically with motivational strategies to enhance the persuasive and inspirational power of the message. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how illocutionary acts shape motivational discourse in spoken communication.

Keywords: *illocutionary acts; motivational function; TED Talk; Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor*

1. Introduction

Understanding how language generates motivational impact requires more than identifying the actions performed through speech. Speech Acts Theory, first introduced by Austin and later refined by Searle, provides an important foundation for explaining the illocutionary force embedded within utterances. However, despite its usefulness in describing language as action, the relationship between illocutionary force and the emergence of motivational effect in public discourse remains insufficiently explored. This gap becomes especially significant in motivational effects, where speakers intentionally craft their linguistic choices to shape emotions, shift perspectives, and stimulate action. Such

dynamics are strongly visible in widely circulated public talks, including Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor's influential TED presentation.

TED Talks are known as a global digital discourse genre that combines the dissemination of knowledge with persuasive rhetoric. For example, discourse analysis of TED Talks demonstrates how speakers use narrative techniques and communication strategies to convey complex ideas ways that are accessible to broad audiences (Altamimi, 2021). In addition, rhetorical analyses of TED Talks also highlight speakers' use of persuasive strategies such as ethos, pathos, and logos to influence audiences both emotionally and cognitively (Mohammed & Mayuuf, 2025).

Given that the motivational power of the talk arises not only from its thematic content but also from the manner in which Taylor articulates her ideas, examining her linguistic strategies becomes crucial. The speech presents patterns that build speaker credibility, invite emotional connection, and encourage listeners toward personal transformation. Such features indicate that a surface-level analysis of structure or themes would be insufficient. A framework capable of interpreting language as purposeful action is therefore necessary. Thus, Speech Act Theory, proposed by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1979), provides an appropriate lens for uncovering how Taylor employs illocutionary acts to construct her motivational message.

Even so, categorizing illocutionary acts alone does not fully explain how the speech generates motivation. It is equally important to examine the persuasive functions embedded within Taylor's utterances. Elements such as emotional appeal, cognitive reframing, encouragement, messages fostering self-efficacy, and inspirational motivation allow for a deeper understanding of the persuasive and affective power of her language. By integrating both illocutionary analysis and motivational functions, this study seeks to demonstrate how Taylor's linguistic choices stimulate motivation, strengthen emotional engagement, and create persuasive influence throughout her talk.

Several previous studies have explored speech acts in different contexts, though each adopted distinct focuses and theoretical perspectives. The first study by Hussein & Mubarak (2025) examined the multimodal and linguistic strategies used by TED speakers to engage audiences, showing that narrative framing and emotional resonance shape message impact. However the study did not analyze individual utterances through the perspective of Speech Act Theory. The second study by Mestre-Mestre and Pérez Cabello de Alba (2022) focused on discourse strategies that trigger audience applause, revealing that humor, personal storytelling, and emphatic statements are key persuasive cues; however, the analysis emphasized audience reactions rather than motivational force within the speaker's utterances. The third study by Jovic et al., (2023) investigated the use of hedging in TED Talks and demonstrated how hedges contribute to persuasive appeals such as ethos, pathos, and logos. Nevertheless, the study did not explore their relationship with illocutionary acts or motivational functions. Although these studies provide valuable insights into persuasion in TED discourse, none specifically examines how illocutionary force interacts with motivational strategies. Therefore, this gap becomes the primary focus addressed in the present study.

2. Literature Review

This study uses Speech Act Theory as the primary analytical framework to examine how Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor's TED Talk *My Stroke of Insight* conveys motivational meaning through language. The theoretical basis refers to Austin (1962), who introduced the idea that

language performs actions, and Searle (1979), who later refined the classification of illocutionary acts into five categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. According to Speech Act Theory, every utterance contains not only literal meaning but also communicative intention that reflects the speaker's purpose in interaction. In public discourse, especially motivational speech, language functions not merely as a medium for transferring information but also as a strategic tool for influencing emotions, shaping perspectives, and encouraging audience engagement.

Motivational speech is considered a form of persuasive discourse designed not only to create emotional arousal such as fear, sadness, joy, or excitement, but also to motivate audiences to respond through reflection or action (Wrench et al., 2016). Therefore, speech acts in motivational discourse often function simultaneously as communicative actions and persuasive strategies. In addition to illocutionary acts, this study also examines motivational functions, which refer to the ways language influences audience emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and actions through discourse. In motivational communication, language does not merely convey information but also serves as a psychological instrument that encourages, inspires, and reshapes audience perspectives toward personal experiences and social reality.

This study adopts five motivational functions: emotional appeal, cognitive reframing, encouragement, self-efficacy, and inspirational motivation. Emotional appeal is derived from Aristotle's concept of pathos, which emphasizes the role of emotions in persuasion (Aristotle, 2007). Cognitive reframing is based on cognitive restructuring theory proposed by Beck (1976) and Ellis (1994), which explains how individuals reinterpret situations in order to change emotional responses and perspectives. Encouragement is associated with positive reinforcement and supportive communication that promotes confidence, persistence, hope, and motivation (Wong, 2015). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to perform actions, as proposed by Bandura (1997). Meanwhile, inspirational motivation is drawn from transformational leadership theory by Bass and Riggio (2006), highlighting how language can inspire individuals toward higher motivation, confidence, and purpose.

2.1 Emotional Appeal

Emotional appeal is grounded in Aristotle's concept of pathos, which positions emotion as a central component of persuasion (Aristotle, 1991). In persuasive and motivational discourse, emotional appeal functions as a strategy to establish emotional connection between the speaker and the audience. Through emotional engagement, speakers can strengthen audience attention, create empathy, and increase the persuasive impact of their message. Emotional appeal is often realized through expressive language, evaluative adjectives, emotionally loaded expressions, and personal narratives that evoke sympathy and emotional identification (Frijda, 1986; Bruner, 1991). In motivational speech, emotional appeal also helps speakers construct authenticity and sincerity, which strengthen persuasive influence in public discourse.

2.2 Cognitive Reframing

Cognitive reframing draws from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, especially the theories proposed by Beck (1976) and Ellis (1994). This concept refers to the process of changing how individuals interpret situations, experiences, or problems in order to produce different emotional and psychological responses. In motivational communication, cognitive reframing functions as a persuasive strategy because it encourages audiences to reinterpret negative experiences as opportunities for growth, learning, or transformation. Linguistically, cognitive

reframing is often marked by contrastive expressions such as *but*, *however*, *actually*, and phrases such as *the truth is* or *in another way*, which indicate shifts in perspective and interpretation.

2.3 Encouragement

Encouragement refers to language that provides direct motivational support and positive reinforcement to the audience. Research by Wong (2015) and Kellermann and Shea (1996) highlights encouragement as a form of supportive communication that aims to strengthen confidence, persistence, courage, and optimism. In motivational discourse, encouragement functions to reduce doubt and stimulate audiences to continue pursuing positive action despite difficulties or uncertainty. Encouragement is commonly expressed through positive affirmations and directive expressions such as *you can*, *keep going*, and *do not give up*.

2.4 Self-Efficacy Messages

Self-efficacy messages are derived from Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which emphasizes that individuals' beliefs in their own abilities significantly influence their motivation and behavior (Bandura, 1997). People who believe in their capability to perform actions are more likely to persist in facing challenges and achieve desired goals. In discourse, self-efficacy messages function to strengthen audience confidence and foster a sense of personal capability. Linguistically, these messages are commonly expressed through assertive statements and modality indicating capability, such as *can*, *able to*, *capable of*, and *will succeed*.

2.5 Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational motivation is derived from transformational leadership theory proposed by Bass and Riggio (2006). This motivational function refers to the use of language that inspires audiences by presenting hope, vision, meaning, and collective purpose. Inspirational motivation encourages individuals to move beyond personal limitations and pursue broader goals or higher ideals. It is commonly realized through visionary language, metaphorical expressions, symbolic narratives, and collective pronouns such as *we* and *our*. Speakers also frequently employ visionary prompts such as *imagine* and *think about* to encourage audiences to visualize possibilities and positive transformation.

By combining Speech Act Theory with these motivational dimensions, the present study provides an integrated framework for examining how linguistic action and motivational intent work together in motivational discourse. This approach allows a deeper understanding of how Taylor's TED Talk generates emotional engagement, shifts perspectives, and encourages positive reflection through strategic language use.

3. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method because the purpose of the research is to describe and interpret the illocutionary acts and motivational functions found in Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor's TED Talk *My Stroke of Insight*. A qualitative descriptive design is suitable for examining meaning, intention, and language use in natural contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The analysis relies on Speech Act Theory proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1979), combined with motivational communication frameworks.

3.1 Data Source and Unit of Analysis

The data consist of utterances taken from the official transcript of Jill Bolte Taylor's TED Talk *My Stroke of Insight* (Taylor, 2008). The transcript represents the complete spoken text of the presentation and serves as the primary data source. The unit of analysis is an utterance, defined as a meaningful segment of speech that conveys a communicative intention.

A total of 139 utterances were selected from the full transcript using the following inclusion criteria:

1. The utterance contains an illocutionary act based on Searle's taxonomy.
2. The utterance reflects at least one motivational function adopted in this study.
3. The utterance forms a complete and interpretable unit of meaning.

Utterances that were incomplete, unclear, or did not meet these criteria were excluded.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted through several steps:

1. Watching the TED Talk repeatedly to understand the tone, emotional delivery, and context.
2. Reading the transcript carefully and identifying utterances containing illocutionary force.
3. Coding the selected utterances based on:
 - a. the type of illocutionary act (representative, directive, commissive, expressive, or declarative), and
 - b. the motivational function (emotional appeal, cognitive reframing, encouragement, self-efficacy, or inspirational motivation).

Each utterance was then recorded in a coding sheet for further analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), consisting of:

1. data reduction: selecting utterances relevant to the research focus.
2. data display: organizing utterances into analytical tables.
3. conclusion drawing: interpreting how speech acts and motivational strategies work together to construct motivational meaning.

Speech Act Theory was used to identify the illocutionary force of each utterance, while motivational analysis was used to explain how the utterances influence emotion, cognition, and audience empowerment. By integrating these two frameworks, the study explains how linguistic actions generate motivational impact in motivational discourse.

3.4 Reliability Strategies

To strengthen reliability and minimize subjectivity, this study employed a peer-checking procedure. A portion of the coded data was reviewed by a second coder to compare category assignments and ensure consistency in interpretation. The results of the review showed that the classifications remained stable and aligned with the theoretical

criteria. The reliability process was further supported by theoretical triangulation, in which each coding decision was cross-checked against the theoretical frameworks proposed by Austin (1962), Searle (1979), Aristotle (1991), Beck (1976), Ellis (1994), Wong (2015), Bandura (1997), and Bass and Riggio (2006). In cases where an utterance contained multiple motivational elements, the dominant communicative intention was used as the primary classification.

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method because the purpose of the research is to describe and interpret the illocutionary acts and motivational functions found in Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor's TED Talk *My Stroke of Insight*. A qualitative descriptive design is suitable for examining meaning, intention, and language use in natural contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The analysis relies on Speech Act Theory proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1979), combined with motivational communication frameworks.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of this study show that in Jill Bolte Taylor's "*My Stroke of Insight*," illocutionary acts and motivational functions strongly interact. The majority of the 139 utterances that were analyzed were classified as representative acts (121 data), indicating the speaker's tendency to use assertive expressions to convey perceptions, narrate experiences, and construct reality (Searle, 1979). This dominance aligns with the nature of autobiographical TED Talks, which typically emphasize factual recounting and meaning-making. Unlike previous TED-related studies, such as Hussein & Mubarak (2025), who focused on multimodal strategies, or Mestre-Mestre and Pérez Cabello de Alba (2022), who examined applause triggers, the present findings demonstrate that the persuasive power in Taylor's talk does not stem primarily from delivery techniques or audience reactions, but from the consistent use of representative acts to construct emotional resonance. Emotional Appeal also emerged as the most frequent motivational function (84 data), further reflecting that autobiographical narratives rely heavily on emotional engagement to influence the audience (Nabi, 2021). Within this interaction, Representative + Emotional Appeal appeared as the most dominant pattern (78 data), showing that descriptive narration is strategically used to evoke empathy and guide the audience's emotional response.

The study demonstrates that distinct illocutionary acts consistently co-occur with particular motivational functions. From a total of 139 data, the most dominant illocutionary act was Representative (121 data), followed by Expressive (8 data) and Directive (10 data). In terms of motivational functions, Emotional Appeal emerged as the strongest category (84 data), followed by Inspirational Motivation (29 data), Cognitive Reframing (12 data), Self-Efficacy (8 data), and Encouragement (6 data). When the two categories were combined, Representative + Emotional Appeal appeared as the most prevalent pattern (78 data), demonstrating how descriptive narration is deliberately used to evoke emotional resonance. Other notable pairings include Representative + Inspirational Motivation (24 data), Representative + Cognitive Reframing (12 data), Representative + Self-Efficacy (6 data), and Representative + Encouragement (1 data). Less frequent but meaningful combinations also appeared, such as Directive + Encouragement (5 data), Directive + Inspirational Motivation (4 data), Directive + Self-Efficacy (1 data), Expressive + Emotional Appeal (6 data), Expressive + Self-Efficacy (1 data), and Expressive + Inspirational Motivation (1 data). These distribution patterns indicate that motivational strategies and illocutionary force interact systematically to shape the speaker's persuasive intention and influence the audience's emotional and cognitive responses.

4.1 Representative + Emotional Appeal

06:15

"On the morning of the stroke, I woke up to a pounding pain behind my left eye."

This utterance is categorized as a representative illocutionary act because it reports a direct physical experience of the speaker. The vivid phrase "pounding pain" heightens the emotional weight of the narration by making the discomfort feel immediate and tangible for the audience. This description does not merely relay medical symptoms but intentionally draws listeners into the urgency and intensity of the moment. The emotional appeal emerges through sensory detail that allows the audience to mentally simulate the experience and feel an empathetic response. According to Nabi (2002), affective responses play a central role in persuasion, as emotional cues influence how messages are interpreted and internalized. In this case, the detailed description of pain allows the audience to mentally simulate the speaker's experience, thereby increasing emotional involvement and empathetic response.

4.2 Representative + Inspirational Motivation

10:38

"How many brain scientists have the opportunity to study their own brain from the inside out?"

This utterance is representative in that it reflects the speaker's genuine recognition of the rare situation she found herself in during the stroke. At the same time, it carries inspirational motivation by reframing a traumatic and life-threatening incident as a moment of unique opportunity. The rhetorical question encourages listeners to pause and see the situation through a more hopeful perspective, shifting from fear to curiosity. This linguistic strategy helps redefine adversity as something potentially meaningful, which strengthens motivational impact. Recent studies highlight that rhetorical questions increase cognitive engagement and encourage audiences to reconsider negative events through a more empowering lens (Sawin & Brewer, 2023). Through this utterance, the speaker motivates listeners to adopt a perspective that values growth even in extreme hardship.

4.3 Representative + Cognitive Reframing

04:59

"Our left hemisphere is all about the past, and it's all about the future."

This statement functions as a representative act because it provides an informational explanation of brain functions based on the speaker's professional background. However, it simultaneously serves as cognitive reframing by guiding the audience to reinterpret how the brain shapes perception of time. By contrasting the left hemisphere's temporal focus with the right hemisphere's present-moment awareness, the speaker helps listeners reconsider how conscious experience is structured. This reinterpretation invites the audience to see the brain not only as an organ but as a system influencing emotional and cognitive orientation. Gross (2013) explains that reframing involves shifting one's understanding to produce a different emotional outcome. Here, the speaker uses scientific explanation to build an

accessible mental shift that helps listeners rethink their own patterns of attention, thought, and self-awareness.

4.4 Representative + Self-Efficacy

12:28

"So that as I would come back to normal reality, I'd be able to tell, 'Yes, I've already dialed that number.'"

The speaker's real-time experience throughout her neurological disability is described in this utterance, making it a representative act. Additionally, it demonstrates self-efficacy, as evidenced by her assurance in monitoring her behaviour despite cognitive difficulties. The statement "I'd be able to tell" demonstrates an internal belief in her own operational capability, which is a crucial component of self-efficacy, which is defined as people's judgments of their capacity to plan and carry out the actions necessary to manage circumstances (Schunk & Dibenedetto, 2019). The statement conveys psychological resilience and a sense of personal agency even in times of crisis by highlighting her capacity to keep an eye on and validate her activities.

4.5 Representative + Encouragement

16:08

"And it motivated me to recover."

This utterance is representative because it directly expresses the speaker's emotional and motivational state during recovery. It fits the Encouragement category because the speaker frames her own experience as an example of determination that the audience can learn from. By stating that she was motivated to recover, she presents personal progress not merely as an outcome, but as an active, hopeful process. Such statements create a narrative of possibility for listeners who may be facing challenges of their own. Research on motivational communication shows that messages emphasizing personal drive and emotional momentum increase listener engagement and perceived hopefulness (Nabi, 2021). The utterance acts as a simple yet powerful reminder that recovery begins with internal motivation, encouraging the audience to trust in the value of their own emotional strength.

4.6 Directive + Encouragement

16:44

"And we have the power to choose, moment by moment, who and how we want to be in the world."

This utterance falls under the Directive category because the speaker implicitly instructs and guides the audience toward adopting a particular mindset by recognizing their agency in shaping their identity and behaviour. The directive force appears through the suggestion that individuals should acknowledge their capacity for intentional choice. At the same time, the statement conveys Encouragement, as it reassures the audience that personal transformation is possible and within their control. Encouragement in motivational communication often highlights autonomy and self-direction, which helps strengthen listeners' confidence. Recent studies on motivational language demonstrate that messages

emphasizing choice and autonomy enhance psychological empowerment and perceived control (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Similarly, self-determination research shows that affirming agency can elevate motivation and foster positive behavioral change (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Therefore, this utterance exemplifies directive encouragement by guiding the audience while simultaneously supporting their sense of personal capability.

4.7 Directive + Inspirational Motivation

09:24

"Imagine what it would be like to be totally disconnected from your brain chatter that connects you to the external world."

Beginning with the verb "Imagine", this utterance is clearly Directive, inviting the audience to mentally simulate an alternative reality. It also provides Inspirational Motivation, encouraging listeners to broaden their perspective and consider an extraordinary cognitive state. Inspirational motivation works by invoking vivid imagery and emotional elevation, elements that help audiences explore new meanings and aspirational ideas (Nabi & Myrick, 2019). Here, the speaker guides the audience into an imaginative space where they can reflect on consciousness, silence, and inner peace, inspiring a deeper appreciation of mental awareness.

4.8 Directive + Self-Efficacy

11:01

"So I've got to call help. I've got to call work."

The statement reflects an urgent need for immediate action, which aligns with the characteristics of a Directive act, as it directs behavior even though it is addressed to the self. The repetition of the phrase "*I've got to*" emphasizes a strong sense of obligation and urgency, reinforcing the directive force within the utterance. At the same time, the statement demonstrates Self-Efficacy, as it reflects the speaker's belief in her ability to perform necessary actions despite severe cognitive disruption from the stroke. Within Social Cognitive Theory, articulating intended actions is considered a form of self-regulation that supports goal-directed behavior and enhances perceived control in difficult situations. Schunk & Dibenedetto (2019) argue that individuals with higher self-efficacy tend to organize their actions more effectively and persist even under pressure, as reflected in the speaker's effort to seek help and maintain responsibility.

4.9 Expressive + Emotional Appeal

10:54

"I don't have time for a stroke!"

The expression conveys a spontaneous emotional reaction, which places it within the category of expressive acts, as it reflects the speaker's immediate feelings of shock, frustration, and disbelief about the situation. The exclamatory form and informal tone intensify the emotional force of the statement, making the experience feel more vivid and relatable to the audience. At the same time, the utterance functions as an Emotional Appeal, as it invites listeners to empathize with the speaker's crisis. By framing the situation in a

slightly ironic and urgent way, the speaker creates a moment that is both emotionally engaging and memorable. Emotional expressions like this are known to enhance audience involvement because they trigger affective responses that shape how messages are processed and understood (Nabi & Myrick, 2019). Therefore, the statement not only reflects personal emotion but also strategically draws the audience into the speaker's experience.

4.10 Expressive + Self-Efficacy

16:58

"I am the life-force power of the universe."

The statement reflects an expressive act because it conveys the speaker's deep emotional realization and sense of spiritual connection following the stroke experience. At the same time, the utterance strengthens Self-Efficacy by expressing inner strength, confidence, and personal empowerment. The phrase "I am the life-force power of the universe" symbolizes the speaker's belief in her own existence and capability to continue living despite the traumatic experience. According to Bandura (1997), verbal expressions affirming personal agency can reinforce perceptions of capability and resilience. Therefore, the statement functions both as emotional expression and as reinforcement of the speaker's psychological strength.

4.11 Expressive + Inspirational Motivation

10:38

"This is so cool!"

The utterance is expressive, conveying excitement and delight during an otherwise frightening neurological episode. The playful tone adds a layer of humor, making the moment feel more human and accessible. Humor supports inspirational motivation by allowing the audience to engage positively with complex and abstract experiences. Meyer (2015) notes that humor increases message receptivity and reduces psychological resistance. The speaker's enthusiastic response reframes the situation as one filled with awe rather than fear, inspiring the audience to adopt a more open and curious attitude toward unexpected experiences.

5. Conclusion

Based on an analysis of 139 utterances drawn from Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor's TED Talk, this study concludes that a strategic interplay between illocutionary acts and motivational functions constitutes the core of the speech's persuasive power. Representative acts dominate the discourse because the speaker foregrounds detailed narration to construct an experiential reality and guide the audience's understanding. Emotional Appeal emerges as the strongest motivational function, indicating that the persuasive force of the narrative relies not only on factual description but also on emotional engagement that evokes empathy, attention, and identification. These patterns show that linguistic choices in motivational speeches operate simultaneously as communicative actions and motivational strategies. Theoretically, this study contributes to pragmatic scholarship by demonstrating that illocutionary acts function beyond their traditional action-performing role, they also serve as structured motivational mechanisms capable of shaping audience cognition and

emotional involvement. The findings also enrich motivational discourse studies by showing that Emotional Appeal is not merely an aesthetic element but also a functional device that reinforces narrative persuasion in autobiographical storytelling. In the context of public speaking research, the study highlights how TED Talk speakers integrate descriptive narration with motivational framing to construct impactful and relatable messages. Practically, the findings offer insights for public speakers, educators, and communicators regarding the importance of aligning speech acts with motivational intent to enhance clarity, engagement, and persuasive impact. Finally, future research may explore how these linguistic–motivational patterns differ across genres, such as classroom discourse, political speeches, or religious sermons, across TED speakers with different backgrounds, or through multimodal analysis that incorporates gestures, voice, and visuals to provide a more comprehensive understanding of motivational communication.

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ADJECTIVE SUFFIXATION AND STYLISTIC MEANING IN FRANZ KAFKA'S *THE METAMORPHOSIS*

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Abstract

This study examines adjective-forming suffixation in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* by integrating derivational morphological analysis with stylistic interpretation. The study aims to identify the types and frequencies of adjective-forming suffixes and to explore their contribution to the novel's thematic and stylistic construction. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach supported by quantitative frequency analysis, the data were collected from the English translation of *The Metamorphosis* and analyzed using theories of derivational morphology proposed by Katamba (2018), Plag (2018), and related scholars. The analysis identified 73 valid instances of adjective-forming suffixation distributed across eighteen suffix types. The most productive suffixes were -ful (13 instances), -al (8 instances), -y (7 instances), and -less (6 instances). The findings indicate that most derived adjectives function as qualitative adjectives, describing emotional states, psychological conditions, and physical characteristics, while relational adjectives primarily establish social and contextual relationships. The distribution of suffixes reveals a significant increase in adjective use in the final chapter, corresponding to the intensification of Gregor Samsa's psychological decline and social isolation. Furthermore, suffixes such as -ful and -less contribute to the representation of suffering, vulnerability, powerlessness, and alienation, which constitute central themes of the novel. The study concludes that adjective-forming suffixation functions not only as a productive morphological process but also as a stylistic resource that supports characterization, thematic development, and meaning construction in literary discourse.

Keywords: *adjective suffixation; English morphology; literary text; relational adjectives; qualitative adjectives; stylistic meaning*

1. Introduction

Language in literary texts functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a tool for constructing meaning, atmosphere, and psychological depth (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004). One linguistic aspect that plays an important role in this process is derivational morphology, particularly suffixation, which enables the formation of new words and the extension of lexical and semantic meaning (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011; Bauer et al., 2013; Katamba, 2018).

Derivational morphology is considered one of the most productive mechanisms in English word formation because it allows speakers and writers to create new lexical items through affixation processes (Schmidtke et al., 2018; Baayen et al., 2019). In English, suffixation frequently changes both grammatical category and semantic meaning, allowing nouns and verbs to function as adjectives with descriptive and evaluative meanings. According to Carstairs-McCarthy (2002), derivational processes reflect the productivity and flexibility of language structure. Similarly, Yule (2014) explains that affixation contributes significantly to vocabulary development because it enables language users to construct expressions that suit communicative and contextual purposes.

In literary texts, morphological choices often contribute to stylistic and narrative effects, influencing readers' interpretation, emotional engagement, and understanding of literary meaning (Fernandez-Quintanilla & Stradling, 2023; Scapin et al., 2023). The use of adjective-forming suffixes can strengthen characterization, emotional atmosphere, and descriptive intensity within a narrative (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2023; Lastari & Winarta, 2025). Functional linguistic perspectives emphasize that lexical and grammatical choices are closely related to meaning-making processes in discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Therefore, examining adjective suffixation in literary works can provide deeper insight into how linguistic forms contribute to narrative representation and psychological expression.

In this context, *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka contains rich descriptive and psychologically intense language, making it an appropriate text for examining adjective formation (Kafka, 2005; Toolan, 1998). The narrative's focus on alienation, transformation, and inner experience relies heavily on descriptive expressions, many of which are realized through adjective suffixation (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2023). These linguistic patterns contribute to the representation of psychological states throughout the narrative. Descriptive adjectives guide readers' interpretation of Gregor Samsa's psychological struggles, illustrating how morphological choices shape literary perception and reinforce narrative meaning (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004).

However, previous studies on derivational morphology have largely focused on non-literary discourse or general language use (Schmidtke et al., 2018; Günther & Marelli, 2020). Limited studies examine how adjective suffixation functions specifically in literary narratives, particularly in relation to descriptive and psychological effects (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2023; Lastari & Winarta, 2025). Furthermore, existing studies tend to emphasize structural aspects of word formation while giving less attention to the stylistic and interpretive functions of derivational morphology in literary texts. This gap is significant because literary meaning is often constructed through subtle linguistic choices that influence readers' perceptions of characters, themes, and emotional experiences (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* by focusing on the relationship between morphological structure and narrative function (Katamba, 2018; Lieber, 2004). By using a literary text as the data source, this study provides empirical evidence of how suffixation operates in authentic contexts. More importantly, this study contributes to bridging linguistic analysis and literary studies by demonstrating that morphological processes function not only structurally but also stylistically in constructing narrative meaning. The findings are expected to enrich discussions of derivational morphology in literary discourse and provide further evidence

that morphological choices contribute to characterization, thematic development, and psychological representation in narrative texts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Derivational Morphology and Suffixation

Morphology examines the internal structure of words and the processes of word formation, including derivation through affixation. Lieber (2010) argues that derivation may change both the grammatical category and meaning of a base word. Similarly, Bauer (2003) states that suffixation is one of the most productive word-formation processes in English because it systematically creates new lexical items. Derivational processes therefore play an important role in expanding vocabulary and constructing meaning in language use.

Common adjective-forming suffixes include -ful, -less, -ous, -y, -able, -ive, and -al, each contributing distinct semantic functions (Plag, 2018b). For example, the suffix -ful generally expresses possession of a quality (e.g., painful, hopeful), while -less indicates absence or lack (e.g., helpless, lifeless). Suffixation simultaneously alters grammatical category and enriches semantic meaning, making it a central mechanism of English word formation. Recent studies on literary reading have further demonstrated that linguistic foregrounding and stylistic features influence readers' emotional engagement and interpretation of literary texts, reinforcing the role of linguistic form in meaning construction (Scapin et al., 2023; Fernandez-Quintanilla & Stradling, 2023)

2.2 Adjectives in Literary Texts

In literary discourse, adjectives construct atmosphere, characterization, and psychological depth, making them central to stylistic analysis. Adjectives are commonly classified into qualitative and relational types. Qualitative adjectives convey evaluative or emotional qualities, while relational adjectives denote classification or association, both shaping narrative interpretation (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005). Qualitative adjectives are particularly dominant in literary narratives because they strengthen descriptive and emotional expressions.

Lexical and grammatical choices guide readers' interpretation of characters, emotions, and situations within a narrative (Leech & Short, 2007). In this context, adjective suffixation becomes an important linguistic feature because it supports emotional expression and psychological representation in literary discourse. Recent stylistic studies have increasingly shown that derivational morphology operates not merely as a grammatical mechanism but as a meaning-making tool in literary language (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010; Nørgaard et al., 2010; Verdonk, 2002).

2.3 Stylistic Meaning and Morphology

Stylistic meaning refers to the layer of meaning encoded in language choices that goes beyond referential or denotative content to convey social, affective, and evaluative dimensions (Crystal & Davy, 1969; Leech, 1974). In literary texts, stylistic meaning is often created through specific lexical and grammatical choices that foreground particular aspects of experience or emotion. Leech (1974) identifies seven types of meaning, of which stylistic or connotative meaning is central to literary analysis because it reflects the writer's intentional or habitual use of linguistic forms to achieve specific effects.

In the context of adjective-forming suffixation, stylistic meaning is realized through the selection and frequency of certain suffixes that carry affective values. For instance,

adjectives formed with -less (helpless, lifeless, powerless) carry connotations of deprivation, vulnerability, and existential emptiness. Similarly, -ful adjectives (painful, pitiful, hopeful) often encode heightened emotional states. Simpson (2004) argues that the stylistic dimension of language in fiction is closely tied to the patterns of foregrounding, in which certain linguistic choices stand out against the norm and draw attention to themselves as meaning-making devices.

From a functional linguistic perspective, Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) explain that lexical and grammatical choices construct ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. When applied to literary texts, this framework helps explain how morphological patterns such as adjective suffixation contribute to the overall emotional and thematic texture of a narrative. In *The Metamorphosis*, the stylistic meaning of derived adjectives is inseparable from Kafka's representation of alienation, psychological disintegration, and social isolation. The repeated occurrence of emotionally loaded adjectives throughout the narrative creates a cumulative stylistic effect that reinforces the novel's dominant themes. Recent stylistic research has further emphasized that readers' responses to literary texts are strongly influenced by recurrent linguistic patterns, which contribute to emotional engagement and narrative interpretation (Scapin et al., 2023).

Several recent studies have explored the stylistic functions of morphological choices in literary texts. Research on derivational suffixes in novels and fairy tales has shown that affixation contributes not only to lexical formation but also to characterization, descriptive richness, and the construction of narrative meaning (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2024; Lastari & Winarta, 2025). These findings suggest that morphological analysis should incorporate a stylistic perspective to better explain how linguistic forms contribute to literary interpretation.

2.4 Previous Studies and Research Gap

Plag (2018) and Haspelmath & Sims (2013) have extensively documented derivational morphology in general English language use. However, their focus remains on structural and grammatical dimensions rather than on literary or stylistic functions. Similarly, earlier studies such as those by Bauer (2003) and Lieber (2004) provide foundational accounts of suffixation but do not address its role in literary discourse.

Recent research has increasingly examined derivational morphology in literary discourse, highlighting the contribution of affixation to characterization, descriptive richness, and meaning construction in literary narratives (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2024; Lastari & Winarta, 2025). More recently, research on literary morphology has shown that derivational affixes play an important role in shaping characterization, enriching emotional expression, and enhancing stylistic features in literary works (Yuliana & Putra, 2024; Lastari & Winarta, 2025; Lumintang & Winarta, 2025). Furthermore, studies on adjective-forming derivational suffixes have demonstrated that morphological choices contribute to descriptive meaning, characterization, and thematic development within literary narratives (Meilandari et al., 2022; Karang et al., 2024). Despite these advances, few studies have analyzed adjective suffixation in canonical literary texts such as Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, and fewer still have integrated stylistic meaning as a central analytical dimension. Moreover, most previous studies have concentrated on identifying and classifying derivational affixes, while relatively little attention has been paid to how adjective-forming suffixes contribute to psychological representation and stylistic meaning in canonical literary works. This study addresses that gap by combining morphological analysis with stylistic interpretation.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018), appropriate for analyzing linguistic forms in narrative context rather than quantifying frequency alone. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to interpret morphological phenomena within their literary and stylistic context, examining not only the forms of adjective-forming suffixes but also their contributions to meaning construction, psychological representation, and narrative atmosphere. This design is consistent with approaches used in literary linguistics and stylistics research, in which close textual analysis is prioritized over statistical measurement. Qualitative description was considered appropriate because the study sought to provide a detailed account of morphological patterns and their stylistic functions within a literary text without attempting to test causal relationships or statistical generalizations.

3.2 Data Source and Sampling

The data source is Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (Kafka, 2005), a canonical work of literary modernism widely recognized for its psychologically intense and descriptively rich language. The novel is divided into three chapters, each representing a distinct stage of narrative development: Chapter 1 functions as the exposition, presenting Gregor Samsa's transformation and initial psychological shock; Chapter 2 serves as the rising action and development, depicting the family's gradual estrangement; and Chapter 3 constitutes the climax and resolution, culminating in Gregor's death and the family's liberation. Since the study examined all three chapters of the novel, total sampling was employed. All occurrences of adjective-forming suffixes identified in the text were included in the analysis to ensure comprehensive coverage of morphological patterns across the entire narrative.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted through systematic close reading and note-taking guided by an observation sheet to ensure consistency. A structured observation sheet was used to record each occurrence of adjective-forming suffixation, including the derived form, base form, suffix type, semantic category, and narrative context. This procedure follows document analysis principles commonly employed in qualitative textual research (Bowen, 2009). The procedure involved the following steps: (1) all words containing adjective-forming suffixes such as *-ful*, *-less*, *-ous*, *-y*, *-able*, *-ent*, *-ive*, *-ly*, and *-al* were identified through close reading (Katamba, 2018); (2) loanwords and inflected forms were excluded to maintain focus on derivational morphology; (3) the identified words were categorized based on the type of suffix they contain; (4) the morphological process of each derived adjective was analyzed by identifying the base form and the attached suffix; (5) the derived adjectives were classified into qualitative (evaluative/emotional) and relational (associative/classificatory) categories following Huddleston and Pullum (2005); and (6) the stylistic meaning of the derived adjectives was interpreted in relation to their narrative context, drawing on Leech's (1974) framework of stylistic meaning and Simpson's (2004) theory of foregrounding in literary discourse.

Data analysis proceeded through three interpretive stages: morphological identification, semantic categorization, and stylistic interpretation. First, each derived adjective was analyzed to identify its base form and derivational suffix. Second, the adjectives were categorized according to their semantic and grammatical functions. Third, their stylistic meanings were interpreted within the narrative context by drawing on Leech's

(1974) theory of stylistic meaning, Simpson's (2004) concept of foregrounding, and Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) functional perspective on meaning-making. The analytical process followed the interactive model of qualitative data analysis involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This triangulated approach ensured that findings were grounded in both structural and stylistic dimensions of the text.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The analysis identified a total of 73 valid instances of adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis*, collected from all three chapters after excluding inflectional forms (e.g., superlative -est) and lexicalized forms that did not meet the criteria of productive derivational morphology. Following morphological verification based on established frameworks of derivational morphology, the identified adjectives were categorized according to their morphological structures and semantic functions.

The distribution of adjective-forming suffixes across the novel demonstrates an uneven pattern. Chapter 1 contains 18 instances (24.66%), Chapter 2 contains 17 instances (23.29%), and Chapter 3 contains 38 instances (52.05%). The substantial increase in Chapter 3 indicates that adjectival derivation becomes more prominent as the narrative progresses. This tendency corresponds to the intensification of emotional conflict, social alienation, and psychological deterioration experienced by Gregor Samsa during the final stage of the story. The greater frequency of derived adjectives in the concluding chapter suggests that Kafka increasingly relies on descriptive language to portray emotional states, interpersonal tensions, and evaluative judgments. Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of adjective-forming suffixes identified in the corpus.

Table 1.
Frequency of Adjective-Forming Suffixes

Suffix	Frequency	Data	Percentage (%)
-ful	13	pitiful, peaceful (2), careful (3), painful (3), beautiful, useful, helpful, hopeful	17.81%
-al	8	personal, normal, musical, cultural, logical, accidental, national, professional	10.96%
-y	7	hungry (2), dirty, dusty, cloudy, healthy, easy	9.59%
-less	6	helpless, lifeless, powerless, hopeless, useless, peerless	8.22%
-ous	5	anxious, curious, dangerous, famous, nervous	6.85%
-able	5	comfortable (2), suitable, moveable, changeable	6.85%
-ent	5	different (3), permanent, dependent	6.85%
-ive	4	sensitive, effective, attractive, creative	5.48%
-ly	4	Friendly (2), lovely (2)	5.48%
-ic	4	electric, economic, artistic, poetic	5.48%
-ible	3	Horrible (2), terrible,	4.11%
-ary	2	necessary, ordinary	2.74%
-ish	2	childish, foolish	2.74%
-ar	1	particular	1.37%
-en	1	Rotten	1.37%
-ant	1	Resistant	1.37%
-ical	1	Historical	1.37%
-ific	1	Scientific	1.37%
Total	73		100%

The data reveal that the suffix *-ful* is the most productive adjective-forming suffix in the corpus, accounting for 13 occurrences (17.81%). Examples such as *pitiful*, *peaceful*, *careful*, and *painful* indicate that this suffix primarily contributes evaluative and emotional meanings. Morphologically, *-ful* attaches predominantly to nominal bases to express possession or abundance of a particular quality. The frequent occurrence of words such as *painful* and *pitiful* reflects the thematic centrality of suffering, sympathy, and emotional distress in the novel. This finding suggests that adjectival derivation through *-ful* functions as an important linguistic resource for expressing the psychological dimensions of Kafka's narrative.

The second most frequent suffix is *-al* with eight occurrences (10.96%). Adjectives such as *personal*, *cultural*, *logical*, and *professional* are relational adjectives derived from nouns. Unlike qualitative adjectives that express subjective evaluations, these forms establish conceptual, institutional, or social relationships. Their presence indicates Kafka's attention to social structures and familial roles that influence Gregor's identity. The occurrence of relational adjectives reinforces the broader themes of social obligation and family responsibility embedded in the narrative.

The suffix *-y* appears seven times (9.59%), producing adjectives such as *hungry*, *dirty*, *dusty*, and *cloudy*. These adjectives typically describe physical conditions, sensory perceptions, or environmental states. Their use contributes to the vivid depiction of Gregor's deteriorating living conditions and bodily transformation. Semantically, the suffix *-y* often denotes the presence of a particular characteristic, thereby enhancing the descriptive quality of the narrative.

The suffix *-less*, occurring six times (8.22%), represents a particularly significant pattern. Examples such as *helpless*, *lifeless*, *powerless*, *hopeless*, and *useless* express absence, deprivation, or lack of desirable qualities. The concentration of these negatively marked adjectives aligns closely with the themes of alienation and existential despair that characterize *The Metamorphosis*. The repeated use of *-less* derivatives reflects Gregor's progressive loss of agency, social value, and human identity. From a semantic perspective, this suffix serves as a powerful linguistic marker of negation and deficiency, reinforcing the tragic atmosphere of the novel.

Similarly, the suffix *-ous* occurs five times (6.85%), generating adjectives such as *anxious*, *curious*, *dangerous*, *famous*, and *nervous*. These forms predominantly express emotional, psychological, or evaluative states. The occurrence of *anxious* and *nervous* is particularly noteworthy because these adjectives directly relate to the emotional instability experienced by Gregor and his family. The suffix therefore contributes to the representation of psychological tension throughout the narrative.

Other moderately productive suffixes include *-able*, *-ent*, *-ive*, *-ly*, and *-ic*, each contributing between four and five occurrences. Adjectives such as *comfortable*, *suitable*, *dependent*, *sensitive*, *effective*, *friendly*, and *artistic* demonstrate the diversity of derivational processes employed in the text. These suffixes expand the descriptive repertoire of the narrative by expressing possibility (*-able*), states or conditions (*-ent*), qualities or tendencies (*-ive*), personal characteristics (*-ly*), and categorical relations (*-ic*).

Less frequent suffixes, including *-ible*, *-ary*, *-ish*, *-ar*, *-en*, *-ant*, *-ical*, and *-ific*, occur only occasionally. Although their numerical contribution is relatively small, they demonstrate the morphological richness of English adjective formation. Examples such as *horrible*, *necessary*, *foolish*, *particular*, *rotten*, and *historical* illustrate the variety of derivational patterns available in English and utilized within Kafka's translated text.

From a semantic perspective, the findings indicate that qualitative adjectives significantly outnumber relational adjectives. Most of the identified adjectives describe emotions, psychological states, physical conditions, or evaluative qualities rather than merely establishing relationships between entities. This predominance reflects Kafka's narrative focus on the subjective experiences of Gregor Samsa and the emotional reactions of those around him. The high frequency of adjectives expressing pain, helplessness, anxiety, and deterioration supports the interpretation that emotional and psychological characterization constitutes a central stylistic feature of the novel.

Taken as a whole, the results demonstrate that adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* serves not merely as a grammatical process but also as a significant stylistic and semantic device. The predominance of suffixes such as -ful, -less, and -ous highlights the novel's emphasis on emotional intensity, psychological conflict, and existential suffering. Consequently, derivational morphology contributes substantially to the construction of meaning and characterization, revealing how linguistic form interacts with literary themes to shape readers' understanding of the narrative.

4.2 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that adjective-forming suffixation in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* follows systematic and productive morphological patterns that contribute not only to lexical expansion but also to the construction of narrative meaning. The identification of eighteen adjective-forming suffixes, with a total of 73 valid occurrences, confirms the central role of suffixation as one of the most productive derivational processes in English morphology (Katamba, 2018; Plag, 2018). The data reveal that most adjectives are derived from nominal bases, such as pity → pitiful, danger → dangerous, and culture → cultural, while a smaller number are derived from verbal bases, including use → useful, change → changeable, and attract → attractive. This pattern supports previous morphological studies arguing that derivational suffixes serve as effective mechanisms for transforming lexical categories while simultaneously extending semantic meaning (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011; Bauer, 2003).

From a morphological perspective, the findings provide empirical evidence for the category-changing function of derivational suffixation. The formation of adjectives from nouns and verbs illustrates how suffixes systematically alter the grammatical status of lexical items while preserving a semantic relationship with their base forms. For example, the transformation of danger into dangerous and attract into attractive demonstrates how derivation creates new lexical items that express qualities, attributes, or states associated with the original roots. This finding aligns with Matthews (1991) view that derivational morphology constitutes a productive process through which languages expand their lexical inventories and increase semantic precision.

However, the significance of adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* extends beyond grammatical transformation. In literary discourse, morphological choices contribute to stylistic effects and influence readers' interpretation of characters, events, and themes (Lieber, 2004). The predominance of qualitative adjectives throughout the corpus suggests that Kafka relies heavily on evaluative and descriptive language to portray emotional experiences, physical conditions, and psychological states. According to Biber et al. (1999) and Quirk et al. (1985), adjectives function as essential descriptive resources in written discourse because they enrich textual representation and facilitate detailed

characterization. The present findings support this argument, as qualitative adjectives substantially outnumber relational adjectives in the dataset.

The dominance of the suffix *-ful* (13 occurrences; 17.81%) is particularly significant. Adjectives such as *pitiful*, *painful*, *careful*, and *hopeful* encode emotional and evaluative meanings that contribute directly to the portrayal of Gregor Samsa's psychological condition. Semantically, the suffix *-ful* denotes the presence or abundance of a particular quality, enabling the narrative to emphasize feelings of suffering, sympathy, expectation, and vulnerability. The frequent occurrence of these forms suggests that emotional evaluation constitutes a central stylistic feature of the novel. In this regard, adjective derivation serves as a linguistic mechanism through which Kafka intensifies the reader's emotional engagement with Gregor's experiences.

The relatively high frequency of the suffix *-al* (8 occurrences; 10.96%) also merits attention. Unlike *-ful* adjectives, which primarily express subjective qualities, *-al* adjectives such as *personal*, *cultural*, *professional*, and *national* function as relational markers that connect individuals to broader social, institutional, and cultural frameworks. Their presence reflects the social dimensions of Gregor's identity as a worker, son, and provider. These relational adjectives help construct the external world against which Gregor's transformation unfolds, highlighting the tension between individual subjectivity and social expectations. Consequently, the use of *-al* adjectives contributes to the novel's critique of modern social structures and the pressures imposed upon individuals.

Similarly, the suffix *-y* (7 occurrences; 9.59%) plays an important descriptive role. Adjectives such as *hungry*, *dirty*, *dusty*, and *cloudy* evoke sensory perceptions and physical conditions that characterize Gregor's deteriorating environment. These forms reinforce the material and bodily dimensions of the narrative, providing vivid imagery that reflects Gregor's gradual separation from human society. The prevalence of *-y* adjectives suggests that Kafka's language systematically links physical decay with psychological decline, thereby strengthening the symbolic relationship between Gregor's transformed body and his increasing social isolation.

Particularly noteworthy is the occurrence of *-less* adjectives (6 occurrences; 8.22%), including *helpless*, *lifeless*, *powerless*, *hopeless*, and *useless*. Semantically, the suffix *-less* expresses absence, deprivation, or lack, making it one of the most negatively marked derivational patterns in the dataset. The repeated appearance of these forms reflects the progressive erosion of Gregor's agency, social value, and human identity. Their concentration within the narrative supports interpretations of *The Metamorphosis* as a literary exploration of alienation, dehumanization, and existential despair. Therefore, the productivity of *-less* adjectives is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a stylistic strategy that reinforces the novel's dominant themes.

The findings further indicate that suffixes such as *-ous*, *-able*, *-ent*, *-ive*, and *-ly* contribute to the representation of emotional states and personal attributes. Adjectives such as *anxious*, *nervous*, *sensitive*, and *dependent* frequently describe psychological conditions, while forms such as *comfortable* and *suitable* characterize situational circumstances. Collectively, these derivations enrich the narrative's descriptive texture and enable nuanced portrayals of characters and events. The diversity of suffix types demonstrates the flexibility of English derivational morphology in generating adjectives that express a broad range of semantic functions.

The present study also contributes to the growing body of research on derivational morphology in literary texts. Previous studies by Meilandari et al. (2022), Karang et al.

(2024), and Lastari & Winarta (2025) demonstrated that derivational suffixes contribute to characterization, thematic development, and descriptive richness in literary works. The current findings corroborate these studies by showing that adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* performs similar functions. Nevertheless, this study extends earlier research by integrating quantitative morphological analysis with stylistic interpretation. Rather than merely identifying and classifying suffixes, the analysis demonstrates how specific suffix types and their frequencies are systematically connected to narrative themes, emotional atmosphere, and characterization.

Overall, the findings reveal that adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* operates simultaneously at morphological, semantic, and stylistic levels. The predominance of suffixes such as *-ful*, *-al*, *-y*, and *-less* reflects Kafka's reliance on derived adjectives to construct emotional intensity, depict physical deterioration, and critique social structures. Consequently, derivational morphology emerges not merely as a linguistic process but as an integral component of literary meaning-making, contributing significantly to the novel's representation of alienation, psychological suffering, and dehumanization.

4.3 Discussion: Stylistic Meaning of Derived Adjectives

Beyond their grammatical and morphological functions, the derived adjectives identified in the corpus perform significant stylistic roles that contribute to the thematic and psychological complexity of *The Metamorphosis*. Stylistic analysis suggests that the distribution of adjective-forming suffixes is not arbitrary; rather, it reflects a systematic linguistic pattern through which Kafka constructs emotional atmosphere, character psychology, and thematic development. The frequency data reveal that the most productive suffixes *-ful* (13 instances), *-al* (8 instances), *-y* (7 instances), and *-less* (6 instances) collectively account for nearly half of all identified adjective formations, indicating their central role in shaping the novel's stylistic profile.

A notable finding is the relationship between suffix frequency and thematic representation. The predominance of *-ful* adjectives contributes to the expression of emotional intensity and subjective evaluation. Words such as *pitiful* and *painful* encourage readers to interpret Gregor's condition through an affective lens, reinforcing themes of suffering and vulnerability. In contrast, *-less* adjectives systematically foreground absence and deprivation, emphasizing Gregor's loss of agency, social recognition, and human dignity. The coexistence of these two highly expressive suffixes creates a linguistic contrast between emotional presence (*-ful*) and existential absence (*-less*), a contrast that mirrors the tension between Gregor's inner humanity and his increasingly dehumanized social existence.

The stylistic significance of adjective derivation becomes even more apparent when examined in relation to narrative progression. While Chapters 1 and 2 contain relatively similar frequencies of adjective-forming suffixes (18 and 17 instances respectively), Chapter 3 contains 38 instances, accounting for more than half of the total dataset. This sharp increase suggests a deliberate intensification of descriptive language as the narrative approaches its climax. The greater density of derived adjectives in the final chapter reflects the increasing complexity of emotional conflict, family tension, and psychological deterioration. As Gregor becomes progressively isolated from his family and society, the narrative correspondingly employs a richer network of evaluative and descriptive adjectives to articulate this process.

Particularly significant is the concentration of negatively marked adjectives in the final chapter. Forms such as *helpless*, *lifeless*, *powerless*, and *hopeless* appear at crucial

moments in the narrative, coinciding with Gregor's physical decline and eventual death. Their semantic association with absence and loss reinforces the novel's exploration of alienation and dehumanization. This pattern supports (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010) argument that recurring linguistic features often function as stylistic signals that guide readers toward particular thematic interpretations. In the case of *The Metamorphosis*, the increasing use of negatively evaluated derived adjectives contributes to a cumulative stylistic effect that intensifies the sense of despair and social exclusion.

Furthermore, the coexistence of qualitative and relational adjectives enhances the multidimensional characterization of Gregor. Qualitative adjectives predominantly depict emotional states, physical conditions, and evaluative judgments, whereas relational adjectives situate Gregor within broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts. This interaction between subjective and contextual description reflects one of the central tensions of the novel: the conflict between personal identity and social expectations. Through the strategic use of adjective-forming suffixation, Kafka simultaneously represents Gregor's inner psychological world and the external social structures that contribute to his marginalization.

From a stylistic perspective, therefore, adjective-forming suffixation functions as more than a process of lexical creation. It serves as a linguistic resource through which emotional intensity, thematic development, and characterization are systematically constructed. The findings demonstrate that the distribution and semantic properties of derived adjectives are closely aligned with the novel's dominant concerns, particularly alienation, identity loss, and dehumanization. Consequently, the study provides further evidence that morphological patterns can play a crucial role in literary meaning-making and that derivational morphology constitutes an important analytical lens for understanding the relationship between linguistic form and literary interpretation.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated adjective-forming suffixation in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* from a derivational morphological perspective and explored its stylistic significance within the narrative. The analysis identified 73 valid instances of adjective-forming suffixes distributed across eighteen suffix types, with -ful, -al, -y, and -less emerging as the most productive patterns. These findings confirm that suffixation constitutes a highly productive word-formation process in English, enabling the derivation of adjectives from nominal and verbal bases while simultaneously generating new semantic and grammatical functions.

The study further demonstrates that adjective-forming suffixation in *The Metamorphosis* serves purposes beyond lexical and grammatical transformation. The predominance of qualitative adjectives indicates Kafka's reliance on descriptive and evaluative language to portray emotional states, psychological conditions, and physical deterioration. In particular, the frequent occurrence of -ful adjectives contributes to the expression of suffering, vulnerability, and emotional intensity, whereas -less adjectives foreground themes of absence, loss, and powerlessness. Similarly, -y adjectives enhance sensory and environmental description, while -al adjectives situate characters within broader social and institutional contexts. Together, these morphological patterns contribute to the construction of characterization, atmosphere, and thematic meaning throughout the novel.

The distribution of adjective-forming suffixes across the three chapters also reveals a meaningful stylistic pattern. The substantial increase in derived adjectives in Chapter 3 corresponds to the climax of Gregor Samsa's psychological decline and social isolation, suggesting that morphological choices are closely aligned with narrative development. This finding demonstrates that derivational morphology functions not merely as a structural linguistic process but also as a stylistic resource that reinforces the novel's central themes of alienation, dehumanization, identity loss, and existential suffering.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of derivational morphology by illustrating how morphological analysis can be integrated with stylistic interpretation in literary studies. Unlike previous research that primarily focused on identifying and classifying derivational suffixes, the present study demonstrates that the frequency, distribution, and semantic functions of adjective-forming suffixes can reveal important aspects of literary meaning and narrative construction. The findings therefore support the view that morphological patterns constitute a significant component of literary style and can provide valuable insights into the relationship between linguistic form and thematic representation.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited to adjective-forming suffixation in a single literary work. Future research may expand the scope by examining other derivational processes, such as noun-forming and verb-forming suffixes, or by conducting comparative analyses across different literary texts, authors, genres, or translations. Such investigations would further enhance our understanding of the role of morphology in literary discourse and contribute to the growing intersection between linguistic analysis and literary criticism.

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COOPERATIVE HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY IN DISNEY'S *MOANA*: NEOLIBERAL GENDER POLITICS AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF PATRIARCHAL AUTHORITY

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of hegemonic masculinity in Disney's animated film *Moana* (2016). Drawing on Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, this research employs a qualitative constructionist approach to examine how male authority operates within a seemingly progressive narrative. The analysis focuses on the characters of Moana and Maui, whose dominance, confidence, and technical competence embody traditional masculine ideals. Although the film promotes themes of collaboration and empowerment, Maui's mentorship continues to shape Moana's growth, subtly reaffirming male centrality. His transformation from an authoritative figure to a supportive mentor reflects the adaptive nature of hegemonic masculinity, which redefines itself as emotionally intelligent and cooperative rather than overtly dominant. The findings reveal that while *Moana* advances female empowerment, it simultaneously preserves patriarchal values through subtle mechanisms of validation and guidance. By embedding male authority within a cooperative framework, the film perpetuates traditional gender hierarchies in a modernized and socially acceptable form. This study contributes to media and gender studies by extending Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity into the realm of contemporary animated cinema, showing how masculine dominance is recalibrated into culturally acceptable forms of guidance, partnership, and emotional vulnerability without relinquishing structural authority.

Keywords: *gender representation; hegemonic masculinity; masculine influence; Moana; patriarchy*

1. Introduction

Disney, as a global company, has a profound presence, with theme parks, films, and merchandise that have become integral to popular culture worldwide. In Australia, Disney has intertwined with the Australian popular culture and reflects technological development and global events (Groves, 2025). Hong Kong Disneyland highlights the impact of glocalization, where Western entertainment meets local cultural expectations (Bafagih & Wise, 2023). In the film *Moana*, Disney collaborated with Pacific Islanders to create a narrative that integrates Polynesian oral tradition (Tamaira & Fonoti, 2018). Moreover,

Disney films have exhibited characters and themes that incorporate gender ideology to appeal to diverse global audiences (Globan & Vukovic, 2022; Hubbard & Morrissey, 2024) and shape public understanding of masculinity and femininity.

Animated films often revolve around traditional gender stereotypes. They employ character arcs that reflect traditional gender roles. For instance, male characters are frequently depicted as strong, assertive, and emotionally restrained, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity (Harriger et al., 2021). In contrast, female characters may be portrayed as nurturing or passive (Al-Jbouri & Pomerantz, 2020; McCallum, 2013; Shawcroft et al., 2022). These designs play a crucial role in conveying gender identity. Male characters are often depicted with strong, angular features, while female characters may have softer, more rounded designs. This visual representation reinforces societal stereotypes about gender (Aley & Hahn, 2020). Disney animated films are no exception to these characteristics. Early portrayals often depicted female characters in traditional, patriarchal roles, emphasizing obedience and marriage as their primary goals.

While many animated films continue to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, there is a growing trend toward subversion. Both Pixar and Disney animated films offer audiences new nuances of masculinity and femininity. Films such as *Toy Story*, *Coco*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Mulan* represent new man (Al-Jbouri & Pomerantz, 2020, p. 45; McCallum, 2013, p. 116). A significant shift occurs in the portrayal of female characters. Disney's heroines who were traditionally portrayed with "beauty-long, flowing hair, doe-eyes, dazzling smile, hourglass figure" are now replaced with "more realistic representation of woman" (Karmakar & Bhadra, 2023, p. 5), such as Merida in *Brave* and Moana in *Moana*.

Disney has a diverse and flourishing portfolio of female characters, whose appearances and depictions have changed substantially throughout the studio's history. The female characters in the first Disney animations were regularly depicted as passive figures seeking salvation. They were perceived as helpless and in need of protection (Zipes, 2012). Over the years, many Disney characters have undergone significant transformations. In this case, Disney features several generations of female characters that exemplify its evolution from passive, stereotypical depictions to more empowering and nuanced portrayals. The first generation, the Eurocentric female characters were conventionally beautiful, passive, and completely dependent on male saviors. They were portrayed as lacking independence, and their value was determined solely by their youthful beauty. Whereas the second generation saw a change. In this generation, Disney female characters were depicted as highly passionate and free to embark on adventures. Despite having stronger desires and personalities, they ultimately sacrificed themselves irrationally to men. Later in the third generation, Disney sought to incorporate the theme of diversity, as evidenced by its female characters from different ethnicities and regions. Yet, these efforts were frequently trapped in awkward exoticization and caricature, where these characters were burdened with representing their entire race or ethnicity rather than being individuals with their own stories, thereby feeling like a corny 'apology' for Disney's Eurocentric history (Bell et al., 1995; Scarangella, 2010).

Subsequently, the fourth generation emerged, differing from previous generations. The fourth generation is perceived as the most promising stage of evolution. In this case, the female characters that appear are depicted as independent, empowered, and fully self-reliant, strong-brave girls. They do not need to be saved by men; rather, they save themselves and others. This generation also brings an outspoken critique of gender

stereotypes and traditional fairy-tale conventions. While, according to Cohen (2013), they continue to be criticized for their unrealistic beauty standards, the fourth generation has made real progress in creating complex, strong Disney female characters that embody more modern and equal values.

In its fourth generation, the audience knew them as the Disney renaissance and its aftermath featured more decisive and independent female protagonists, whom some scholars even deemed feminist heroines (Zsubori, 2024). This development is associated with the growing number of female writers, producers, and executives at the studio (Shawcroft et al., 2022). In contemporary academic discourse, many of Disney's female characters are now understood as interpretations of postfeminist and neoliberal media (Leader, 2018; Seybold, 2021; Stover, 2013; Wilde, 2014). They embody what is known as dual entanglement, which concurrently embraces and negates feminist values (McRobbie, 2004). These characters also operate within an economy of visibility, in which their bodies are commodified as the epicenter of their identity construction (Banet-Weiser, 2015). Thus, the supposedly progressive depictions of female Disney characters still speak within a much broader cultural context that solidifies gender power relations. It leaves open the issue of how the empowerment of females in popular culture is still confined within the persistent norms of patriarchy and capitalist logic.

Hegemony of masculinity is a conception that was conceptualized to address how masculine power persists in society despite the presence of diverse forms of masculinity (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1987). This concept perceives gender as something volatile and relational, and power is sustained not principally through direct coercion, but through consensus or cultural consent that renders the dominance of one group of masculinity over the other natural and legitimate (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Donaldson, 1993). Hegemony of masculinity functions not as the most commonly enacted form of masculinity, but as a normative standard that is culturally valorized and positioned as aspirational, shaping how both men and women understand and negotiate gendered identities (Enloe, 1983; Hockey, 2014). This hegemonic ideal defends its power through the subordination of other forms of masculinity and femininity. Although its form can be altered and evolved through the adoption of new practices, these changes are frequently a strategy for maintaining power and establishing new hierarchies based on race, class, or sexuality, instead of encouraging substantive equality (Khalili, 2011; Whitworth, 2004).

In Disney's *Moana* (Musker & Clements, 2016), there is an attempt to displace the traditional hero princess narrative through the representation of a self-reliant, physically strong, and loveless heroine. Moana is depicted as a courageous and resilient Disney character who is designated as a leader for her people. In this case, Moana appears to defy the passive gender stereotype of the previous princess era (Rebollo, 2019). Yet this framing of Moana's femininity occurs alongside a notable disempowerment of the alternative masculinity embodied by Maui.

Moana was released in 2016, when public discourse on gender representation and female empowerment in children's media had become more critical. The attempt to deconstruct the traditional heroine is evident in Moana's characterization as a character who has no interest in romance and is fully focused on her mission to save her people and find her true identity. Yet Moana also points out how female empowerment is framed within hegemonic masculinity. Thus, Moana's strength and independence are praised, but both are

contrasted with Maui's fall from heroic status. Therefore, it solidifies a hierarchy in which female emancipation can be achieved only by weakening non-hegemonic male figures. This displacement exemplifies Connell's argument that hegemonic masculinity adapts and rearranges itself, which is accelerating towards certain feminist values while preserving its primary dominance.

Due to its gender dynamics, *Moana* has gathered significant academic attention. The main female character is portrayed as a strong, independent leader, whose main concern is not romance but environmental issues (Hernawati, 2021). Ramadhan (2019) identified Moana's character as having both masculine and feminine traits, where the masculine traits are more dominant than the feminine ones. Meanwhile, Hollowell (2021) focuses on the male character, Chief Tui, who initially exhibits misogynistic behavior but later comes to support Moana's leadership, representing a shift toward a more progressive view of masculinity. Maui, the demigod, is described as having physical strength and relying on his magical fishhook; however, he challenges traditional notions of masculinity by being insecure and struggling with identity (Streiff & Dundes, 2017). Streiff and Dundes also found that, despite the appeal of a new, seemingly contemporary Disney princess, *Moana* reinforces stereotypes. The existing scholarship on *Moana* has predominantly focused on Moana's characterization as a strong, independent feminist heroine and the shifts in masculine representation through secondary male figures. While these analyses offer valuable insights into gender representation, they largely treat masculinity either as fragmented character traits or as a backdrop to female empowerment. Crucially, however, prior studies isolate individual attributes – such as Maui's insecurity or Chief Tui's initial resistance – without situating these traits within the broader structures of power that produce and sustain them. Examining masculinity as a collection of discrete characteristics risks obscuring how dominance is not simply embodied by individuals, but negotiated, contested, and reproduced through social and narrative relationships.

What remains underexplored is how hegemonic masculinity functions in relation to others: how its meanings and hierarchies are actively constructed through interactions between characters rather than existing within any single figure. Hegemonic masculinity cannot be fully understood in isolation; it gains its ideological strength precisely through the way it positions itself against femininity, subordinate masculinities, and alternative gender performances within a given narrative framework. Existing analyses have yet to consider how the dynamic between Moana and Maui serves as the primary site where hegemonic norms are both challenged and, at times, reaffirmed. This study, therefore, addresses a structural-theoretical gap in the film. Instead of listing gender traits at the character level, it examines how Connell's framework of hegemonic masculinity functions as a relational and structural force within the film's narrative, using the Moana-Maui dynamic as its central lens.

Thus, this study identifies the specific traits of hegemonic masculinity embodied in the interaction between Moana and Maui, with particular attention to how Maui's characterization and narrative arc function within the film's gender politics. Rather than reading Maui's loss of heroic authority as a simple subversion of masculine dominance, the analysis critically examines the mechanisms through which hegemonic masculinity is reconfigured as cooperative guidance, mentorship, and emotional support – forms that appear progressive while continuing to secure masculine centrality within the narrative. By foregrounding this dynamic, the study demonstrates how Moana's empowerment is framed

in relation to, and partially mediated by, a rearticulated masculine presence that adapts to feminist discourse without relinquishing its structural privilege. In doing so, the research contributes to media studies by offering a nuanced account of Disney's neoliberal negotiation of gender norms in contemporary cultural texts, revealing how apparent inclusivity and gender progressivism coexist with the subtle preservation of patriarchal power under the guise of partnership, balance, and mutual growth.

2. Literature Review

Connell describes masculinity as "simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (2005, p. 71). The idea has three components: social position, the behavior of men and women, and the individual and cultural consequences of the behavior. She argues that masculinity is not an individual experience but a social practice observable across organizations, communities, and cultures over time and in different places. Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity (2005, p. 77) accounts for the method in which gendered practices contribute to the reinforcement of patriarchy, thus maintaining male dominance and female subjugation.

Hegemony is a term introduced by Antonio Gramsci in his work on class relations. It is the cultural means by which a group achieves and maintains its dominating position in society. Connell (2005, p. 76) describes a hierarchy of masculinity which consists of four tiers: the complicit, marginalized, subordinate, and hegemonic. Hierarchy shows the dominance of masculinity, particularly towards less dominant men and women (Sholichah, 2020). The four tiers differ in their definitions and in the characteristics owners may exhibit. Hegemonic masculinity is the most prominent type of masculinity. It is defined as "ideal" masculinity in which men with hegemonic characteristics are dominant. They assert their authority over women, whereas other genders are seen as feminine. Dominance is not only established through violence, but can be secured by cultural norms, institutional structures, and persuasive means. Therefore, hegemonic masculinity is formed in certain settings and by its historical context.

Hegemonic masculinity is historically contingent, and experiences changes in response to cultural and economic conditions. This adaptability is especially visible when viewed through the lens of neoliberalism, the dominant ideological paradigm of late capitalism, which prioritizes individualism, self-improvement, and performance by market parameters (Dean, 2017). In neoliberal contexts, hegemonic masculinity does not disappear; it is reconfigured. It is no longer communicated through overt patriarchal rule but through stories of individual accomplishment, competitive independence, and economic productivity.

Hollywood's historical record demonstrates this evolution. The changing portrayal of hegemonic masculinity is documented in Hollywood's mainstream films. In post-war America in the 1940s, Hollywood films portrayed males characterized by "toughness, competitiveness, and open and dominant heterosexuality" (Howson & Yecies, 2016, p. 62), thereby reinforcing the ideal masculine traits that were sought by the U.S. Occupation authorities. In the 1980s, muscular masculinity became the hegemonic form in the action-hero genre. Films such as *Rambo* and *Terminator* focused on traditional ideas of male supremacy (Edwards, 2013, p. 42). The 1990s civil rights, feminist, and homosexual

movements challenged the validity of conventional masculinity. Films of this period, such as *Point Break*, depicted a crisis in hegemonic masculinity (Bowen, 2022). In the early 21st century, Hollywood represented masculinity through the traumatized troops of the Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan war, as well as secret agent archetypes like James Bond and Jason Bourne who suffer from emotional and psychological instability. The characters embodied a modern masculinity that was "troubled, ill at ease with their own aspirations and pleasures, uncomfortable with the systems of privilege and power that differently enable individual men economically, socially, and culturally" (Baker, 2015, p. 245). The historical record suggests that hegemonic masculinity is not undone by critical scrutiny, but instead demonstrates its potential for adaptation, thereby maintaining its cultural hegemony through the absorption of critique and the redeployment of its legitimacy within new ideological formations.

Disney is especially powerful in a neoliberal cultural landscape. Disney is a global media company that both reflects and plays a key role in shaping and spreading existing gender stereotypes. The company uses stories that reflect gender issues in the contexts of personal empowerment, consumer choice, and identity development (Giroux, 1999). Disney stories often present a neoliberal perspective in which self-improvement is the primary means of enacting social change. This technique always moves the attention to personal development, not social problems. In this setting, Disney functions as a neoliberal cultural entity, reproducing hegemonic masculine qualities and strategically updating change. Harriger et al. (2021) point out that, although Disney films have shifted away from traditional depictions of masculinity to more varied representations, the themes of violence and risk-taking remain, signifying that the ideological foundation of hegemonic masculinity remains intact beneath its changed facade.

Postfeminism works with neoliberalism to reconfigure this relationship by re-envisioning the ways in which masculine dominance is articulated and resisted. Tasker and Negra (2007, p. 21) propose that postfeminism glorifies female strength and individual empowerment, and simultaneously redefines masculinity, often portraying male characters as "somewhat hapless, bumbling 'victims' or 'losers' in the 'sex wars'" (Gill, 2014, p. 191). This reveals the shortcomings in the articulation of masculinity, especially in the spheres of work and family (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 4). This perceived decline of male power should not be confused with a real collapse of hegemonic masculinity. Postfeminism reinterprets masculine authority, shifting it from an overt domination to a more subtle one. The male character who admits frailty, gives way to female competence, and ironically enjoys personal development becomes a rejuvenated source of ideological validity. In neoliberal postfeminist media, rather than rejecting masculine authority, it is reformed to fit a cultural climate that promotes progress but largely maintains core power relations.

This study applies the analytical framework of Connell's structural account of hegemonic masculinity, the neoliberal recodification of gender through individual achievement, the function of Disney as an ideological industry, and postfeminism's dual empowerment of women and rehabilitation of masculinity. This notion highlights that the gender representations are not separate features but relationally constructed and institutionally controlled and ideologically sustained inside the narrative of the film, especially with the hegemonic masculinity.

3. Research Method

This study is based on two interrelated theoretical frameworks: Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and postfeminist theory. These frameworks provide conceptual tools to investigate gender politics in *Moana* (2016). Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as the culturally prevalent form of masculine activity in a given social order, which validates patriarchal power and is replicated through major institutions such as popular media. Crucially, hegemonic masculinity is not a static or monolithic construct. It is historically contingent and renegotiated in response to changing gender relations, frequently by incorporating progressive or egalitarian discourses to retain its cultural authority in more palatable forms (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, pp. 832–833). This dynamic nature is especially significant to contemporary Disney narratives, which often depict seemingly modern gender arrangements even as they continue to promote male agency. For the research, hegemonic masculinity is defined as the discursive and representational strategies through which the demigod Maui's masculine identity is produced, performed, and legitimized throughout the film's narrative.

This analysis is further influenced by the postfeminist sensibility proposed by Gill (2007) and McRobbie (2004), which defines a cultural logic in whereby feminist advances are both recognized and disavowed. Postfeminism is not the negation of feminism but its incorporation into dominant discourse: it produces gender representations that appear progressive – men who co-operate, show emotion, or defer to female protagonists – but that ultimately reestablish masculine normativity through narrative closure (Gill, 2014, p. 185). Tasker and Negra note that postfeminist media culture is defined by a selective interaction with feminist ideas, making critique structurally problematic (Gill, 2007, p. 1). The analysis utilizes postfeminism alongside neoliberal models of individualism and self-improvement through which masculinity is reconfigured as a personal project of development and reform rather than a source of structural dominance. Together, these theoretical coordinates show how *Moana* frames hegemonic masculinity as cooperative and benevolent – and hence unproblematic.

This study is based on systematic critical textual analysis as a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the meanings that people attach to social occurrences. It is based on textual and image data and uses specific methods for data collection, analysis, and validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Systemic textual analysis, as opposed to impressionistic close reading, employs specific and replicable techniques to select, code, and analyze a defined data corpus (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18).

For three reasons, textual analysis is the methodologically acceptable choice for this analysis. First, animated films are ideological texts that embed cultural notions about gender, ethnicity, and power through the intersection of narrative, dialogue, visual composition, and character design. Second, the verbal and visual modes of animated film work at the same time and in interdependence, requiring a multi-modal analytical approach that can understand image and language together (Jewitt & Oyama, 2004, p. 138). Third, the focus of this study is on representational ideology, on how masculinity is formed and naturalized, rather than on how it is received by audiences. Therefore, a text-centered method is more appropriate than approaches focusing on audience reception or production context. The media texts are seen as sites of reproduction and contestation of social

relations of power (Fairclough, 1995, p. 47) and discursive analysis is needed in order to expose the ideological activity of the film.

The primary data source is Disney's animated feature film *Moana* (2016), directed by John Musker and Ron Clements. The film focuses on the Polynesian character Moana and the demigod Maui, offering a rich basis for the examination of masculinity in a contemporary Disney narrative that is expressly positioned as progressive and culturally sensitive. Thematic selection of scenes was purposeful and driven by their direct relation to the creation, negotiation, or performance of masculinity, according to the criteria of theoretical sampling in qualitative inquiry (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 147).

Data were drawn from four iterative rounds of systemic viewing, each with a different analytical focus, based on the multi-pass technique suggested for multi-modal textual analysis (Bateman & Schmidt, 2012, pp. 8–10):

- a. Transcription and timecoding. All selected scenes were watched, and dialogue transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was marked with time codes so it could be linked to visual data.
- b. Visual coding. The scenes were shown without sound so that only visual information could be attended to. Camera angle (low-angle shots creating dominance; high-angle shots indexing vulnerability), spatial composition (the positioning of Maui in relation to Moana and other characters), and bodily performance (expansive versus contracted postures, aggressive versus deferential gestures) were coded.
- c. Multimodal integration. Verbal and visual data were studied together for moments of alignment, tension, or contradiction between what characters say and how they are depicted spatially and cinematically. This pass addresses the discursive activities that follow the film's ideological work.
- d. Focused and theoretical coding. Initial open codes generated inductively were examined and clustered into focused topic categories by frequent comparison. The codes were then mapped into the theoretical frameworks of Connell and Gill to have the final analytical categories.

The coding process produced three main analytical categories, which are all based on the study's theoretical framework. The hegemonic masculine performance category describes moments in which Maui performs the characteristics of Connell's hegemonic masculinity: the exclusion of female competence and the assertion of authority through spatial and vocal command. The postfeminist category is reflected when the film seems to soften and reform traditional masculinity through the film's ending. This category interrogates, following Gill, the way that progressive surface representations work to recoup, rather than demolish, dominant norms, so the character becomes sympathetic and emotionally accessible without redistributing narrative or symbolic power. Cooperative masculinity as an ideological category explores sequences in which Maui's masculinity is reframed as benevolent, supporting, and collaborative – corresponding to neoliberal concepts of reformed yet still-dominant masculinity (Messner, 2016). This category looks at how the film frames cooperation as a question of ideological concepts of postfeminism and individual self-improvement, rather than as a structural restructuring of masculine power.

4. Results and Discussion

The reconstruction of masculinity in the film *Moana* is evident in the portrayal of two significant characters, Maui and Moana. Maui is depicted as a deity who has lost his powers and assists Moana in saving the island where her tribe lives. The film presents Moana as a non-stereotypical female protagonist and Maui as a male supporting character of diminished strength. However, their interactions ultimately reveal a relationship that reinforces traditional masculine values.

4.1 Moana: Narrative Positioning and the Regulation of Female Agency

The film's narrative places Moana between resistance and restriction. Although she is initially portrayed as a brave woman with an adventurous spirit, her actions are constantly limited by ideological structures that govern women's autonomy. Moana's narrative construction reflects how women are often granted limited space while remaining trapped within the structure of patriarchal authority. Her identity is continuously shaped through her relationship with the authority of her father, Chief Tui, and the community's expectations regarding her future role as chief. She frequently finds herself in moments of conflict between her desires and social obligations, family responsibilities, and masculine authority. The film gives Moana space to resist, yet her resistance is continually undermined through institutional corrections and emotional discipline. Consequently, the film gives the impression of female empowerment while restricting it within hegemonic boundaries.

The struggle between personal desire and social obligation is set out in the musical scene from [00:07:58] to [00:10:12]. The lyrics underscore the themes of leadership, tradition and communal responsibility, emphasizing the need for Moana to follow in the footsteps of her father as chief. However, visually, the frame is always directed toward the ocean, where one might find freedom, movement, and self-determination. The song and the visual elements generate a tension between the institutional role and the individual aspiration. Moana's obsession with the ocean is thus a metaphor of defiance of societal restrictions. Yet the film also depicts this yearning as dangerous and disruptive, restricting the validity of her disobedience. In this scene, the film presents Moana's goal as emotionally compelling yet socially destructive, thereby confirming hegemonic notions that privilege communal stability over female self-determination.

This ideological positioning is reinforced through cinematographic composition in Image 1.

Image 1.

Moana's deep connection with the ocean



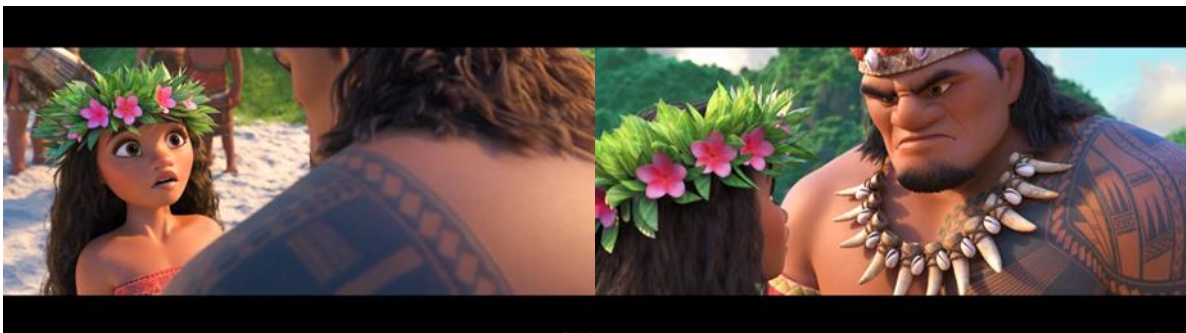
The use of the rule of thirds puts Moana on the border of the frame while the ocean fills the visual space, establishing a visual hierarchy that pushes the protagonist to the outside of her own environment. Instead of only showing emotional longing, this framing casts Moana as a symbolic figure on the margins of institutional authority. The panning shot does this by directing the audience's gaze to the water, highlighting her separation from the societal framework that bounds her desires. The cinematic framing is ideological because visual positioning influences how spectators perceive power relations in the image (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2025, p. 673). Spatial marginalization often entails less authority, whereas central positioning confers dominance and legitimacy. Therefore, Moana's spatial marginalization serves to normalize her inaccessibility to autonomy and leadership and to place her in limbo between two irreconcilable identities: a submissive future chief and an autonomous explorer. The ocean stands for emancipation and possibilities, but also for the risks of overstepping patriarchal norms, given its enormous scope. This cinematic configuration reproduces the hegemonic ideology, in which female ambition is constructed as tentative and unstable rather than entirely authoritative.

The figure of Chief Tui makes the patriarchal system that governs Moana's life more evident. He is a parent and political leader, the embodiment of institutional power. The film invariably depicts his choices as reasonable, protective, and morally defensible. Chief Tui's choice to keep Moana in the reef is not depicted as an act of repression but a rational decision to protect the community. However, Moana's desire to explore the sea is portrayed in emotional terms, as impetuous and irresponsible. This binary reproduces the traditional gender discourse in which male power is justified via reason and moral necessity, while female agency is equated with emotional instability. The patriarchal leadership is maintained in *Moana* by frequent emphasis on obedience, protection, and paternal guidance. Crucially, the disagreement is not depicted as a balanced argument; rather, the narration focuses on Chief Tui's perspective, tying his authority to the community's survival. In this framework, patriarchal control is read as necessary and kind, not constraining. As a result, patriarchal ideology is accepted through emotional framing, not direct compulsion.

The cinematography further naturalizes this patriarchal hierarchy through the uses of high-angle and low-angle shots in Image 2.

Image 2.

Moana's Father



The low-angle shot of Chief Tui emphasizes his authority by positioning viewers below him, visually aligning the audience with Moana's subordinate perspective. This viewpoint justifies power as it visibly amplifies the authority of the subject observed (Reid & Sanders, 2021, p. 120). Conversely, the high-angle shot of Moana de-empowers her, making

her visually weak and subordinate. The camera does not simply represent conflict neutrally but deliberately constructs a hierarchy in which masculine leadership is stable, reasonable, and authoritative, while female resistance is emotionally reactive and insecure. The cinematography, rather than serving as a mere aesthetic device, visually normalizes the patriarchal hierarchy as a societal order. Such visual methods discreetly influence viewers to consider masculine domination as normal and female resistance as unstable.

Another instance of the discipline of female liberty is when Moana fails to cross the reef at [00:20:29]. After confronting her father, she tries to sail on her own but quickly fails when the ocean overturns her boat and injures her. This scene plays as a corrective method where transgressive feminine action is met with punishment and humiliation. Her acknowledgement that “He was right” briefly reestablishes the patriarchal legitimacy and confirms the ideological tie between masculine authority and safety. This mechanism is observed in Moana’s momentary acceptance of her father’s authority following failure. The film does not treat her reluctance as a weakness, but rather as a product of internalized patriarchal values. The scene depicts how control is maintained in the patriarchal system, not just by direct constraint, but also by emotional internalization, where the dominant authority is seen as correct and necessary. The film links autonomy with failure and obedience with safety and therefore perpetuates hegemonic ideology in the guise of character development.

Although Moana’s subsequent change into a leader seems to defy patriarchal restraints, her story is nevertheless structured by masculine mediation. Maui, the demigod, serves as both her mentor, gatekeeper, and narrative threshold character, controlling Moana’s access to navigation, survival skills, and technical proficiency. He teaches her the skills of navigation, survival, and leadership, and tests her resolve again and again. Moana does succeed on her own, but her development operates within a structure of masculine teaching and validation. Maui becomes the vehicle through which Moana gets “qualified” for leadership. Her empowerment is consequently conditional, not entirely her own. Though progressive in featuring a female heroine, the film maintains dominant gender structures by making masculine authority the origin of knowledge, legitimacy, and capacity.

4.2 Maui: A Rebranded Masculine Authority

In the beginning, Maui represents Connell’s paradigm of hegemonic masculinity by his physical dominance, technical ability, and discursive authority (Connell, 2005, p. 77). His introduction stresses masculine superiority not just by physical strength and divine power but by conversational control. In his first meeting with Moana [00:37:11 – 00:37:51], Maui continuously interrupts her speech, steers the topic to his accomplishments, and calls himself “hero of men.” Such interruptions are ideologically important because they create discursive dominance, restricting Moana’s ability to articulate her own authority in the discussion. Hegemonic readings imply that the prevalence of conversation is representative of larger patriarchal institutions (Montoro, 2014, p. 349) where masculine voices are the interpretative and authorial positions. Maui’s language of self-mythologizing makes manhood a show, authorizing himself through performance, exaggeration, and recognition. Therefore, this scene does not simply describe Maui as arrogant; it reproduces hegemonic masculinity by constructing masculine identity as naturally dominating, conspicuous, and culturally praised.

Maui's physical portrayal vividly supports this dominant positioning. His large body, magical fishhook, and ability to influence his environment exemplify masculinity through physical strength and technical skill. Hegemonic masculinity often associates a man's legitimacy with muscular power, competence, and mastery over space (Hopkins & Giazitzoglu, 2025, p. 90). In *Moana*, Maui's body serves as a metaphor for patriarchal authority, with his physical abilities consistently outperforming Moana's. Even when Moana is the story's focus, masculine competence is emphasized through action scenes where Maui acts as a protector, strategist, and fighter. The film predominantly limits physical confrontations and tactical expertise to Maui during battles with the Kakamora and Te Ka, while Moana's role is portrayed more through emotional resilience and moral resolve. This separation reinforces traditional genre hierarchies linking masculinity with action and skill, and femininity with emotional endurance and ethical leadership. Thus, masculinity remains central to the story, even one led by a girl.

Maui's masculinity gradually shifts from displays of brute strength to emotional vulnerability and collaboration. This change should not be seen as the rejection of hegemonic masculinity but as its intentional evolution within neoliberal cultural discourse. Modern neoliberal masculinity no longer relies on aggressiveness and emotional suppression. Instead, it emphasizes emotional intelligence, vulnerability, and self-awareness (Lashayas et al., 2023, p. 49), while still projecting masculine power behind progressive facades. Masculinity thus becomes an adaptation rather than an avoidance of emotional expression. Maui's development reflects this shift, as his authority is balanced by empathy and cooperation without losing strength. The storyline rebrands masculinity into a more emotionally accessible form that aligns with contemporary ideals of inclusive and emotionally intelligent masculine leadership.

This intentional adaptation is especially clear in Maui's confession about being abandoned by his human parents [01:08:88]. This scene seems to undermine his earlier hypermasculine image by showing emotional vulnerability and childhood rejection. However, conceptually, this revelation doesn't reject hegemonic masculinity; rather, it revises its emotional aspect. His vulnerability creates empathy and boosts his credibility without undermining his authority, technical skills, or heroic status. Neoliberal masculinity suggests that modern media often turn vulnerability into a way to enhance masculine appeal, as emotional honesty is now seen as a sign of authenticity, psychological depth, and moral complexity, not weakness (Radzi et al., 2021, p. 170). Maui exemplifies this process: his confession humanizes him while maintaining his roles as protector, mentor, and hero. Vulnerability, therefore, is a deliberate strategy that allows patriarchal masculinity to remain culturally dominant while seeming more emotionally progressive. The film doesn't dismantle masculine power but reconfigures it into something softer and more emotionally engaging.

Maui's exploration of emotional intelligence takes place within and against the framework of neoliberal masculinity. Throughout the story, he becomes increasingly compliant, sympathetic, and caring toward Moana. However, these features do not remove hierarchy; they mask it in the language of participation and support. Neoliberal culture often transforms structural inequalities into personalized, emotionally charged forms that seem egalitarian but still uphold existing power relations (Laruffa, 2024, p. 591). Maui's emotional sensitivity typifies this process, as his supportive actions reinforce his role as the emotionally mature masculine figure who mentors and stabilizes the heroine. His encouraging role made him the source of emotional validation and motivational authority. Consequently, emotional

intelligence acts as a tool of hegemonic masculinity, allowing adaptation to societal progress while retaining structural dominance. The film depicts Maui as emotionally engaged, yet his emotional skills reinforce, rather than challenge, his authority.

This dynamic is especially apparent in Maui's mentorship of Moana. While their relationship seems to be collaborative, it remains fundamentally hierarchical, with Maui controlling key knowledge like navigation, survival tactics, and strategic thinking. The mentor role presents Maui as the gatekeeper of legitimacy, while Moana's leadership development is viewed through a masculine perspective. In film, female subjectivity is often shaped by male-centered narratives that limit women's agency (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 15). Moana exemplifies this, as Maui consistently assesses her readiness, imparts technical skills, and judges whether she is prepared to proceed. Mentorship doesn't equate to equality – it reflects a form of dominance. Authority shifts from direct orders or coercion to offering advice, training, and emotional support. While this makes masculine control appear collaborative and kind, it still upholds unequal power relations.

The ideological significance of mentorship is most evident in the intense scene with Te Ka [01:25:27 – 01:28:05]. Moana does return Te Fiti's heart in the end, but Maui acts as her defender and sacrificial warrior, taking the physical danger away from her. His words, "I got your back, Chosen One. Go save the world" sound encouraging, yet at the same time, it continues masculine authorization of female agency. Masculine endorsement and protection continue to be a narrative validation of Moana's leadership. The scene also maintains traditional gender divides, associating masculine heroism with conflict, sacrifice, and strategic defense, and feminine heroism with restoration, healing, and reconciliation. Even within a progressive story of female emancipation, physical confrontation and tactical leadership are still left to the male character. Thus, mentorship and emotional support work as methods for modernizing, not dismantling, hegemonic masculinity.

4.3 Cooperative Hegemonic Masculinity: A Conceptual Adaptation

Moana, being a modern animated picture, does not utilize overt masculine domination. Masculine authority is being reconstructed instead on cooperation, emotional intelligence, mentorship and supportive leadership. This form of cooperative hegemonic masculinity therefore describes a form of hegemonic masculinity that sustains the centrality of masculinity not through overt coercion, but through emotionally adaptive and collaborative practices that appear egalitarian while perpetuating the patriarchal hierarchy underneath.

The idea is closely related to Connell's theory but extends it by applying hegemonic masculinity to the cultural landscape of neoliberalism. Connell's focus is mainly on explicit forms of masculine dominance, such as violence, authority, and control. In contrast, neoliberal media culture gradually reinterprets masculinity through emotional openness, empathy, and relational cooperation, without fundamentally dismantling patriarchal power. Neoliberal discourse often shifts structural inequalities to individual, emotionally intelligent, and seemingly progressive positions that still sustain existing hierarchies (Smith, 2012). Building on this, the concept of cooperative hegemonic masculinity describes how masculine power adapts to feminist and postfeminist demands. Cooperative hegemonic masculinity strategically supports and mentors women instead of overtly restricting female agency, while still positioning men as sources of legitimacy, competence, and guidance. The

theoretical goal of this idea is to understand how patriarchy persists not despite but through progressive discourse.

Throughout *Moana*, Maui is an example of this adaptive kind of hegemonic masculinity. He strongly fits Connell's classic hegemonic model through physical domination, verbal authority, violence and technical expertise at first. His many interruptions of Moana's speech [00:37:11 – 00:37:51], his insistence that Moana serve as bait [00:59:28], and his emotional outburst when his fishhook is damaged [01:15:25] all reiterate his entitlement to authority, competence, and control. These moments are a mirror of what Connell calls the culturally exalted masculine ideal, where leadership and legitimacy are linked to male domination (Connell, 2005, p. 23). But the narrative progressively steers Maui away from outright tyranny toward emotional cooperation and sympathetic guidance. This transition does not demolish hegemonic masculinity; it renews and hides it. Maui's authority is less confrontational, but structurally crucial to the plot.

The most notable novelty in cooperative hegemonic masculinity is in the interplay between mentorship and power. Masculine authority in patriarchal stories is usually exercised as direct command and control (Connell, 2005, p. 23). In *Moana*, however, authority is reconstituted through mentorship, emotional affirmation and cooperative guiding. Maui teaches Moana navigation, sailing and survival skills and sets himself up as the gatekeeper of technical ability and legitimacy. This is evident in *Moana* since Moana's empowerment is always mediated through masculine direction. Even when Maui appears to be supportive and non-controlling, he remains the expert, instructor and validator. Mentorship is thus ideologically a rebranding of dominance; power does not work by force but through instruction that appears benevolent and helpful. The hierarchy is subtle, but still present.

The emotional fragility of Maui is more evidence of the adaptive quality of cooperative hegemonic masculinity. His admission that he was abandoned by his parents seems to run counter to the hypermasculinity by revealing emotional weakness and trauma. But in the end, this weakness serves to reinforce, rather than diminish, his influence. Contemporary media often humanize masculine heroes by focusing on their emotional wounds, making patriarchal masculinity more psychologically complicated and emotionally accessible without losing heroic status (Kac-Vergne, 2018, p. 162). Maui's openness to emotional weakness fosters the audience's sympathy and emotional connection without compromising his narrative force, technical competency of heroic stature. Vulnerability is thus a deliberate adaptation that allows hegemonic masculinity to remain culturally dominant within current ideals of emotional openness. Authority of masculinity is maintained by seeming emotionally mature, not authoritarian.

This adaptation is strongly related to neoliberal masculinity, where emotional intelligence becomes a vehicle of masculine legitimacy. Maui's display of empathy, cooperation, and emotional support, while concealing his structural prominence in the story, gives the image of egalitarian masculinity. This is a form of hybrid masculinity, as described by Bridges and Pascoe (2014, p.147), where dominant male traits are selectively combined with softer or marginalized qualities to gain cultural acceptance while preserving structural dominance. An example of this hybridization is Maui, whose power is not diminished by emotional intelligence, but rather modernized. He becomes more cooperative, but still provides the competence, emotional stability, and strategic direction. It therefore functions conceptually as a neoliberal masculine method, hiding hierarchy behind empathy and

collaboration. Culturally, masculinity is becoming more flexible, yet patriarchal dominance is maintained.

Thus, the conceptual contribution of cooperative hegemonic masculinity is to account for the ways in which contemporary media texts support patriarchal institutions via progressive portrayal rather than blatant hostility to feminism. Unlike traditional hegemonic masculinity, cooperative hegemonic masculinity rests on emotional adaptation, collaborative leadership, and authority based on mentorship rather than evident domination. It sustains masculine centrality by looking supportive rather than oppressive. In *Moana*, female empowerment is promoted but nevertheless mediated by masculine validation, education, and emotional guidance. The film then shows how neoliberal culture converts patriarchy into softer, more culturally acceptable forms without destroying its structural basis. Cooperative hegemonic masculinity offers a paradigm for the analysis of this change by highlighting how emotional intelligence, vulnerability, and cooperation can serve not as alternatives to hegemonic masculinity, but as its modern methods of survival and adaptation.

5. Conclusion

Produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios and released by Walt Disney Pictures, *Moana* appears to be promoting female empowerment and cultural affirmation through the representation of an independent female protagonist. However, the film is also a complex neoliberal cultural construct reconfigures rather than challenges hegemonic masculinity. Its focus on individual agency, resilience, and self-discovery reflects neoliberal views that frames empowerment as a personal path of self-improvement rather than a focus on changing power structures.

Moana's growth both a feminist victory and a post-feminist negotiation of gender roles. Post-feminism often uses feminist terminology—such as confidence, leadership, and independence—while subtly reinforcing traditional hierarchies. Although Moana becomes a leader and restores ecological balance, her empowerment is rooted on a story that validates male mentorship as an important part of growth. Maui's transformation from an authoritarian demigod to an emotionally-available partner illustrates how hegemonic masculinity shows flexibility: authority shifts from explicit dominance to guidance, vulnerability, and collaboration. Masculine power is not annihilated, but renewed.

In this way, *Moana* exemplifies what scholars call neoliberal feminism—a discourse that praises female potential but maintains patriarchal and hierarchical systems. The story resolves conflict through personal growth and reconciliation rather than criticizing the system. Moana's success highlights personal perseverance and self-confidence, implicitly linking empowerment to self-discipline and emotional awareness—traits vital to neoliberal identity. Masculine values are maintained, however, by indispensability, not dominance.

This study, therefore, posits that *Moana* is a sign of a modernized version of hegemonic masculinity conceptualized as cooperative hegemonic masculinity, a neoliberal form of masculine authority that maintains patriarchal centrality through emotional intelligence, collaboration, and supportive mentorship rather than direct aggression. It conceals hierarchy behind narratives of partnership, empathy, and empowerment, allowing masculine dominance to appear progressive and emotionally evolved. The film's ideological

complexity lies in this contradiction. It promotes female leadership while simultaneously structuring that leadership through masculine mediation and validation.

As one of Disney's globally circulated cultural products, *Moana* carries broader implications for media pedagogy and cultural discourse. Since Disney films function as influential pedagogical texts consumed by global audiences, their representations of gender contribute significantly to how leadership, authority, and empowerment are culturally understood and normalized. The film's seemingly progressive portrayal of gender equality may shape audiences to perceive emotionally adaptive patriarchal authority as inherently egalitarian. This highlights the importance of critically examining not only overt sexism, but also subtler neoliberal forms through which gender hierarchy is reproduced in contemporary popular culture.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF GENRE-BASED EFL WRITING: CLASSROOM REALITIES IN A VOCATIONAL MUSIC SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation of the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) in EFL writing instruction at a vocational music senior high school, focusing on the challenges teachers face in classroom practice. A qualitative case study design was employed, with data collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with an English teacher, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns related to instructional practices, scaffolding strategies, and contextual constraints. GBA was implemented through its core pedagogical stages from Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF) to Independent Construction of Text (ICOT) in alignment with its theoretical framework. However, implementation was constrained by several interrelated challenges, including limited instructional time, heterogeneous beginner-level proficiency, and restricted technological resources. In response, the teacher employed adaptive strategies such as flexible scaffolding, differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, bilingual explanations, and the use of artificial intelligence. Flexible scaffolding and bilingual explanations, in particular, enabled students to produce genre-appropriate texts despite their limited proficiency. The findings reveal a persistent gap between the idealized conceptualization of GBA and its actual realization in classroom practice. Effective GBA implementation requires pedagogical flexibility and contextual awareness, not rigid adherence to procedural implementation. This study enriches empirical GBA research by illustrating how teachers negotiate its principles under non-ideal classroom conditions.

Keywords: *genre-based approach; EFL writing instruction; scaffolding strategies; classroom challenges; adaptive strategies; vocational education.*

1. Introduction

The teaching of writing in EFL contexts has shifted significantly, moving away from isolated grammar instruction toward meaning-making, communicative purpose, and genre awareness. Modern writing pedagogy emphasizes students' ability to construct texts that are socially situated, purposeful, and rhetorically appropriate. In line with this shift, the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) has emerged as one of the most influential frameworks in EFL writing instruction, as it explicitly teaches the social function, rhetorical structure, and linguistic features of texts within real communicative contexts (Hyland, 2019). This makes GBA particularly relevant in Indonesia, where students' limited exposure to English outside the classroom often results in difficulty producing coherent and purposeful texts.

In practice, GBA implementation often falls short of its ideal framework. Although GBA theoretically provides a systematic scaffolding cycle from Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF), Modeling of the Text (MOT), Joint Construction of the Text (JCOT), to Independent Construction of the Text (ICOT), teachers frequently encounter difficulties in enacting all stages consistently. Challenges such as limited instructional time, heterogeneous student abilities, large class sizes, and insufficient understanding of scaffolding principles often cause genre-based learning to stall at the modeling stage, leaving JCOT and ICOT under-implemented (Nadjib & Triastuti, 2023).

Despite a growing body of GBA research, a critical gap remains. Most existing studies focus on learning outcomes or examine isolated GBA stages, without providing a comprehensive picture of how all four stages are enacted in real classroom conditions. Even fewer studies examine how teachers adapt GBA implementation in non-mainstream school contexts, such as vocational schools with specific subject concentrations, where students' language needs and classroom constraints may differ considerably from general secondary settings. Furthermore, research that explores teachers' adaptive strategies in heterogeneous EFL classrooms particularly at secondary level remains limited (Fatimah et al., 2024).

To address this gap, this study investigates how a teacher implements GBA in English writing instruction at a vocational music senior high school. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How are the stages of BKOF, MOT, JCOT, and ICOT implemented in EFL writing classes? (2) What challenges do teachers face in each stage of GBA implementation? (3) What strategies do teachers employ to address these challenges in heterogeneous classroom conditions?

The focus on a vocational music school is intentional, as this context represents a non-mainstream EFL setting that has received minimal attention in genre-based writing research. This study contributes by examining teachers' strategies for implementing GBA under real classroom constraints, bridging the gap between theory and practice. The findings are expected to offer practical implications for EFL teachers designing genre-based writing instruction in similarly constrained contexts, as well as inform professional development efforts aligned with text-based learning policies in Indonesia's Independent Curriculum.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Genre-Based Approach in EFL Writing Instruction

The Genre-Based Approach (GBA) is a pedagogical framework that teaches writing by making explicit the social functions, rhetorical structures, and linguistic features of texts within real communicative contexts. Rooted in systemic functional linguistics, GBA positions writing not as an individual cognitive act but as a socially situated practice in which genre knowledge enables learners to participate effectively in academic and professional discourse communities (Hyland, 2019). In the EFL context, GBA is particularly significant because it provides learners with a structured pathway to understanding how texts are organized and why, moving beyond surface-level grammar instruction toward purposeful text production (Nadjib & Triastuti, 2023).

The approach has been widely adopted in EFL writing classrooms across diverse educational levels, from secondary to tertiary, and across multiple genre types including recount, procedure, analytical exposition, and argumentative texts. Its effectiveness lies in its capacity to make genre knowledge visible and teachable through a cycle of guided and collaborative instruction before students are expected to write independently (Alhammad, 2025; Alwasilah, 2025). In the Indonesian EFL context specifically, GBA has been formally

integrated into the national curriculum through text-based learning, making it one of the most institutionally prominent writing pedagogies in secondary and vocational education (Suharyadi et al., 2021).

2.2 Stages of GBA: BKOF to ICOT

GBA is operationalized through a four-stage teaching and learning cycle designed to scaffold students' genre knowledge progressively. The first stage, Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF), activates and extends students' prior knowledge of the topic and context relevant to the target genre. At this stage, teachers engage students in discussions, media inputs, and vocabulary activities that establish the thematic and contextual foundation for subsequent text work (Rahman et al., 2025). BKOF is critical in EFL settings where students may lack both content knowledge and genre awareness, as it reduces cognitive load before text-level engagement begins.

The second stage, Modelling of the Text (MOT), involves explicit analysis of a model text representing the target genre. Students examine the text's social purpose, schematic structure, and key language features under teacher guidance (Hutabarat & Gunawan, 2021). This stage transforms implicit genre knowledge into explicit, teachable content, and is considered foundational to students' ability to recognize and reproduce genre conventions in their own writing.

The third stage, Joint Construction of the Text (JCOT), shifts the locus of production to collaborative writing, where students and teachers co-construct a text of the same genre. This stage functions as a transitional scaffold between teacher-led modeling and independent writing, enabling students to apply genre knowledge in a supported social context (Herman et al., 2020). The collaborative nature of JCOT aligns with Vygotskian principles of learning within the zone of proximal development, where peer interaction and teacher mediation facilitate competence development (Lantolf et al., 2023).

The fourth and final stage, Independent Construction of the Text (ICOT), requires students to produce a genre-appropriate text autonomously. ICOT serves as both a learning task and an evaluative indicator of how effectively the preceding scaffolding has been internalized. The progression from BKOF to ICOT represents a gradual release of responsibility, moving students from dependence on teacher and peer support toward independent genre production (Simanjuntak & Tambunan, 2025).

2.3 Scaffolding in GBA

Scaffolding is the conceptual and pedagogical core of GBA, referring to the temporary, adjustable support that teachers and peers provide to enable learners to perform tasks beyond their current independent capacity (Rodriguez & Protacio, 2025). In GBA, scaffolding is not incidental but structurally embedded, as each stage of the BKOF–ICOT cycle constitutes a distinct form of instructional support that is progressively withdrawn as learner competence develops. Hammond and Gibbons (2021) distinguish between macro-level scaffolding, which involves the design of the curriculum and task sequence, and micro-level scaffolding, which involves moment-by-moment instructional moves teachers make during classroom interaction. Both dimensions are essential to effective GBA implementation.

In EFL contexts, scaffolding in GBA takes multiple forms depending on learner needs. Linguistic scaffolding involves the use of simplified language, bilingual explanation, or metalinguistic support to help students access genre concepts. Social scaffolding is realized

through collaborative tasks at the JCOT stage, where peer interaction creates a dialogic space for knowledge co-construction. Technological scaffolding, increasingly relevant in contemporary classrooms, encompasses the use of digital tools, multimodal resources, and AI-assisted materials to support text comprehension and production (Fitria, 2023). The effectiveness of GBA scaffolding is therefore not reducible to adherence to the four-stage sequence but depends on teachers' capacity to calibrate support to learners' actual readiness across these multiple dimensions (Yawiloeng & Chairinkam, 2024).

2.4 Challenges in GBA Implementation

Despite its theoretical coherence, GBA implementation in EFL classrooms encounters persistent and multidimensional challenges. Pedagogically, the most frequently reported difficulty is time constraint: the four-stage cycle requires sustained instructional time that is often incompatible with curriculum schedules, leading to compression or omission of the JCOT and ICOT stages (Nadjib & Triastuti, 2023). This disrupts the scaffolding continuum that GBA depends upon and limits students' opportunities for supported practice before independent writing is required.

Linguistically, the heterogeneity of student proficiency levels poses a significant challenge, particularly in EFL contexts where learners span a wide range of language competence within a single classroom. Teachers must simultaneously address comprehension barriers at the BKOF and MOT stages while maintaining genre-level learning objectives, a tension that often results in reduced depth of genre instruction (Simanjuntak & Tambunan, 2025). In vocational school contexts specifically, where students may have limited prior English literacy experiences, this challenge is intensified by the mismatch between students' language resources and the linguistic demands of academic genres.

Institutionally, limited access to technological infrastructure constrains the richness of text modeling and multimodal scaffolding possible at the MOT stage (Suharyadi et al., 2021). The scarcity of contextually relevant model texts particularly in specialized institutional settings such as arts or music-based schools further compounds preparation challenges, as teachers must invest considerable effort in locating or producing texts that are both genre-appropriate and meaningful to students (Fatimah et al., 2024).

2.5 Strategies for Addressing GBA Challenges

In response to these challenges, EFL teachers employ a range of adaptive strategies to sustain genre-based instruction under non-ideal conditions. Bilingual or code-switching instruction is among the most commonly reported strategies in heterogeneous EFL classrooms, functioning as linguistic scaffolding that bridges the gap between students' existing language resources and the conceptual demands of genre learning (Rayo et al., 2024). Rather than representing a departure from GBA principles, the strategic use of students' first language supports comprehension of genre concepts at the BKOF and MOT stages without undermining genre learning objectives.

The integration of digital tools and AI-assisted material development has emerged as an increasingly prominent strategy, enabling teachers to produce contextually relevant model texts when conventional curriculum resources are insufficient (Fitria, 2023). Teachers who use AI tools for text generation retain pedagogical control over genre type, language complexity, and communicative purpose, effectively extending their material design capacity without compromising genre fidelity. Additionally, engagement-oriented activities including games, digital quizzes, and collaborative tasks are used to maintain student motivation and

focus, particularly in challenging learning conditions such as afternoon sessions or extended class periods (Yawiloeng & Chairinkam, 2024).

At the JCOT stage, flexible grouping strategies are employed to leverage peer teaching as a social scaffolding resource. By arranging groups that include students of varying proficiency levels, teachers create collaborative conditions in which more capable peers support developing learners, operationalizing the zone of proximal development within the GBA cycle (Lantolf et al., 2023; Herman et al., 2020). These adaptive strategies collectively reflect the understanding that effective GBA implementation requires not procedural fidelity but pedagogical responsiveness the ability to preserve the core principles of genre-based scaffolding while adapting their realization to the specific institutional, linguistic, and situational conditions of the classroom (Zulmeida & Basikin, 2025).

3. Research Method

3.1 Type of Research

This study employed a qualitative case study design to reveal the implementation of the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) in EFL writing. The case study design was considered appropriate because it enabled in-depth investigation of educational phenomena comprehensively within the boundaries of a specific real-world context, namely an English class at a vocational music senior high school in Yogyakarta (Yin, 2022; Creswell, 2023).

3.2 Research Location

This study was conducted at a high school located in the city of Yogyakarta. The school was selected through purposive sampling because it has integrated the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) into its English language curriculum as part of text-based learning practices aligned with the requirements of the Merdeka curriculum. Institutionally, this school has distinctive characteristics as an arts and music-based high school, so its students' learning context is closely tied to the world of performing arts.

This context makes the research site not only relevant as a setting for studying the GBA in general but also provides a unique backdrop for examining how teachers adapt in selecting contextual and meaningful model texts for students. The selection of this specific and contextual location also supports the depth of the case study analysis, as recommended in qualitative research that emphasizes the importance of alignment between the research setting and the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2023).

3.3 Research Subject

The subject of this study is an English teacher who teaches classes at the school serving as the research site. The subject was selected using purposive sampling, which involves intentionally selecting informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. One English teacher with 15 years of GBA experience was purposely selected to provide rich data. The informant had extensive experience teaching EFL writing using Genre-Based Approach (GBA) in heterogeneous classrooms. As explained by Creswell (2023), the purposive sampling technique is highly effective in qualitative research when the researcher intends to obtain detailed and meaningful information from individuals who have direct experience with the phenomenon under study.

3.4 Research Instruments and Data Collection

As is characteristic of qualitative inquiry, the primary instrument in this study is the researcher, who was directly responsible for data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Three supporting instruments were employed to structure this process: (1) a structured observation sheet with stage-by-stage indicators spanning the full GBA cycle (BKOF through ICOT); (2) a semi-structured interview guide probing teachers' instructional reasoning, challenges, and adaptive strategies; and (3) a document analysis protocol covering lesson plans (RPP), model texts, and student writing samples. Together, these instruments formed a triangulated data collection framework, with each source cross-checking and reinforcing the others.

Data were gathered across four writing instruction sessions using three complementary techniques. Classroom observation provided direct, first-hand evidence of how each GBA stage was enacted in practice independent of teachers' self-reports and guided by the structured observation sheet to maintain systematic focus (Putri, 2025). Following each session, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to surface the reasoning behind instructional decisions and the strategies teachers used to navigate difficulties; the semi-structured format preserved thematic coherence while allowing the researcher to pursue emerging threads (Astuti et al., 2023). Document analysis was then used to verify and deepen these findings: by comparing designed lesson plans, their classroom enactment, and the writing produced by students, the researcher could objectively assess the alignment or divergence between planning and practice, strengthening the overall credibility of the findings.

3.5 Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity of the data, this study employed two primary strategies: source triangulation and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing and cross-referencing data from classroom observations, interview transcripts, and learning documents. Drawing on three distinct sources ensured the coherence, consistency, and robustness of the findings, serving as an internal validation mechanism that strengthens overall confidence in the data (Fatimah et al., 2024). Member checking was carried out by presenting a summary of the findings to the participating teachers for confirmation. Where discrepancies arose between the researcher's interpretations and the teachers' actual experiences, corrections were made prior to finalization, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in classroom realities.

In addition, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the data collection and analysis process, systematically documenting assumptions, interpretive decisions, and emerging analytical responses. This practice enabled the researcher to monitor and minimize the influence of personal bias, which is widely regarded in qualitative inquiry as essential to credible and transparent analysis.

Although this case study focused on a single school and does not yield statistical generalization, the findings carry transferability value. Educators and researchers working in comparable contexts, such as vocational high schools implementing genre-based approaches or heterogeneous EFL classrooms with varied student literacy backgrounds, may draw on these findings as a conceptual and pedagogical reference. Transferability in qualitative research is not determined by the researcher but assessed by the reader, based on the contextual description provided throughout this study.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected from observations, interviews, and documents were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which allows the researcher to systematically identify, organize, and interpret recurring patterns across multiple data sources. The analysis followed a sequential process across three stages. First, during the data familiarization stage, the researcher carefully read all interview transcripts, field observation notes, and collected documents to gain an initial holistic understanding of the data. Second, open coding was applied to mark units of meaning directly relevant to the research questions. Third, the emerging codes were grouped into broader categories and subsequently organized into main themes reflecting significant patterns in the data.

To illustrate this process, codes that frequently appeared across observation notes and interview transcripts such as "limited lesson time," "uneven student proficiency," and "difficulty differentiating instruction" were grouped into the category of contextual constraints, which was subsequently consolidated into the broader theme of contextual challenges in GBA implementation. Similarly, codes such as "use of visual scaffolds," "peer discussion tasks," and "simplified model texts" were grouped under scaffolding strategies, reflecting how teachers adapted instruction in response to student needs. This grouping process was conducted iteratively, with codes and categories reviewed and refined until the themes adequately represented the full range of the data.

Thematic analysis was considered appropriate for this study because it enables clear and systematic conclusions to be drawn from complex empirical evidence, and is widely employed in language teaching research to explore teachers' instructional practices in depth (Yawiloeng & Chairinkam, 2024).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Implementation of GBA

The findings show that the teacher implemented all four stages of the Genre-Based Approach systematically: Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF), Modelling of the Text (MOT), Joint Construction of the Text (JCOT), and Independent Construction of the Text (ICOT). The teacher confirmed that classroom practice aligned with established GBA procedures: *"Ada empat langkah... seperti GBA yang seharusnya dilakukan, tidak ada yang berbeda"* ("There are four steps... just as GBA should be carried out, nothing is different"). This indicates an adequate theoretical understanding of the framework and its sequential application in practice.

At the BKOF stage, the teacher interpreted the phase not as introducing entirely new knowledge, but as eliciting and bridging students' prior knowledge: *"Lebih ke menjembatani, bridging, atau eliciting apa yang siswa sudah peroleh dari pembelajaran sebelumnya"* ("More about bridging or eliciting what students have already obtained from previous learning"). This positions students as active participants whose existing knowledge serves as the foundation for genre learning, consistent with GBA's emphasis on contextual knowledge before text production (Hyland, 2019).

At the JCOT stage, group work was used as a space for social scaffolding and peer teaching. Groups were arranged flexibly based on class dynamics, allowing more capable students to support those still developing: *"Yang tadinya tidak bisa, diharapkan menjadi bisa peer-teaching sama temennya sendiri"* ("Those who couldn't before are expected to learn through peer teaching with their friends"). ICOT was then positioned as an evaluative stage,

serving as an indicator of how effectively scaffolding had been internalized throughout the prior stages. Assessment across all stages emphasized formative feedback through questioning, discussion, and group tasks rather than summative evaluation alone.

4.1.2 Challenges of GBA

The challenges identified in this study can be grouped into three thematic categories: pedagogical, linguistic, and infrastructural.

Pedagogical challenges included difficulties in preparing contextually relevant texts and managing time allocation. Because the school is arts-based, finding authentic English texts related to music and popular culture proved difficult: *"Cari teks yang sesuai dengan minat itu di Google juga tidak banyak"* ("Finding texts that match students' interests on Google is also not easy"). Time constraints further disrupted the sequential integrity of GBA stages, with planned allocations frequently misaligned with actual learning pace: *"Ternyata belum selesai... bisa meleset dari time allocation yang sudah dirancang"* ("It turned out to be unfinished... it could deviate from the designed time allocation"). Maintaining student focus during afternoon sessions was identified as the most persistent pedagogical difficulty: *"Mempertahankan fokus dan konsentrasi mereka sepanjang pelajaran itu problem nomor satu"* ("Maintaining their focus and concentration throughout the lesson is the most persistent challenge").

Linguistic challenges centered on students' low English proficiency, with the majority identified as still at the beginner level. This directly affected instructional decisions around language use, particularly at the BKOF and MOT stages, where comprehension of genre concepts is foundational (Emilia & Hamied, 2015).

Infrastructural challenges included limited access to technology such as functioning projectors and stable internet connections: *"LCD-nya rusak... wifi-nya juga terbatas... guru sangat terbatas ketika memaksimalkan IT"* ("The LCD was broken... the wifi was also limited... teachers are very limited in maximizing IT"). These constraints restricted the use of multimodal resources that could otherwise enrich the modeling and scaffolding stages of GBA.

4.1.3 Strategies of GBA

In response to the identified challenges, the teacher applied four adaptive *strategies*, each directly linked to the challenge it addressed.

First, bilingual scaffolding was employed as the primary linguistic strategy. Given students' beginner-level proficiency, instruction was delivered predominantly in Indonesian (approximately 80%), with English used selectively: *"Yang penting anak-anak paham"* ("What matters is that the students understand"). This mitigated comprehension barriers at the BKOF and MOT stages without abandoning genre learning objectives.

Second, AI-assisted *text development* was used to overcome the scarcity of contextually relevant model texts. The teacher used AI tools to generate texts aligned with students' musical interests, while retaining full pedagogical control over genre type, language level, and communicative purpose: *"Tugas kita adalah menulis prompt yang benar supaya mendapatkan output yang kita inginkan"* ("Our task is to write the right prompt to get the output we want"). This strategy directly addressed both the text preparation challenge and infrastructure limitations.

Third, engagement-oriented activities such as games, digital quizzes, and Canva-based tasks were used to sustain student attention during afternoon sessions. Warm-up

activities were designed to bridge naturally into the core material: "*Pakai warming up sebisa mungkin... yang memang bisa bridging ke materinya*" ("Using warm-up as much as possible... one that can bridge to the material"). This strategy mitigated the focus and stamina challenges identified in the afternoon learning context.

Fourth, optimized group work at JCOT was used to leverage peer teaching as a social scaffolding mechanism. Flexible grouping arrangements enabled stronger students to support peers, facilitating the transition toward independent text construction at the ICOT stage.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Challenges in Implementing GBA

The challenges identified in this study reflect a fundamental tension between GBA's theoretical demand for sequential scaffolding and the complex realities of EFL classrooms in arts-based institutional contexts. GBA requires continuous, staged scaffolding to move students from dependence toward independent text production (Rahman et al., 2025). When time constraints compress or disrupt these stages, the mediating function of the teacher central to sociocultural learning theory is weakened, limiting students' opportunity to internalize genre knowledge before reaching ICOT (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Lantolf et al., 2023).

The linguistic challenge is particularly significant. Students operating below elementary proficiency face difficulty engaging with text structure and communicative purpose at the depth GBA requires, a pattern consistent with findings from EFL contexts in Southeast Asia (Simanjuntak & Tambunan, 2025; Emilia & Hamied, 2015). In this study, the arts-based school context added a further layer of complexity: the need for musically relevant texts created preparation demands that standard curriculum resources could not meet. These findings extend prior research by situating GBA challenges not only in generic EFL difficulties but in institution-specific contextual factors that shape what effective scaffolding can look like in practice (Yuniar, 2023).

Infrastructural limitations further constrained the MOT stage, where multimodal model texts are particularly valuable for genre comprehension. The absence of functioning projection equipment and reliable internet reduced the richness of modeling opportunities available to the teacher, reinforcing the point that GBA implementation is shaped not only by pedagogical decisions but by the material conditions of the learning environment (Hyland, 2019).

4.2.2 Strategies Used to Overcome Challenges

The adaptive strategies employed in this study can be theoretically understood as multi-layered scaffolding: linguistic, social, and technological. This conception extends the conventional view of GBA scaffolding, which typically focuses on the staged sequence of activities, to include the modality and medium through which scaffolding is delivered (Hammond & Gibbons, 2021).

Bilingual instruction functioned as linguistic scaffolding, enabling students to access genre concepts without being blocked by limited target language proficiency. This aligns with translanguaging research, which recognizes the strategic use of students' full linguistic repertoire as a pedagogical resource rather than a deficit (Canagarajah, 2022). The deliberate prioritization of comprehension over target language adherence reflects a

pragmatic pedagogical stance consistent with learner-centered GBA principles (Kolang et al., 2025).

The integration of AI for text development represents a notable contribution of this study to the GBA literature, where technology-mediated material development has received limited attention. Rather than replacing teacher agency, AI was used as a production tool under the teacher's genre-informed direction preserving the rhetorical and pedagogical integrity of model texts while overcoming resource constraints (Fitria, 2023). This finding suggests that AI-assisted scaffolding can serve as a viable response to the text scarcity challenge common in EFL contexts with specialized institutional profiles.

Group-based peer teaching at JCOT reinforced the social scaffolding dimension of GBA. Interaction among students at different proficiency levels created a collaborative zone of proximal development, enabling knowledge to be co-constructed before students moved to independent writing (Lantolf et al., 2023). The teacher's flexible grouping approach further demonstrates that JCOT is most effective when its social arrangements are responsive to real classroom dynamics rather than prescribed (Herman et al., 2020).

4.2.3 Classroom Realities Influencing Instruction

The findings confirm that GBA cannot be implemented as a fixed procedural sequence in complex EFL classrooms. The teacher's adaptive practices bilingual instruction, AI-assisted text preparation, engagement strategies, and flexible grouping demonstrate that effective GBA implementation depends on the teacher's ability to mediate the approach in response to institutional, linguistic, and situational constraints (Angraini & Rozimela., 2020; Rayo et al., 2024). This study contributes new empirical evidence that technological scaffolding through AI and bilingual scaffolding through code-switching are viable and theoretically grounded adaptive strategies within the GBA framework, particularly in arts-based secondary school contexts.

4.3 Implications of the Findings

Theoretically, this study demonstrates that scaffolding in GBA operates across three interdependent dimensions: linguistic (bilingual instruction), social (peer teaching at JCOT), and technological (AI-assisted text development). Effective GBA implementation requires teachers to calibrate the form and intensity of scaffolding to students' actual readiness, rather than adhering rigidly to procedural stages (Hammond & Gibbons, 2021).

Practically, EFL teachers need institutional space and support to implement GBA flexibly. This includes permission to use AI for model text development, recognition of bilingual strategies as legitimate pedagogical tools, and differentiated writing tasks that accommodate varied student proficiency levels. Institutional investment in learning infrastructure, particularly access to technology, is equally necessary to enable the full multimodal potential of the MOT stage.

4.4 Study Limitations

This study is intentionally bounded to one school and one teacher, which limits statistical generalizability. However, this focus enables contextual depth and transferability: the findings offer concrete, empirically grounded insights applicable to EFL practitioners in comparable settings, including arts-based schools and heterogeneous classrooms with beginner-level learners (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The absence of quantitative writing outcome

measures is acknowledged; future studies would benefit from integrating pre- and post-assessments to complement the process-focused findings reported here.

4.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies should examine AI integration within GBA across multiple school contexts to assess its scalability and impact on writing quality. Longitudinal research measuring the long-term effects of bilingual scaffolding on EFL writing proficiency development would also address a significant gap in the current literature. Comparative studies involving vocational and arts-based schools would further illuminate how institutional context shapes GBA implementation and the forms of scaffolding teachers deploy in practice.

5. Conclusion

This study addressed a gap in the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) literature by examining its implementation in an arts-based vocational school with predominantly beginner-level EFL learners, a context that has received limited empirical attention. The findings demonstrate that GBA remains an effective pedagogical framework for developing genre awareness, textual organization, and communicative competence when its principles are implemented flexibly and responsively rather than as a rigid procedural sequence. In this setting, GBA enabled learners to connect genre knowledge with their artistic and academic literacy needs, indicating its continued relevance even under challenging instructional conditions.

The study contributes to the field in two important ways. First, it provides empirical evidence that scaffolding within GBA extends beyond sequential classroom stages and operates across interconnected linguistic, social, and technological dimensions. Second, it shows that AI-assisted text development and bilingual instruction can function as legitimate adaptive strategies that support, rather than undermine, the core objectives of genre-based pedagogy when learners face proficiency and resource constraints.

The findings further reveal that the effectiveness of GBA is strongly influenced by contextual factors, including student proficiency levels, limited instructional time, and the availability of suitable learning materials. These conditions often create a gap between the idealized model of GBA and its classroom enactment. In response, teachers' professional judgment in selecting texts, determining language use, and organizing collaborative activities becomes critical for maintaining meaningful scaffolding throughout the teaching-learning cycle.

Beyond the classroom, the study highlights important implications for curriculum developers, teacher educators, and educational institutions. GBA professional development programs should emphasize contextual adaptability alongside pedagogical fidelity, while schools should provide adequate technological resources, professional support, and instructional autonomy to enable teachers to tailor genre-based instruction to local learning needs. Such considerations are particularly relevant in vocational, arts-based, and other specialized EFL contexts.

Although this study is limited to a single school and one teacher, its rich contextual description offers transferable insights for practitioners working with beginner-level learners, heterogeneous classrooms, and specialized educational settings. Future research should investigate the implementation of AI-supported and bilingual scaffolding practices across diverse educational contexts and employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs to

examine their long-term effects on writing development and genre mastery. Comparative studies involving different vocational and arts-based institutions would further enhance understanding of how contextual factors shape GBA implementation and pedagogical adaptation in practice.

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SOCIOPRAGMATIC STRATEGIES FOR SUNDANESE LANGUAGE PRESERVATION IN YOUTUBE VIDEOS FEATURING DEDI MULYADI

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Abstract

The declining use of regional languages in Indonesia necessitates the search for innovative preservation strategies in the digital era. Unlike previous studies that have focused primarily on political communication and media framing, this study highlights the sociopragmatic dimensions of regional language preservation through digital communication. This study analyzes sociopragmatic communication strategies within Kang Dedi Mulyadi's YouTube content, focusing on the use of Sundanese and speech elements that enhance the vitality of regional languages. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data from three of Kang Dedi Mulyadi's YouTube videos were transcribed and coded into relational, educational, and cultural/identity categories, and subsequently analyzed through thematic interpretation. This study substantiates the notion that the sociopragmatic practices of public figures on digital platforms can serve as a potential model for revitalizing regional languages. The findings extend sociopragmatic perspectives by demonstrating how digital discourse contributes to regional language revitalization through the integration of cultural identity, communicative practices, and audience engagement.

Keywords: *digital communication; language vitality; sociopragmatic strategies; Sundanese language preservation; YouTube discourse*

1. Introduction

Regional languages serve as a primary foundation for the cultural identity of the Indonesian nation. Beyond being a medium for daily communication, regional languages also function as a vessel for the transmission of local knowledge, social norms, and cultural values across generations (Putri et al., 2025; Wagianti et al., 2022). However, the wave of globalization and advancements in communication technology have shifted language usage patterns in society. Languages with broader reach are now dominating, consequently marginalizing regional languages in various spheres of life, including the digital environment (Ori & Susianti, 2023; Ridwan et al., 2026).

The decline in the use of regional languages is most pronounced among the younger generation. Data from *Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS)* reveals that Generation Z and Generation Alpha only use regional languages within the family environment at rates of 61–62 percent. This situation indicates a weakening of language transmission processes and necessitates

preservation approaches that are more aligned with the dynamics of the digital era (Aziz, 2023).

In this context, digital media and public figures play a crucial role. Digital platforms, while accelerating the marginalization of regional languages, simultaneously open broader opportunities for revitalization if utilized creatively. Public figures such as Kang Dedi Mulyadi (KDM), who consistently incorporates Sundanese in his YouTube content, exemplify how a public figure can shape public attitudes towards the preservation of regional languages (Natada & Muslim, 2025; Susanti & Gunawan, 2025).

Previous research has extensively examined the decline in regional language use and various revitalization efforts. However, the majority of studies remain oriented towards political dimensions, personal branding, or critical discourse analysis (Adam & Setiadarma, 2026; Alfikri, 2024; Barokah et al., 2023). In-depth studies on the sociopragmatic strategies of public figures in digital media are still very limited. This research aims to fill this gap by analyzing how relational, educational, and cultural/identity strategies in KDM utterances contribute to the vitality of the Sundanese language in the digital space. Specifically, this study addresses three main questions: (1) How are sociopragmatic communication strategies realized in KDM YouTube content? (2) How does the use of Sundanese contribute to the vitality of regional languages? and (3) What linguistic features support language preservation in the digital environment? This study further argues that digital spaces function not only as platforms for discourse but also as sites for regional language preservation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Role of Regional Languages in Cultural Identity and Social Communication

Regional languages do more than help people communicate in daily life; they also represent collective identity, local knowledge, social norms, and cultural values (Hadiwijaya et al., 2022). From a sociolinguistic perspective, especially in Hymes' (1972) ethnography of communication, language is closely linked to its social and cultural context (Hashmi, 2025). It operates as a way to pass culture and shape identity (Blommaert, 2019). While earlier research typically describes this symbolic role in a fixed way, it rarely explores how regional languages adapt and remain resilient when national and global languages are dominant, particularly among young people (Hadiwijaya et al., 2022). There is a need for more research on how regional languages remain vital in today's fast-changing communication landscape, especially with the new challenges brought by the digital era that have not been fully explored in the literature (Ridwan et al., 2026). This study attempts to address this gap by examining sociopragmatic strategies to help preserve regional languages.

2.2 The Foundation of Sociopragmatic Theory in Digital Communication

Sociopragmatic offers an essential analytical lens for understanding how social context influences the meaning and function of language in interactions, based on Hymes' (1972) work on communicative competence and the ethnography of communication (Moreno, 2024). The concepts of face-work and presentation of self-proposed by Goffman (1959) are highly relevant for analyzing how people manage their self-image in social interactions, including online (Meng & Nansen, 2022). The politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech's (1983) politeness maxims complement this framework by explaining the linguistic strategies used to preserve social harmony and the

face of the interlocutor (Djumamuratovna, 2025). In the context of digital communication, which is often asynchronous and involves a heterogeneous audience, understanding these concepts becomes increasingly crucial. Sociopragmatic strategies such as phatic communication, speech acts and identity construction become important tools for retaining the relevance of regional languages within the competitive digital space (Susanti & Gunawan, 2025; Yusuf, 2024). This analysis will examine these concepts, linking them with communication practices in the digital environment and their relationship with the preservation of regional languages.

2.3 The Role of Public Figures and Digital Media in the Dynamics of Regional Languages

Digital media has become a space that offers both opportunities and challenges for keeping regional languages alive. Services like YouTube help spread regional language content to more people, but they also make it easier for national and global languages to dominate (Hadiwijaya et al., 2022). Public figures in this setting act as cultural influencers who can legitimize and promote the use of regional languages (Adam & Setiadarma, 2026; Alfikri, 2024). While many studies have looked at how public figures use political communication and personal branding (Barokah et al., 2023; Rosadi et al., 2022), there is still little research that combines sociopragmatic analysis with efforts to preserve regional languages through public figures in digital media. This gap is the basis for this study, which will examine the communication practices of KDM as a case study. The research intends to show how relational, educational and cultural strategies in digital content can help keep regional languages strong, following Fairclough's (2001) view that media discourse does not only reflect, but also forms social reality (Bajri & Alqurayqiri, 2022).

2.4 The Vitality of Regional Languages and Conservation Strategies in a Global Context

The decline and extinction of languages are global phenomena that threaten the world's linguistic diversity. While Fishman (1991) established a theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding language shift and revitalization strategies, recent scholarship emphasizes the complexities of language revitalization in the 21st century, noting the impact of globalization and the need for new transdisciplinary frameworks (Comajoan-Colomé & Coronel--Molina, 2020). Furthermore, the challenges of the 21st century, such as the penetration of digital technology, present new dimensions that require further analysis. In this context, sociopragmatic provides insights into how groups utilize language in interactions to assert identity and maintain language, even under external pressure. Contemporary studies on self-presentation, grounded in Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, demonstrate how individuals actively manage their self-image and negotiate linguistic identities within fluid online environments (Merunková & Šlerka, 2019). Thus, the integration of sociopragmatic theory with modern language revitalization frameworks is crucial for understanding effective strategies to address the threat of regional language extinction. This perspective is aligned with Blommaert's (2019) critical and sociolinguistic views, which advocate for a reassessment of language-in-society within the online-offline nexus (Rampton, 2021). Although digital media are often perceived as new spaces for the revitalization of regional languages, several theoretical debates suggest that language preservation in digital environments is neither stable nor inherently sustainable. Some studies argue that the visibility of regional languages on digital platforms can broaden

audience reach and strengthen local cultural exposure. However, other studies indicate that the algorithmic logic of digital media tends to prioritize popularity, entertainment, and content commodification, potentially transforming the authenticity of regional languages into mere forms of cultural performance. In this context, the use of regional languages by public figures can be interpreted ambiguously: on the one hand, it contributes to language revitalization and the reinforcement of local identity, while on the other hand, it may lead to the commodification of culture for personal branding, digital popularity, and social media engagement. Furthermore, the dominance of global platforms such as YouTube creates another paradox. Although these platforms provide opportunities for the dissemination of local culture, they continue to operate within global communication structures that largely privilege dominant languages. Therefore, the preservation of regional languages in the digital era should not merely be understood as a process of linguistic revitalization, but also as a site of negotiation between cultural identity, algorithmic logic, the attention economy, and cultural representation within digital spaces.

3. Research Method

This research design uses a descriptive qualitative method with a sociopragmatic framework as its conceptual basis. The selection of this approach is considered critical due to its ability to promote a comprehensive investigation into the correlation between spoken discourse, the surrounding socio-cultural environment and the fundamental role of language within the spectrum of interactions on digital media (Abdullah et al., 2022; Rahardi, 2022).

This study uses publicly accessible digital content and does not involve personal participant data, using purposive sampling techniques. The main criteria for selecting these videos include the dominance of the Sundanese language, the presence of direct audience interaction, and the diversity of communication contexts they present, such as formal, communal, and religious settings. These three videos were deliberately chosen because they effectively present a rich spectrum of contexts, contribute a significant volume of linguistic data and showcase a variety of interaction strategies that are highly representative of sociopragmatic analysis.

Data collection activity was implemented using two main methods: visual recording (video documentation) and verbatim rewriting (transcription) of all verbal expressions in Sundanese complete with relevant contextual information. Over the course of this process, research ethics principles are strictly upheld, using only publicly available YouTube material and making sure that no personal identity information from participants is included. To ensure translation validity, Sundanese utterances were translated into English while preserving contextual and pragmatic meaning. The translations were cross-checked through peer discussion and supervisor consultation.

Data analysis in this study is carried out through three fundamental stages: identification, classification, and interpretation. At the identification stage, highly relevant utterances are sorted based on the concept of communicative competence articulated by Hymes (1972) and further discussed by Hashmi (2025). The identification process was conducted through open coding of all transcripts to identify utterances representing social functions, communication strategies, and the use of Sundanese language in digital contexts. Excerpts were selected based on several thematic criteria, including: (1) the intensity of Sundanese language use, (2) the presence of direct audience interaction, (3) relevance to relational, educational, and cultural identity strategies, and (4) the recurrence of

communication patterns across the dataset. Next, the classification stage categorizes these utterances into three groups of sociopragmatic strategies. The categories include: first, relational or closeness strategies; second, educational or didactic strategies, referring to speech act and politeness concepts; and third, cultural or identity strategies, referring to identity construction and the role of context in communication (Djumamuratovna, 2025). These strategies were operationalized using specific linguistic and contextual indicators. Relational strategies were identified through informal greetings, humor, and phatic communication; educational strategies through persuasive and value-oriented utterances; while cultural or identity strategies were recognized through the use of local vocabulary, cultural symbols, and expressions reflecting Sundanese identity.

The interpretation stage then seeks to connect all the categories formed with a broader sociopragmatic framework, with the aim of explaining the social function and contextual meaning of speech in the context of efforts to preserve the Sundanese language. To enhance analytical reliability, the coding process was conducted iteratively, and interpretations were continuously compared with the theoretical framework employed in the study. Data triangulation was also applied through cross-video comparison and regular consultation with academic supervisors in order to minimize interpretive bias. In the transcription process, all Sundanese utterances were transcribed verbatim by the researchers and subsequently translated into Indonesian for analytical purposes. Translation accuracy was maintained through repeated contextual checking and careful examination of pragmatic meanings and local cultural expressions to avoid shifts in discursive meaning. To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, this study uses the data triangulation method and continues to consult with academic supervisors. As an important note, the scope of this study is limited to three videos and adopts a textual analysis method, so the conclusions obtained are illustrative and not intended to be generalized.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The results of the data analysis were derived from Kang Dedi Mulyadi's speech in YouTube content, highlighting empirical evidence of the use of proximity, educational, and cultural/identity strategies in each instance. Based on observations made through repeated viewings of the three videos, it was found that Kang Dedi Mulyadi's speech consistently combines the use of the Sundanese language with diverse communicative contexts, ranging from formal situations to direct interactions with the public. The observations also revealed an adaptive pattern of language use, wherein word choice, speech style, and intonation were tailored to the audience and the communicative situation. Furthermore, it was found that elements of humor, advice, and local cultural values recurred as integral components of the communication strategy. Thus, the results of the observations reinforce the view that the use of the Sundanese language in this content is not merely spontaneous, but contains strategic patterns that can be analyzed sociopragmatically.

4.1.1 Analysis of Kang Dedi Mulyadi's Formal Speech at the 543rd Anniversary of Bogor City

The first video demonstrates the use of Sundanese within a formal political and cultural setting. The speech combines religious greetings, historical narratives, educational

criticism, and Sundanese philosophical expressions to construct cultural legitimacy and collective identity. Table 1 presents selected representative excerpts from the speech.

Table 1.
Selected Sociopragmatic Patterns in the First Video

Data Excerpt (Sundanese)	English Version	Aspect	Analysis
"Assalamualaikum... sampurasun rampés..."	"Assalamualaikum... greetings of peace and respect..."	Closeness	Religious and cultural greetings function as phatic communication to establish rapport with diverse audiences.
"Pajajaran 543 taun ka tukang..."	"Pajajaran 543 years ago..."	Cultural Identity	Historical references reinforce collective Sundanese identity and cultural memory.
"Manusa paripurna anu apal kana basana..."	"A complete human being understands their language..."	Educational	Language is positioned as a moral and cultural foundation of humanity.
"Silih asah silih asih silih asuh"	"Mutual learning, mutual love, and mutual care"	Cultural Identity	Sundanese philosophical values are used to frame social harmony and communal ethics.
"Sistem pendidikan ayeuna geus robah jadi matérialistik"	"The education system has become materialistic"	Educational	Social criticism is delivered through persuasive and reflective discourse rather than direct confrontation.
"Manusa kudu ngahiji jeung alam"	"Humans must live in harmony with nature"	Cultural Identity	The speech emphasizes traditional Sundanese ecological values and cultural worldview.

The formal speech reflects a sociopragmatic communication pattern that combines relational closeness, educational persuasion, and cultural identity construction within a formal public setting. Religious greetings and Sundanese expressions function as phatic strategies to reduce social distance and strengthen audience engagement, while reflective criticism regarding education and social change positions language as a persuasive medium for moral awareness. At the same time, references to Sundanese philosophy, collective history, and harmony with nature reinforce cultural identity and legitimize the use of regional language in official discourse. These findings suggest that the Sundanese language in KDM's formal communication operates not only as a symbolic cultural marker but also as an adaptive strategy for maintaining regional language visibility in digital public spaces.

4.1.2 Analysis of Kang Dedi Mulyadi's Interactions with the Community during an Event in Cianjur

The second video illustrates Kang Dedi Mulyadi's communication strategies in a more informal and community-oriented context. The interaction emphasizes everyday language, humor, leadership values, and agrarian narratives closely connected to the audience's social reality. Table 2 presents selected representative excerpts from the interaction.

Table 2.
Selected Sociopragmatic Patterns in the Second Video

Data Excerpt (Sundanese)	English Version	Aspect	Analysis
"Daramang sadayana?"	"How are you all?"	Closeness	Informal greetings function as phatic expressions to establish interpersonal familiarity.
"Gaduh béas teu? gaduh artos teu?"	"Do you have rice? Do you have money?"	Closeness	Everyday questions reflect shared social realities and strengthen emotional connection with the audience.
"Ieu mah heureuy"	"This is just a joke"	Closeness	Humor is used as a mitigation strategy to create relaxed and inclusive interaction.
"Tugas pamimpin téh kudu ngabingahkeun rakyat"	"A leader's duty is to make the people happy"	Educational	Leadership discourse emphasizes moral responsibility and public-oriented governance.
"Pertanian kudu dihirupkeun deui"	"Agriculture must be revitalized"	Educational	The speech promotes practical solutions related to local economic sustainability.
"Béas Cianjur téh seungit pulen pédo"	"Cianjur rice is fragrant and soft"	Cultural Identity	Local agricultural products are symbolically positioned as markers of regional identity and pride.
"Gemah ripah répéh rapih"	"A state of prosperity and harmony"	Cultural Identity	Sundanese philosophy is employed to represent ideals of communal harmony and social welfare.
"Ulah géngsi kana tatanén"	"Do not be ashamed of farming"	Educational	Local professions are legitimized through value-oriented and community-based discourse.

Compared to the formal speech context, communication in this interaction is more dialogic, fluid, and socially grounded. Closeness is constructed through informal greetings, rhetorical questions, and humor that reduce hierarchical distance between the speaker and the community. Educational messages are delivered through practical narratives related to leadership, agriculture, and local economic conditions, reflecting the directive function of sociopragmatic communication in everyday contexts. Cultural identity is also reinforced through agrarian symbols, local philosophies, and references to traditional farming practices, positioning Sundanese as a language closely connected to daily social experience rather than merely ceremonial discourse. These findings suggest that regional language preservation in community-based digital communication becomes more effective when integrated with relatable social realities and participatory interaction patterns.

4.1.3 Analysis of Kang Dedi Mulyadi's Lecture during the Pesantren Anniversary Event

The third video presents Kang Dedi Mulyadi's communication strategies within a religious and educational setting. The lecture integrates humor, spiritual values, personal narratives, and Sundanese philosophical expressions to create moral and emotional engagement with the audience. Table 3 presents selected representative excerpts from the lecture.

Table 3.

Selected Sociopragmatic Patterns in the Third Video

Data Excerpt (Sundanese)	English Version	Aspect	Analysis
"Daramang sadayana"	"How are you all?"	Closeness	Informal greetings function as phatic communication to establish familiarity with the audience.
"Ieu mah heureuy tapi aya pesenna"	"This is just a joke, but it carries a message"	Closeness	Humor is employed to maintain audience engagement while delivering implicit moral messages.
"Sim kuring ngahaturkeun salam ka KH Jujun Junaedi"	"I would like to extend my regards to KH Jujun Junaedi"	Closeness	Respectful expressions strengthen social legitimacy and audience trust within a religious context.
"Ruh jeung raga kudu saimbang"	"The soul and the body must be in balance"	Educational	Moral discourse emphasizes balance between spiritual and physical dimensions of life.
"Santri teu diukur tina kamampuan finansialna"	"A student is not measured by their financial capability"	Educational	Educational values are framed through inclusiveness and social equality.
"Rezeki kudu disampeur lain didagoan"	"Sustenance must be pursued, not awaited"	Educational	The utterance promotes self-reliance and work ethics through persuasive discourse.
"Sareundeuk saigel sabobot sapihanéan"	"Moving together in unity and shared responsibility"	Cultural Identity	Sundanese philosophical values reinforce collective solidarity and communal responsibility.
"Rasa jeung rumasa"	"Feeling and self-awareness"	Cultural Identity	Cultural concepts are used to emphasize emotional sensitivity and self-awareness as part of Sundanese identity.
"Pasantrén minangka ruang nilai"	"The pesantren as a space of values"	Cultural Identity	Religious and cultural values are integrated within institutional and social discourse.

The lecture reflects a sociopragmatic communication pattern that combines emotional closeness, moral education, and cultural identity within a religious setting. Humor, informal interaction, and respectful references to religious figures function as relational strategies that strengthen audience engagement and social legitimacy. Educational messages are delivered through spiritual narratives, personal experiences, and moral advice, reflecting the expressive and directive functions of language in persuasive communication. At the same time, Sundanese philosophical expressions are integrated with Islamic values, positioning the Sundanese language as a medium for transmitting both cultural and religious identity. These findings indicate that regional language preservation in religious digital

discourse becomes effective when cultural values are contextualized within spiritual and community-oriented communication practices.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Analysis of Kang Dedi Mulyadi's Sociopragmatic Communication Strategies in the Preservation of the Sundanese Language

The findings position Kang Dedi Mulyadi's (KDM) communication practices as a form of sociopragmatic strategy in which language operates simultaneously as a communicative, cultural, and symbolic resource. Across formal speeches, community interactions, and religious lectures, Sundanese is consistently employed to construct social relationships, deliver moral discourse, and reinforce collective identity. From a sociopragmatic perspective, these patterns reflect the relationship between linguistic choice, communicative intention, and social context. Sundanese is therefore positioned not merely as a regional code, but as a dynamic medium integrated into contemporary digital interaction.

The closeness strategy primarily emerges through greetings, humor, and dialogic interaction patterns. Expressions such as "daramang" and "tos taruang teu acan" function as phatic communication aimed at maintaining social solidarity and reducing interpersonal distance between speaker and audience. In community-based contexts, humor also operates as a mitigation strategy that softens criticism and creates a more egalitarian communication atmosphere. This pattern aligns with Alfikri's (2024) argument that KDM's communication style relies heavily on local cultural approaches to foster emotional connection with the public. However, compared to previous studies focusing mainly on leadership image, this study identifies the sociopragmatic mechanism underlying those interactions, particularly the role of phatic and expressive functions in sustaining audience engagement through regional language use.

Educational strategies in KDM's discourse are reflected through directive speech acts delivered in persuasive and contextual forms. Advice concerning leadership, social responsibility, agriculture, spirituality, and self-reliance positions language as a medium for influencing public attitudes rather than merely transmitting information. The integration of personal narratives and analogical expressions strengthens the expressive and persuasive dimensions of communication. Ardila and Febria (2025) emphasize rhetorical persuasion through ethos, pathos, and logos, while Maharani et al. (2025) focus on the psychological effects of directive speech acts. This study extends those perspectives by showing how directive and expressive functions are embedded within culturally grounded Sundanese discourse to support both educational messaging and language revitalization.

The cultural and identity dimension is particularly visible through the recurring use of Sundanese philosophical concepts such as "silih asah, silih asih, silih asuh, sareundeuk saigel, and rasa jeung rumasa". Within cultural identity theory, these expressions function as symbolic markers that reinforce collective belonging and local worldview. The findings align with Nayiroh's (2020) observation that Sundanese cultural communication has become central to KDM's leadership style. Nevertheless, this study moves beyond political representation by demonstrating how cultural philosophy operates sociopragmatically as an identity construction strategy in digital discourse. Sundanese is therefore positioned not only as a linguistic symbol of ethnicity, but also as a performative medium through which cultural legitimacy and social values are continuously reproduced.

The communication patterns identified in this study also reflect adaptation to the interactive characteristics of digital media. YouTube enables Sundanese to circulate beyond traditional local domains and enter wider public communication spaces. Rosadi et al. (2022) emphasize the role of YouTube in strengthening KDM's personal branding, whereas Barokah et al. (2023) focus on framing strategies in shaping political image. In contrast, the present study highlights how digital communication contributes to regional language vitality by embedding Sundanese within emotionally engaging and socially relevant discourse. This positions digital media not only as a promotional platform, but also as a sociolinguistic environment where regional language practices can remain visible and socially meaningful.

At the same time, the findings reveal that KDM's communication strategies cannot be separated from political and performative dimensions. The use of Sundanese strengthens the image of leadership closeness and cultural authenticity, while simultaneously functioning as symbolic political branding. Suryakusuma et al. (2026) argue that representations of "the people" in KDM's discourse contribute to political legitimation, whereas Sarwoko (2025) emphasizes the role of social media content in shaping leadership perception. From a critical perspective, this raises questions regarding the extent to which regional language preservation is driven by cultural commitment or by strategic image construction. The popularity of emotionally charged and culturally symbolic discourse may strengthen language visibility, yet it also risks transforming local identity into a performative digital commodity.

This tension becomes more visible in the presence of spectacle and virality within KDM's communication practices. Melisa (2025) notes the use of dramatic and attention-oriented communication techniques, while Faturohman et al. (2025) highlight the disciplinary and viral dimensions of KDM's digital content. The phenomenon of "KDM phobia" identified by Setiawan et al. (2026) further reflects the psychological influence of repetitive digital discourse on audiences. From a sociopragmatic perspective, these patterns reveal that language functions not only as communication, but also as social influence and symbolic performance. Although such strategies contribute to increasing audience engagement with Sundanese, reliance on charismatic public figures also raises concerns regarding sustainability and broader community participation in language preservation efforts.

Overall, the findings suggest that KDM's sociopragmatic communication strategies integrate relational closeness, directive educational discourse, cultural identity construction, and digital performativity within a single communication framework. This study contributes to sociopragmatic scholarship by demonstrating how regional languages can be revitalized through adaptive digital communication strategies rooted in local cultural values and participatory interaction. At the same time, the findings highlight the ambivalent relationship between cultural preservation and political branding in digital spaces, where language simultaneously functions as cultural heritage, communicative strategy, and symbolic capital.

4.2.2 The Use of Sundanese in Kang Dedi Mulyadi's YouTube Content and Its Contribution to Fostering the Vitality of Regional Languages

The findings reveal that the use of Sundanese in Kang Dedi Mulyadi's (KDM) YouTube content functions not only as a communicative choice but also as a sociocultural strategy that reinforces regional language vitality in digital spaces. Across formal, communal, and

religious contexts, Sundanese is consistently integrated into emotionally engaging and socially contextualized discourse. From a sociopragmatic perspective, this pattern reflects how language choice is shaped by communicative goals, audience relationships, and cultural positioning. Sundanese is therefore positioned as an active linguistic resource capable of maintaining relevance within contemporary digital communication.

The persistence of Sundanese expressions in KDM's discourse reinforces the interpersonal function of language in sustaining social solidarity. Greetings, humor, and everyday conversational patterns create familiarity and reduce hierarchical distance between speaker and audience. In sociopragmatic terms, these utterances operate as phatic communication that maintains relational closeness within public interaction. Nayiroh (2020) emphasizes the importance of local cultural communication in strengthening community relations, whereas this study further demonstrates how phatic interaction simultaneously contributes to the normalization of Sundanese within digital public discourse. Regional language vitality is therefore supported not only through symbolic preservation, but also through repeated everyday usage in socially meaningful contexts.

The educational dimension of KDM's communication also contributes to language sustainability by embedding moral and social values into regional language discourse. Directive speech acts related to leadership, agriculture, spirituality, and social responsibility are delivered through culturally familiar expressions and personal narratives. This aligns with speech act theory, particularly the directive and expressive functions of language aimed at influencing audience attitudes and behavior. Ardila and Febria (2025) focus on rhetorical persuasion in KDM's speeches, while Maharani et al. (2025) highlight the psychological influence of directive discourse. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that persuasive communication becomes more socially effective when conveyed through culturally embedded regional language practices.

The integration of Sundanese into digital communication also reflects an adaptive process through which regional languages negotiate visibility within modern media ecosystems. YouTube allows Sundanese to circulate beyond localized interpersonal settings and enter broader digital publics. Rosadi et al. (2022) interpret this phenomenon primarily through personal branding, whereas this study emphasizes its sociolinguistic implications. The repeated presence of Sundanese in viral and highly accessible digital content contributes to language normalization among wider audiences, including younger generations who increasingly consume digital media. In this context, digital communication functions not only as dissemination, but also as a mechanism for sustaining language relevance across generations.

The findings further suggest that Sundanese in KDM's content operates as a form of digital cultural identity construction. Philosophical expressions, agrarian narratives, and references to Sundanese social values reinforce collective belonging amidst the dominance of globalized digital culture. From the perspective of cultural identity theory, language serves as a symbolic marker that differentiates communities while reinforcing cultural continuity. Previous studies by Susanti et al. (2025) and Sarwoko (2025) focus on symbolic communication and leadership image construction. This study, however, highlights how identity construction through regional language simultaneously contributes to language revitalization by positioning Sundanese as culturally prestigious and socially relevant in digital interaction.

Nevertheless, the contribution of KDM's communication to language vitality also contains political and performative dimensions that require critical reflection. The use of Sundanese strengthens perceptions of cultural authenticity and populist closeness, but it may also function as symbolic political branding. Suryakusuma et al. (2026) interpret representations of "the people" in KDM's discourse as part of political legitimization strategies. From this perspective, regional language use can simultaneously operate as cultural preservation and strategic image construction. While such visibility increases public exposure to Sundanese, it also raises concerns regarding whether language revitalization remains community-driven or becomes increasingly dependent on media-oriented political performance.

This tension is reinforced by the spectacle-oriented nature of digital communication. Melisa (2025) identifies dramatic and attention-centered elements in KDM's media practices, while Faturohman et al. (2025) emphasize the disciplinary and viral dimensions of KDM's content. From a sociopragmatic perspective, these patterns reveal how language in digital media functions as symbolic performance capable of shaping emotional and social responses. The popularity of Sundanese discourse in KDM's content therefore reflects not only linguistic preservation, but also the influence of algorithmic visibility and audience engagement culture within digital platforms.

Despite these complexities, the findings confirm that the strategic use of Sundanese in adaptive digital communication contributes significantly to maintaining regional language vitality. Emotional closeness, educational narratives, cultural symbolism, and participatory interaction collectively position Sundanese as a living language within contemporary digital spaces. This study contributes to sociopragmatic research by demonstrating that regional language revitalization is more sustainable when language is integrated into everyday communication practices rather than limited to ceremonial or institutional preservation efforts.

4.2.3 The Linguistic Features of Kang Dedi Mulyadi's Speech in YouTube Content and Support for the Preservation of the Sundanese Language

The findings reveal that the linguistic features of Kang Dedi Mulyadi's (KDM) discourse function as sociopragmatic mechanisms that support the preservation of the Sundanese language within digital communication. The consistent use of Sundanese across formal speeches, public interactions, and religious lectures positions the language as an active communicative resource rather than a symbolic cultural artifact. From a sociopragmatic perspective, these linguistic patterns reflect the interaction between language choice, communicative intention, and social context. Sundanese is therefore positioned not only as a marker of ethnicity, but also as a medium for constructing social relationships, transmitting values, and maintaining cultural visibility in digital spaces.

One prominent linguistic feature is the use of greetings and dialogic interaction patterns. Expressions such as "daramang" and "tos taruang teu acan" function as phatic communication aimed at maintaining social solidarity and interpersonal closeness. In Sundanese communicative culture, relational politeness and familiarity are central components of social interaction. This aligns with Nayiroh's (2020) argument that local cultural communication strengthens relationships between leaders and communities. However, this study further demonstrates that phatic expressions also contribute to the

normalization of Sundanese in public digital discourse by embedding regional language into everyday interaction patterns that audiences perceive as natural and accessible.

Humor also emerges as a significant sociopragmatic feature within KDM's discourse. Rather than functioning solely as entertainment, humor operates as a mitigation strategy that softens criticism, reduces communicative tension, and enhances audience receptiveness. In several contexts, humorous expressions are combined with moral or social commentary, allowing criticism to be delivered indirectly without threatening social harmony. Melisa (2025) interprets this dramatic communication style as part of digital spectacle, while Faturohman et al. (2025) emphasize its disciplinary effects on audiences. The present study expands these perspectives by identifying humor as a sociopragmatic strategy that strengthens emotional engagement while simultaneously increasing the social acceptability of Sundanese discourse in digital interaction.

Another important feature is the dominance of directive and expressive speech acts within educational narratives. Advice related to leadership, spirituality, agriculture, and self-reliance reflects the directive function of language aimed at shaping audience attitudes and behavior. Personal experiences and emotional narratives reinforce the expressive dimension of communication, making messages appear more authentic and persuasive. Maharani et al. (2025) focus on the psychological effects of directive speech acts, whereas this study highlights how directive discourse delivered through Sundanese strengthens the communicative relevance of regional language in contemporary society. Educational messages therefore become not only moral instruction, but also mechanisms for maintaining the functional use of Sundanese in public discourse.

The findings also highlight the importance of cultural symbolism in KDM's linguistic practices. Sundanese philosophical expressions such as "silih asah, silih asih, silih asuh, sareundeuk saigel, and rasa jeung rumasa" operate as symbolic representations of collective identity and local worldview. From the perspective of cultural identity theory, these expressions reinforce a shared sense of belonging while transmitting social values across digital audiences. Susanti et al. (2025) interpret KDM's communication style as culturally symbolic, while Suryakusuma et al. (2026) emphasize its role in constructing collective representation. This study extends these interpretations by showing that symbolic cultural expressions also function as linguistic preservation strategies through repeated circulation in digital communication.

Digital media further amplifies the sociolinguistic impact of these linguistic features. The interactive and highly visible nature of YouTube enables Sundanese expressions to reach audiences beyond traditional local settings. Rosadi et al. (2022) and Sarwoko (2025) primarily discuss social media in relation to branding and public perception, whereas the present study emphasizes the role of digital discourse in expanding the functional domain of regional language use. The repeated exposure of audiences to Sundanese greetings, humor, philosophical concepts, and educational narratives contributes to the creation of a participatory linguistic environment in which regional language remains socially visible and culturally meaningful.

At the same time, the findings reveal tensions between cultural authenticity and performative digital communication. Emotional narratives, humor, and symbolic cultural expressions strengthen audience engagement, yet they also risk transforming regional language into a form of performative media spectacle. The phenomenon of "KDM phobia"

identified by Setiaman et al. (2026) illustrates how repetitive emotional discourse can generate strong psychological effects on audiences. From a critical sociopragmatic perspective, this raises questions regarding whether the popularity of Sundanese discourse in digital media reflects sustainable language revitalization or temporary visibility shaped by charismatic media performance and algorithmic circulation.

Overall, the linguistic features identified in KDM's YouTube discourse reflect the integration of phatic, directive, expressive, and symbolic functions within digital communication practices. Greetings, humor, educational narratives, and cultural philosophy collectively position Sundanese as a living and adaptive language capable of functioning within contemporary media environments. This study contributes to sociopragmatic scholarship by demonstrating that regional language preservation becomes more sustainable when linguistic features are embedded within emotionally engaging, culturally grounded, and socially participatory communication practices.

5. Conclusion

This study identified sociopragmatic strategies employed in YouTube content to support the preservation of the Sundanese language. The findings demonstrate that Sundanese is consistently integrated into educational discourse, relational closeness, and cultural identity construction. Greetings, humor, personal narratives, and Sundanese philosophical values indicate that the language can be effectively adapted to a variety of formal and informal communicative contexts. Consequently, Sundanese functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a vehicle for cultural transmission and preservation. The study highlights relational, educational, and cultural identity strategies as key sociopragmatic mechanisms that contribute to regional language revitalization in digital spaces. Furthermore, it contributes to sociopragmatic scholarship by demonstrating how digital public figures can promote linguistic and cultural preservation through the strategic use of regional languages.

Nevertheless, this study is limited to the analysis of three YouTube videos and does not include a thorough examination of audience responses. Consequently, the findings provide only a partial understanding of how the use of the Sundanese language influences audience reception. In addition, the generalizability of the findings is constrained by the focus on a single public figure. The long-term sustainability of language preservation efforts also remains uncertain because such initiatives may depend heavily on the visibility and influence of individual actors. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within these limitations and may serve as a foundation for future studies focusing on comparative analyses of regional languages, audience reception, and cross-platform digital communication.

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HUMAN-CENTERED CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN PRABOWO SUBIANTO'S INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMATIC SPEECHES: A CRITICAL METAPHOR ANALYSIS IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study examines how recurring human-centered metaphors construct Indonesia's diplomatic identity and represent the country as a political actor in the international speeches of President Prabowo Subianto. Drawing on Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) and the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), the study analyzes sixteen English-language speeches delivered during the first year of Prabowo's presidency. Metaphorical expressions were identified through systematic linguistic analysis and subsequently interpreted through conceptual mapping and critical explanation. The findings reveal two dominant metaphorical patterns: interpersonal relationship metaphors and human body metaphors. Indonesia and its international partners are frequently represented as "friends," "brothers," and members of a "human family," while global issues and national characteristics are framed through expressions such as "lungs of the earth," "embedded in our DNA," and "welcome with open arms." These metaphors portray Indonesia as cooperative, inclusive, globally engaged, and environmentally responsible. At the ideological level, they function to promote solidarity, legitimacy, and mutual cooperation while simultaneously obscuring strategic interests, power asymmetries, and geopolitical tensions. The study demonstrates that human-centered metaphors serve not only as cognitive and rhetorical devices but also as ideological resources for constructing national identity and shaping international perceptions. By highlighting the role of metaphor in diplomatic communication, this research contributes to the fields of metaphor studies, political discourse analysis, and international political communication.

Keywords: *critical metaphor analysis; diplomatic rhetoric; human-centered metaphor; Indonesia; political discourse; Prabowo Subianto*

1. Introduction

Political leadership is exercised not only through institutions and policymaking but also through the strategic use of language. As Charteris-Black (2011) argues, political power is closely connected to the embodied presence of leaders whose language persuades and inspires audiences. In contemporary democracies, this persuasive capacity is frequently enacted through political speeches, where leaders do more than just communicate policy agendas. Through such discourse, leaders construct legitimacy, articulate collective identity,

and frame political reality. This symbolic function becomes especially significant in international forums, where speeches operate as diplomatic performances through which states project priorities, values, and strategic positioning before global audiences. Nye (2021) argues that soft power works through attraction and voluntary preference-shaping rather than coercion. In this sense, international speeches can function as soft-power instruments, helping states seek recognition and trust while legitimizing their position within the global order.

Within political discourse, rhetorical strategies play an important role in shaping how audiences interpret events, actors, and policies. Among these strategies, metaphor is especially influential, enabling leaders to communicate abstract political issues through familiar experiences. Charteris-Black (2013) notes that metaphor enhances both comprehension and persuasion by translating complex realities into accessible conceptual terms. Metaphors frame cooperation as friendship, development as construction, crisis as conflict, or national progress as a journey. Such framing is politically significant because rather than merely simplify political reality, metaphor guides evaluation by making certain interpretations appear natural and morally convincing. Human-centered metaphors are particularly significant because they naturalize political relationships through embodied and affective experiences, thereby making geopolitical positioning appear morally intuitive and socially legitimate.

Previous research has demonstrated the prominent role of metaphor in diverse political contexts. In Indonesia, metaphor has been shown to function as a resource for emotional appeal and public evaluation. Citraresmana et al. (2018), for example, show how metaphorical framing in Indonesian political discourse constructs relational meanings through domains such as journey and containment. Suganda et al. (2025) further show how citizens use evaluative metaphors in digital discourse to express political judgments, showing that metaphor extends beyond elite discourse into audience participation, where ordinary citizens commenting on Indonesian news frequently rely on evaluative metaphors and negation to articulate criticism. International research further underscores metaphor's significance in political discourse. This recognition has prompted extensive research into its use across diverse political contexts, including political persuasion (Brugman et al., 2019), identity construction and policy framing (Musolff, 2016), conflict discourse (Al-Minawi, 2024), diplomatic communication (Batulaya & Roselani, 2025), and party manifestos (Nkrumah, 2025). These studies collectively demonstrate metaphor's explanatory and strategic role in persuasion, identity construction, conflict discourse, and diplomatic communication.

Despite this growing body of scholarship, comparatively limited attention has been given to the use of metaphor in the English-language international speeches of Indonesian political leaders. Existing metaphor studies in Indonesian political discourse have predominantly examined domestic rhetoric, electoral communication, or isolated metaphorical expressions, while relatively little attention has been devoted to how metaphor systematically functions in international diplomatic discourse to construct national identity and geopolitical legitimacy. This gap is significant since international speeches are key sites for states to communicate policy, perform legitimacy, and negotiate their place in the global order.

President Prabowo Subianto offers a pertinent case for such analysis. As Indonesia's newly elected president, his first-year speeches in international forums offer early representations of how the new administration seeks to project Indonesia globally. Recent

studies (Ambarwati & Zifana (2025) suggest that Prabowo's metaphors concretize geopolitical issues while promoting narratives of cooperation, stability, and development. A notable tendency within this broader pattern is the prominence of human-centered metaphors, which frame international relations through familiar human experiences and suggest a more personalized, affective mode of political communication. Embodiment matters in diplomacy because bodily and relational images translate abstract interstate relations into experiences of closeness, vulnerability, care, solidarity, and shared humanity. Such imagery allows diplomacy to appear as morally meaningful relationships among human communities, rather than merely as strategic arrangements among states. Examining these patterns provides insight into Indonesia's symbolic construction of international identity during political transition.

Building on this context, this study employs Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) (Charteris-Black, 2004) to examine human-centered metaphors in President Prabowo Subianto's international speeches during his first year in office. The study pursues two objectives: (1) to interpret human-centered metaphors through their underlying conceptual structures, and (2) to explain how these metaphors function as rhetorical resources conveying ideological meanings and constructing Indonesia's political identity in international contexts. In this way, the study is situated within global metaphor research and foregrounds its originality in analyzing Indonesian presidential rhetoric in international forums.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical Metaphor Analysis

As previously mentioned, this study adopts Charteris-Black's (2004) Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) as its theoretical and analytical framework. CMA is particularly suitable for the present study because political speeches in international forums are strategic discourses rather than neutral informational texts. Rather, they are strategic forms of public discourse through which leaders articulate policy priorities, project national identity, negotiate international relationships, and cultivate legitimacy before multiple audiences. A framework capable of connecting linguistic form, conceptual structure, and ideological function is therefore especially relevant. This orientation also places CMA in conversation with critical discourse scholarship, particularly Fairclough's view of discourse as a social practice and van Dijk's account of ideology as socially shared cognition (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1998).

CMA builds on insights from Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as developed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980). CMT explains metaphor as a cognitive mechanism through which abstract domains are understood through more concrete experiences. Through mappings between source and target domains, political concepts such as development, crisis, cooperation, or national progress can be framed through familiar domains such as journey, health, family, or construction. Expressions such as 'building the future,' 'moving forward,' and 'friend to all' exemplify linguistic manifestations of broader conceptual mappings. Kövecses (2020) further emphasizes that conceptual metaphors are shaped not only by embodied experience but also by cultural and contextual factors, while Semino (2008) shows how metaphor provides a systematic resource for representing experience in discourse.

Although CMT is valuable for identifying source-target correspondences and explaining cognitive structure, it is less attentive to the rhetorical and ideological dimension of metaphor in situated discourse. Political speeches are produced within contexts of

representation, diplomatic signaling, and power negotiation. In such contexts, it is insufficient to identify only how a metaphor structures understanding; it is equally necessary to examine why a particular metaphor is chosen, what interests it serves, and what forms of reality it foregrounds or obscures. For these reasons, the present study employs CMA rather than relying solely on CMT.

Charteris-Black (2013, p. 217) defines CMA as an approach to metaphor analysis that “aims to identify which metaphors are chosen in persuasive genres such as political speeches, party political manifestos or press reports, and attempts to explain why these metaphors are chosen, with reference to the interaction between an orator's purposes and a specific set of speech circumstances.” The framework integrates insights from cognitive semantics, pragmatics, and critical discourse inquiry. Methodologically, CMA proceeds through three interrelated stages: identifying metaphorical expressions, interpreting conceptual patterns, and explaining rhetorical and ideological functions.

To deepen the explanatory stage, the present study also draws on Charteris-Black's (2013) concept of purposeful metaphor. Purposeful metaphor emphasizes that metaphors are frequently selected to achieve strategic communicative goals rather than emerging incidentally. Charteris-Black (2013) identifies seven potentially overlapping purposes of metaphor, including general rhetoric, heuristic, predicative, empathetic, aesthetic, ideological, and mythic, demonstrating how metaphors simplify complex issues, assign evaluations, foster emotional alignment, frame political realities in a preferred way, create mythic or symbolic narratives about political concepts, or strengthen rhetoric and persuasive force in general.

2.2 Previous Studies on Metaphor in Political Discourse

Previous research has consistently demonstrated the importance of metaphor in political discourse across diverse contexts. In crisis communication, Sidiq & Darmayanti (2021) show that Shinzo Abe used battle metaphors in his first speech on COVID-19 to construct urgency and legitimize emergency responses. The findings suggest that metaphor was used to construct a sense of emergency and to legitimize urgent policy responses in the early phase of the pandemic. Similarly, Al-Minawi (2024) in the study of Hamas' official discourse during the Aqsa Flood War, found that metaphor in Hamas' wartime discourse intensified ideological polarization, justified resistance, and represented conflict through recurring war narratives. These studies indicate that metaphor can function as a powerful tool for framing crisis, conflict, and political legitimacy.

Other studies emphasize the metaphor's role in broader political persuasion and ideological communication. Nkrumah (2025) offers a closer methodological parallel by demonstrating that metaphors in party manifestos function ideologically, framing legitimacy, solidarity, and authority. This study aligns strongly with the present research because it treats metaphor not merely as a linguistic pattern but as a strategic means of constructing political meaning. Even so, the object of analysis is a party manifesto rather than spoken political discourse, and the context is electoral competition rather than international speech-making. Likewise, Wiredu (2023) shows that metaphor served as a persuasive resource in Kwame Nkrumah's anti-colonial and Pan-African discourse. These findings highlight metaphor's role in ideological narrative construction, although mainly in electoral, manifesto-based, or anti-colonial contexts.

From a cognitive perspective, Lingga et al. (2025) analyze Donald Trump's speeches using CMT and find that Trump's metaphors project resilience, pride, and assertive

leadership through structural, ontological, and orientational mappings. They further argue that these metaphor types collectively project a worldview marked by resilience, national pride, and assertive leadership. Batulaya & Roselani (2025) identifying 28 conceptual metaphors in Arab leaders' speeches, showing their persuasive and cultural functions in supporting Palestine. Collectively, these studies show that metaphor structures understanding, shapes identity, and positions political actors.

Despite this growing literature, few studies examine Indonesian leaders' English-language international speeches, particularly through CMA. Existing studies tend to focus on crisis rhetoric, conflict discourse, election manifestos, or domestic communication, while fewer studies examine how recurring metaphorical patterns construct national image and diplomatic identity before global audiences. Human-centered metaphors, derived from interpersonal relations and the human body, remain underexplored despite their effectiveness in humanizing geopolitical issues, fostering empathy, and naturalizing political relationships.

This gap is significant because international speeches function as key sites where political leaders simultaneously communicate policy, perform identity, and engage with global audiences. This study therefore employs CMA and purposeful metaphor to analyze how human-centered metaphors in President Prabowo Subianto's speeches function as strategic resources in Indonesia's international political communication.

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative design using Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), which systematically examines linguistic expression, conceptual structure, and socio-political function.

3.1 Data

Data consisted of sixteen official English-language speeches delivered by President Prabowo Subianto in international forums between October 2024 and October 2025, capturing the first year of his presidency. This period was selected because the early phase of a new administration is typically a strategic moment for articulating governmental priorities, projecting leadership, and positioning the state within the international order. Although the corpus is relatively limited in quantity, the speeches were selected purposively based on their rhetorical density, diplomatic significance, and representativeness of Indonesia's international political communication during the early phase of Prabowo's presidency.

English-language speeches were selected because they targeted international audiences and formed part of Indonesia's diplomatic communication. The corpus included speeches delivered in multilateral forums, bilateral meetings, investment gatherings, and international conferences involving themes such as diplomacy, economic development, security, sustainability, and global cooperation.

Speech transcripts were collected from the official website of the President of the Republic of Indonesia (www.presidentri.go.id), which functions as the principal repository of presidential public communication. Where necessary, transcripts were cross-checked against official video recordings released by the Presidential Secretariat (<https://www.youtube.com/@SekretariatPresiden>) to ensure textual accuracy. Speeches were purposively selected if they met four criteria: (1) delivered by President Prabowo

Subianto; (2) presented in an international forum; (3) primarily in English; and (4) contained substantive rhetorical content relevant to international political communication. Contextual information, including date, venue, audience, and forum agenda, was also documented to support the explanatory stage of analysis.

3.2 Analytical Procedure

The analysis followed the three-stage procedure proposed in Critical Metaphor Analysis: identification, interpretation, and explanation (Charteris-Black, 2004).

3.2.1 Metaphor Identification

Metaphors were identified using the Pragglejaz Group's Metaphor Identification Procedure (2007), which compares contextual and basic meanings to determine metaphorical use. Basic meanings were verified using the Oxford English Dictionary. To enhance analytical reliability, metaphor identification and categorization were conducted through repeated close reading and iterative comparison between contextual and basic meanings to ensure consistency in conceptual mapping. A lexical item was categorized as metaphorical when a semantic contrast existed between its contextual and basic meanings, while the contextual meaning remained intelligible through comparison with the basic sense.

3.2.2 Metaphor Interpretation

The second stage involved interpreting identified expressions through CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors were grouped into semantic fields, mapped through source and target domains, and synthesized into conceptual metaphors expressed in propositional form (e.g., A IS B). Higher-level conceptual metaphors were then synthesized into conceptual keys, following Charteris-Black (2004), to reveal rhetorical coherence across the discourse.

3.2.3 Metaphor Explanation

The final stage focused on communicative purpose and political context. Explanation applied Charteris-Black's (2013) concept of purposeful metaphor to analyze the rhetorical effects and ideological implications of metaphorical expressions, conceptual metaphors, and conceptual keys. At the level of metaphorical expressions, the analysis examined lexical choices, evaluative meanings, emotional associations, and immediate rhetorical effects. At the level of conceptual metaphors, it examined how source-domain mappings shaped political understanding and transferred familiar evaluations to political targets. For instance, the metaphor 'friend to all' projects positive values of friendship onto international relations. At the level of conceptual keys, the analysis explored how related metaphors sustained broader ideological narratives and representations of Indonesia's role in world affairs. Contextual factors, including audience, venue, geopolitical circumstances, and thematic agenda, were incorporated to interpret metaphorical purpose.

This methodological design ensured systematic identification, interpretation, and explanation of metaphors while aligning linguistic analysis with socio-political context. However, since CMA is interpretative in nature, the analysis recognizes the possibility of interpretive subjectivity, which was minimized through repeated close reading and consistent application of the analytical framework.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Overview of Identified Metaphors

Analysis of sixteen speeches identified twenty-eight metaphorical expressions, grouped into interpersonal relationship and human body metaphors. These categories indicate a recurring tendency to represent international relations, national identity, development, and global responsibility through familiar forms of human experience. The expressions used are organized into a thematic overview, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Human-Centered Metaphors in President Prabowo Subianto's International Speeches

No	Thematic Category	Expressions	Conceptual Key	Speech Context	Rhetorical Purpose
1.	Interpersonal Relationship	'one thousand friends too few, one enemy too many'; 'we gather together as one human family'; 'our brothers are being destroyed.'	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ARE HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS	St. Petersburg International Economic Forum; General Debate of 80 th UNGA; 11 th D-8 Summit	Frames diplomacy through friendship, unity, and kinship solidarity
2.	Human Body	'lungs of the earth'; 'with a heavy heart'; 'in our DNA'; 'we welcome with open arms.'	SOCIOPOLITICAL REALITY IS A HUMAN BODY	G20 Summit; High-Level Conference on the Question of Palestine; JAPINDA and JJC State Luncheon	Frames ecology, identity, diplomacy, and humanitarian concern through embodied experience

At the level of distribution, rather than appearing randomly, these metaphors vary according to communicative context. Interpersonal relationship metaphors dominate diplomatic and security context, while human body metaphors appear more in economic and development-oriented speeches. This distribution suggests that metaphor selection is closely aligned with rhetorical purpose, reflecting the speaker's sensitivity to audience and context.

4.1.2 Interpersonal Relationship Metaphors

Interpersonal relationship metaphors in the corpus conceptualize international affairs through a set of relational models drawn from everyday human interaction. Friendship, family, and brotherhood metaphors collectively frame diplomacy as relational solidarity, although each operates at a different relational scale: open diplomatic engagement, universal human unity, and bounded communal identification.

One recurring expression is the metaphor of friendship. The word 'friend' conceptualizes Indonesia as a social actor engaged in voluntary and positive relationships with others. In remarks delivered at a state luncheon with the Japan Indonesia Association (JAPINDA) and Japan Jakarta Club (JJC) delegations, President Prabowo Subianto states:

Text 1

"The global situation is full of uncertainty, and that's why Indonesia wants to be a friend to all. We by tradition are non-aligned. We are *friends to all*."
(State Luncheon with JAPINDA and JJC Delegation, December 2024)

Looking at the speech context, Indonesia is personified as an actor capable of friendship. The mapping transfers qualities associated with human friendship, such as trust, goodwill, reciprocity, and positive engagement, onto the state as a political entity. The phrase 'to all' expands the relational scope beyond bilateral partnership and projects an image of open engagement with multiple states. This metaphor is reinforced by the reference to 'non-alignment', which aligns with the interpersonal notion of a friend who maintains balanced and non-exclusive relations. The surrounding reference to 'a global situation full of uncertainty' situates this mapping within a context where friendship functions as a stabilizing form of engagement. The same orientation appears at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum 2025:

Text 2

"Our foreign policy is very simple, one phrase. *"One thousand friends, too few. One enemy, too many."* We want *to be friends with everybody*." (St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, June 2025)

The formulation shown in Text 2 intensifies the friendship metaphor by presenting international relations as the accumulation of positive ties rather than antagonistic divisions. The contrast between 'friends' and 'enemy' frames diplomacy through moralized interpersonal categories, where friendship is desirable and hostility is undesirable.

A different relational scale emerges in the metaphor of 'human family', which organizes diversity into a shared collective identity. In an address to the United Nations General Assembly, President Prabowo Subianto states:

Text 3

"We differ in race, religion, and nationality, yet we gather together today as *one human family*." (General Debate of the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 2025)

The metaphor 'one human family' integrates diversity into unity, framing global solidarity through familial bonds. Differences of race, religion, and nationality are acknowledged but symbolically integrated within a common relational structure. The modifier 'one' consolidates plurality into unity, while the act of 'gathering together' reflects the physical and symbolic assembly of states within the United Nations. References to 'fellow human beings' and shared rights in the same speech further stabilize this mapping by aligning political actors with a common human identity. In the context of the United Nations General Assembly, the metaphor gains force because representatives of many nations are present, allowing the relational model of family to be grounded in the physical and symbolic assembly of states. As Marks (2025) notes, the notion of 'human family' has long been used

in international discourse to conceptualize the world as a unified social entity structured around shared belonging.

A narrower and more bounded form of solidarity appears in the metaphor of brotherhood. In the D-8 Summit, President Prabowo Subianto states:

Text 4

“We have vast resources, but we cannot unite, we quarrel among ourselves. And then when *our brothers* are being destroyed, then we give some declaration of support, and we send humanitarian aid.” (Special Session of 11th Developing Eight (D-8) Summit, December 2024)

The metaphor of brotherhood constructs solidarity among Muslim-majority states, while also acknowledging internal discord. The expression ‘our brothers’ constructs a specific in-group defined by shared religious or political affinity. Articulated in the D-8 Summit, where the audience consists of leaders and government officials from Muslim-majority and Global South countries, the possessive ‘our’ positions the speaker and audience within the same relational community while distinguishing that group from external actors. The surrounding reference to internal quarrel, as seen in the statement “we quarrel among ourselves,” frames geopolitical fragmentation as conflict within a shared family structure. The depiction of external harm, particularly in relation to Palestine, intensifies relational proximity by framing it as harm inflicted upon close kin. This dual structure, combining solidarity with internal tension, reflects what Goetze (2024) identifies as a key feature of kinship metaphors: their capacity to construct imagined connectivity while simultaneously revealing fractures within the group.

The metaphorical patterns found indicate that interpersonal relationship metaphors systematically conceptualize international affairs through familiar human bonds. Expressions such as ‘friend’, ‘human family’, and ‘brother’ each reflect the conceptual metaphors “INTERNATIONAL RELATION IS FRIENDSHIP”, “HUMANITY IS A FAMILY”, and “COMMUNITY IS KINSHIP”. Although each expression foregrounds a different relational scale, they share the same underlying logic of interpreting political actors and global communities through social relationships. These mappings converge into the conceptual key “INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ARE HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS”. With this coherent metaphorical framework, international politics is represented less as an arena of impersonal strategic interaction than as a network of friendship, belonging, and solidarity.

4.1.3 Human Body Metaphors

Body metaphors concretize abstract realities by mapping ecological, cultural, diplomatic, and humanitarian issues onto embodied experience. Alongside interpersonal relationship metaphors, they provide resources for understanding political and global phenomena through bodily functions, inherited traits, gestures, and emotional states. One prominent example appears in President Prabowo Subianto’s remarks at the G20 Summit on sustainable development and energy transition, as shown in Text 5.

Text 5

“Indonesia I think has the largest tropical forest. Maybe only Brazil and some African countries have more forest than us. We have contributed for many, many years to cooling the world. We are considered *the lungs of the Earth*.” (Third Session of G20 Summit, November 2024)

Indonesia's forests are framed as 'the lungs of the Earth', emphasizing ecological indispensability and global responsibility. The mapping projects the life-sustaining function of lungs onto forests as ecological systems that regulate climate and sustain planetary balance. Through this metaphor, Indonesia's environmental role is presented as vital, continuous, and deserving of global recognition.

A different bodily configuration appears in the state luncheon with JAPINDA and JJC delegations, as shown in Text 6.

Text 6

"Indonesia for many, many years, even before there was an Indonesia, the tradition here is to welcome guests and to welcome foreigners. That is our tradition, that is our age-old custom. Maybe that is *in our DNA*." (State Luncheon with Japan Indonesia Association and Japan Jakarta Club Delegation, December 2024)

Hospitality is framed as intrinsic to Indonesian identity through the metaphor "in our DNA." By projecting the concept of biological inheritance onto cultural identity, the metaphor presents openness to guests and foreigners as natural, enduring, and historically continuous rather than merely situational or policy-driven. The same diplomatic setting also includes the expression as shown in Text 7.

Text 7

"We are a friend to all. Our philosophy is 1,000 friends are too few, one enemy is too many. So, we *welcome with open arms*." (State Luncheon with Japan Indonesia Association and Japan Jakarta Club Delegation, December 2024)

The gesture of 'open arms' symbolizes diplomatic openness and readiness for cooperation. The bodily image of opening one's arms, conventionally associated with welcome and embrace, is mapped onto Indonesia's willingness to engage with foreign partners, particularly Japanese investors and institutions.

Human body imagery is also used to express moral and emotional responses in contexts of humanitarian crisis. In remarks delivered at the High-Level International Conference on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, President Prabowo Subianto states:

Text 8

"It is with *a heavy heart* that we recall the ongoing unbearable tragedy in Gaza: thousands of innocent lives—many of them women and children—have been killed, famine looms, human catastrophe is unfolding before our eyes." (High-Level International Conference on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, September 2025)

The metaphor 'with a heavy heart' conveys embodied sorrow, framing humanitarian concern as moral responsibility. References to loss of life, famine, and suffering shape the interpretation, where the 'heaviness' signals not generic sadness but a response to large-scale human tragedy. The relevant correspondence lies in the idea of something difficult to carry, where physical burden parallels the strain of ethical awareness and empathy. In this case, the heart as the locus of that burden grounds an abstract moral stance in embodied

sensation. Thus, the expression frames political response not as detached diplomacy, but as emotionally grounded ethical engagement.

Human body imagery systematically structures sociopolitical realities through familiar bodily functions, conditions, and actions. The expressions ‘lungs of the Earth,’ ‘in our DNA,’ ‘with open arms,’ and ‘with a heavy heart’ reflect the conceptual metaphors “THE EARTH IS A HUMAN BODY,” “CULTURE IS BIOLOGY,” “SOCIAL RELATIONS ARE PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS,” and “EMOTIONAL CONCERN IS PHYSICAL BURDEN”. Although each expression foregrounds a different dimension of embodiment, they share the same underlying logic of understanding abstract collective phenomena through the human body. These metaphors converge into the conceptual key “SOCIOPOLITICAL REALITY IS A HUMAN BODY,” through which environmental systems, national identity, diplomatic relations, and humanitarian concern are rendered more intelligible and experientially accessible.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Metaphor as Framing Device

The findings indicate that human-centered metaphors function as framing devices that shape how complex realities are understood and evaluated. Metaphors simplify complex realities through their heuristic function and attach normative evaluations through their predicative function. This dual function is especially visible in the conceptual key “INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ARE HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS”, reflected in expressions such as ‘friend to all’, ‘one thousand friends too few, one enemy too many’, and ‘one human family’. These metaphors reduce the complexity of foreign policy by recasting diplomacy through the interpersonal logic of friendship and kinship. Strategic relations between states are therefore rendered more intelligible through concepts associated with everyday social life. At the same time, these metaphors are evaluative. Friendship conventionally evokes trust, reciprocity, goodwill, and peaceful coexistence. By describing Indonesia’s foreign policy through the language of friendship, the discourse presents non-alignment not merely as a strategic doctrine but as an ethically desirable orientation. Similarly, the metaphor of a human family frames cooperation as morally preferable to rivalry and fragmentation.

From a critical perspective, however, such framing is not ideologically neutral. The metaphor ‘friend to all’ foregrounds goodwill while obscuring strategic calculations of non-alignment. A recent study suggests that Indonesia’s contemporary non-aligned posture can also be understood as an effort to preserve strategic autonomy amid intensifying rivalry between major powers, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region (Anwar, 2023). In this sense, the friendship metaphor may function as a form of geopolitical masking: it presents strategic hedging and non-alignment as morally neutral cooperation rather than pragmatic maneuvering within an increasingly competitive regional order. This masking effect is consistent with recent research showing that metaphorical discourse can depoliticize contested policy issues by presenting interested positions as balanced, reasonable, or legitimate (van Schalkwyk et al., 2024).

A similar pattern can be observed in bilateral economic settings. In speeches addressed to Japanese business audiences, friendship and hospitality metaphors present Indonesia–Japan relations as warm and cooperative. Yet these metaphors may downplay structural asymmetries in the partnership, particularly in access to capital, advanced technology, and regulatory influence, as Japan remains an important source of investment,

technological support, and infrastructure finance for Indonesia (Handayani & Yuliatiningtyas, 2025).

4.2.2 Empathetic Force of Metaphor

Empathetic metaphors humanize politics by framing states as kin and crises as embodied sorrow, thereby fostering moral engagement. By representing states as friends, global communities as family members, and diplomacy as bodily openness, the discourse brings distant and abstract political issues closer to everyday human experience. This aligns with Charteris-Black's (2013) notion of the empathetic purpose of metaphor, in which metaphor is used to evoke emotional identification and relational closeness. Expressions such as 'our brothers' and 'with a heavy heart' encourage audiences to interpret world politics through norms of care, solidarity, hospitality, and shared responsibility. Rather than depicting international affairs as impersonal systems of competition, these metaphors recast them as relationships among recognizable human actors.

However, from a critical perspective, empathetic framing risks oversimplifying conflicts by privileging emotional solidarity over structural analysis. A study of Indonesia's foreign policy toward Palestine suggests that although Indonesia expresses strong moral and symbolic support for Palestine, its ability to shape outcomes remains limited given its position as a middle power operating within wider geopolitical structures (Prabandari & Darmawan, 2026).

At a broader level, these patterns suggest a recurring tendency to frame world politics as a sphere of interpersonal connection rather than a field structured by power asymmetries, institutional limits, and strategic competition. The persuasive power of empathetic metaphor lies in its ability to recast distant political crises as immediate human experiences, thereby inviting moral engagement while leaving their wider structural constraints less visible.

4.2.3 Legitimizing National Image through Human-Centered Metaphor

Human-centered metaphors function as soft power tools, legitimizing Indonesia's image as cooperative, environmentally responsible, and welcoming. Political speeches in global forums are communicative acts as well as representational performances through which states narrate who they are and how they wish to be perceived. More specifically, they contribute to strategic narratives through which states communicate identity, values, and legitimacy to international audiences. Recent public diplomacy scholarship emphasizes that strategic narratives are central to persuasive communication because they help political actors organize identity claims and make them credible within global public discourse (Hedling, 2025). Hence, metaphor functions as a strategic resource of image management and soft power. As Nye (2021) argues, soft power refers to the ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction rather than coercion. Recent scholarship further emphasizes that soft power operates through credibility, legitimacy, public diplomacy, policy reputation, and the relational reception of national image by international audiences (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2023; Chitty et al., 2023). This view is supported by recent work on foreign government public relations, which shows that strategic narratives help governments communicate the value of their national brand and policies to foreign publics and stakeholders (Arceneaux, 2024).

Interpersonal metaphors expressed through phrases such as 'friend to all' and 'one human family' position Indonesia as cooperative, peaceful, inclusive, and globally engaged.

This rhetorical framing also aligns with Indonesia's longstanding '*bebas aktif*' (independent and active) foreign policy tradition, which, as Yadav (2025) notes, continues to inform the current administration's diplomatic orientation.

Human body metaphors contribute a complementary dimension. The expression 'lungs of the Earth' presents Indonesia as environmentally significant and valuable through its tropical forests. In an era of climate politics, such imagery allows ecological resources to function as diplomatic assets. Meanwhile, the expression 'in our DNA' frames hospitality and openness to cooperation as intrinsic national traits rather than contingent policy choices. Similarly, the phrase 'with open arms' reinforces an image of Indonesia as welcoming, partnership-oriented, and receptive to international collaboration.

From a CMA perspective, these representations are ideological because they organize political meaning around socially desirable beliefs about cooperation, responsibility, and moral legitimacy. Through the metaphor of friendship, family, openness, and embodied care, Indonesia is represented both as a state actor and as a humane and trustworthy member of the international community. As Mio (1997) notes, metaphors can resonate with latent symbolic representations operating below the level of conscious awareness, which helps explain why such imagery often carries persuasive force. Human-centered metaphors therefore legitimize Indonesia's global role by normalizing values of cooperation, responsibility, and moral legitimacy.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that human-centered metaphors significantly shape representations of international politics, humanitarian concerns, environmental responsibility, national development, and identity in Prabowo Subianto's speeches. By employing metaphors of interpersonal relationships and the human body, complex geopolitical realities are translated into familiar domains of friendship, family, embodiment, and emotion. These patterns confirm that metaphor systematically organizes political meaning.

Two dominant tendencies emerge: international relations are framed as human relationships, while sociopolitical realities are understood through bodily functions and gestures. These patterns make abstract issues, diplomacy, environmental responsibility, humanitarian concern, and national identity, more concrete and accessible. The study contributes to political metaphor scholarship by showing how human-centered metaphors function as cognitive, rhetorical, and ideological resources in diplomatic discourse, while also demonstrating the usefulness of Critical Metaphor Analysis in linking linguistic patterns with political meaning.

Critically, these metaphors foreground cooperation, solidarity, openness, and legitimacy while obscuring strategic competition and structural asymmetries. They foreground cooperation, solidarity, openness, and moral legitimacy, while backgrounding strategic competition, structural asymmetries, and political contestation. Thus, the speeches construct Indonesia as cooperative, peace-oriented, globally engaged, and morally legitimate.

This study is limited to English-language speeches delivered during the first year of Prabowo Subianto's presidency. Future research should compare metaphors use across leaders, contexts, and languages to examine cultural variation and geopolitical framing.

Longitudinal studies could trace how metaphors evolved with shifting domestic priorities and international circumstances.

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AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN EFL READING CLASSROOM: EFFECTS ON STUDENTS' COMPREHENSION AND MOTIVATION

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Abstract

This study aimed to find out the effect of using authentic materials in learning English, especially for reading comprehension. Besides, the students' motivation in reading was also explored. This study employed a quantitative experimental design using a one-group pre-test/post-test approach. The population consisted of 11 first-grade classes at a senior high school in Langsa. One class of 25 students was selected through purposive sampling as the sample. A reading test in the form of multiple choices and a student response questionnaire were administered to collect the data. The results showed that there is a good improvement in students' reading comprehension. This finding is supported by the difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. Students' average scores improved from 56.8 (pre-test) to 80.8 (post-test), surpassing the minimum competency standard. Students also reported increased interest, motivation, and vocabulary acquisition when using authentic materials. Findings suggest that authentic materials can enhance reading comprehension and student motivation. This study contributes to EFL pedagogy by demonstrating the effectiveness of authentic materials in improving reading comprehension and motivation. However, the study was limited to one class and may not generalize to broader populations.

Keywords: *authentic materials; reading comprehension; students' motivation; teaching reading*

1. Introduction

Reading is a fundamental skill in language teaching and learning. Reading is an important skill in EFL contexts for acquiring new vocabulary. The large amount of new vocabulary acquired makes it easier for students to understand the text quickly. Apart from that, reading is also one of the ways to create students critical thinking. Students can grow their critical thinking through different reading process (Arifin, 2020), materials (Himawan, Suyata, & Kusmiatun, 2024), strategies (Yulian, 2021). Through reading process, the students could raise questions related to information from the text and look for solutions to questions that cross their mind.

Students in learning English are targeted to be able to understand the meaning and implied messages of the text through reading. It is in line with English learning target in high school level, particularly in phase E, mentioned that students are expected to be able to

understand and infer information implied from reading written texts (Hermawan, Haryati & Suryaningsih, 2022). Therefore, it is important for students to master reading skill to make it easier to achieve learning goals and build critical thinking for students.

However, recently learning reading has been considered ineffective and difficult to master due to several factors. Observations through informal interviews that the author has conducted with one of the English teachers at some senior high schools in Langsa revealed that most students have difficulty understanding the content of texts. As a result, students struggle with reading comprehension due to limited vocabulary, overreliance on dictionaries, and low motivation, resulting in average scores of 76–78. Some previous studies also indicated the same problems, such as students cannot understand the meaning of the text well as a whole for long paragraphs (Fitriana, 2018), students still lack of vocabulary and background knowledge (Asra, Rahmiati, Fadlia, & Mawaddah, 2026; Wijayanti, 2020), and students use ineffective reading strategies (Yulian, 2021).

To overcome difficulties in understanding reading, one idea is to integrate the authentic materials into collaborative learning process. Even though debates are still raging on why it should or should not be included in learning, it is clear that those authors who support the use of authentic material have a common understanding that the authentic materials exposed students to the language in authentic setting. As Wong, Kwok, and Choi (1995, p. 318) stated that through the use of authentic materials, students can achieve an understanding of how language is used properly in real life. Therefore, the teachers need to consider using it during teaching English, especially for reading skill.

Other recent studies also found the benefit of authentic materials, for instance the use of authentic materials was effective in training students reading comprehensions skills (Jihad, Nasriandi, & Jusriati, 2023), the authentic materials can increase students' reading ability and achieve curriculum learning targets (Sukmawati, 2020), and students' interest in reading increases after implementing learning with authentic (Rama, 2020). Therefore, authentic materials are recommended to be applied in English learning to help students understand reading texts and increase students' interest in reading. The previous studies show authentic materials improve motivation and comprehension, but few have examined their integration with collaborative learning in senior high school contexts.

This study used the collaborative learning method to achieve joint learning goals by carrying out the learning in groups. The use of collaborative learning in reading using authentic materials can encourage social interaction and improve communication and critical thinking skills. Collaboration in learning allows students to discuss and understand text better, as well as motivate students due to the use of authentic material. Thus, this study aims to investigate the effect of authentic materials, integrated with collaborative learning, on students' reading comprehension and motivation. This study contributes to EFL pedagogy by demonstrating how authentic materials, combined with collaborative learning, can enhance reading comprehension and motivation among high school students in Aceh.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Authentic Teaching Material

Authentic materials are texts created for real-life communication, not specifically for pedagogy (Berardo, 2006, p. 60). It means that a text can be said to be authentic if the material is created with a real communicative purpose where the author has a special message to convey to the reader using the original source language and is not intended for

teaching. In connection with this explanation, Adam (1995) stated that in proving that a material is original, it can be proven by looking at who created it and to whom it was distributed. It can be said to be original if it was created by a native speaker with the target being the native speaker himself.

Authentic material is the right thing for students to use to improve language skills because it presents material that leads to the real world in a certain context. Peacock (1997, p. 144) stated that authentic material is material that is created and has been distributed to achieve several social goals in a language community. It shows authentic material that was originally intended for real communicative purposes, such as newspapers, advertisements, news reports, songs and others. Although authentic material is not designed for pedagogical purposes, the use of authentic materials is recommended for pedagogical use, one of which is teaching a language.

The use authentic materials in language teaching can increase students learning motivation by presenting various types of authentic context. Authentic materials present interesting material and gives students the opportunity to obtain real information and find out more about what is happening in the world around them. Guariento and Morely (2001: 347) stated that students generate a sense of accomplishment in gathering important information from real texts in a new or different language and can be very motivating. Besides, the authentic texts also bring students closer to the target culture, making the learning process more enjoyable and motivating (Peacock, 1997, p. 144). Therefore, authentic material has an effect on increasing students' learning motivation by exposing students to "real" language.

In applying authentic materials, teachers need to pay attention to various aspects in order to make the materials used are in accordance with students' needs and provide results in accordance with learning outcomes. Berardo (2006, p. 60) stated that there are three main aspects in choosing authentic materials used in the classroom, including: (a) suitability of content: in this case teachers need to pay attention to the suitability of the content that will be used in class, such as choosing texts with themes that are interesting, motivate students and suit students' needs; (b) exploitation: in terms of exploitation, refers to how a material can be applied and utilized to improve students' abilities in the learning process; and (c) readability: readability refers to the level of difficulty of a text. Likewise, the number of new vocabulary and new structures contained in the text.

2.2 Reading Comprehension

Reading is the process to understand the meaning in the text. According to Patterson (2016), reading is a meaning-making process. Creating meaning in reading will link information and knowledge that is already known, then it can predict what will happen and synchronize it with new information. Therefore, reading is a process of constructing meaning through dynamic interactions that occur between the background knowledge of the reader, the message suggested by written language, and the context of the situation in reading. This shows that reading activities are related to the formation of meaning.

Furthermore, Berardo (2006, p. 60) stated that in reading there is a process where the reader constructs a meaning by reading each word, letter by letter, then examining the vocabulary and syntax in detail. It shows how someone can understand and interpret the

meaning of a written text in obtaining information. This activity is called comprehension of reading or reading comprehension.

Boarman, Klingner, and Vaughn (2007) stated that reading comprehension is a process of interaction between readers and the background they bring to a text, such as knowledge and application of strategies. It shows that the process of reading comprehension is related to the background knowledge that the reader has and relates it to new texts by applying the strategies they have to achieve a faster and more precise understanding of the meaning.

Reading comprehension means understanding the meaning, assessing, and utilizing information messages and ideas obtained through dialogue between the writer and the reader (Ardiana, 2015, p. 140). It shows that in reading comprehension there is an interaction process between two people, namely the reader and the writer through the medium of written text. Reading comprehension is also interpreted as a complex process where readers use their intellectual abilities to understand the meaning of a text. It shows the importance of the quality of a text as a determinant of reading comprehension.

For students, reading is an inevitable activity in learning. They need to master reading skill since reading ability is one way for someone to get various kinds of information and knowledge (Fitriana, 2018, p. 43). To measure students reading comprehension, some indicators have been proposed. King and Stanley (1989) stated that there are several indicators in reading comprehension, especially in descriptive texts for students, including main idea: students can get the main idea or ideas from a text; finding factual: students can obtain the general structure and detailed messages from a text; references: students can understand references from a text; conclusion: students are able to create a summary of a text; and vocabulary: students can understand the meaning of the vocabulary found in the text.

3. Research Method

The method used in this study was quantitative experimental research with a one group pre-test post-test design. This design allowed the study to measure the effect of authentic materials on students' reading comprehension and motivation. Experimental research tests cause-and-effect relationships between variables (Creswell, 2012), while a one group pre-test post-test design is used to measure the actions of a group before and after implementing an experiment (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010). Thus, this study employed a one-group pre-test/post-test design, measuring students' reading comprehension before and after treatment.

The population consisted of 11 first-grade classes at a senior high school in Langsa. One class (X-10) with 25 students was selected purposively, based on high motivation and lack of prior exposure to authentic materials. The purposive sampling is a technique for selecting samples based on the researcher's special considerations (Creswell, 2012). The participation was voluntary, and students' identities were anonymized. The study was conducted with school approval.

In collecting the data, this study used test as instruments in the form of pretest and posttest. The pre-test and post-test are presented in multiple choice form with 10 questions with choices (A, B, C, D and E). The questions related to the type of text and are focused on understanding related to the content of the text. The pre-test and post-test consisted of 10

multiple-choice items assessing comprehension of descriptive texts. Items were validated by expert review.

The pre-test given in the first meeting. After that, the treatment involved three sessions using authentic texts (reviews and reports) from Calameo Magazine and The New York Times, selected based on student interest in football and film. The selected reading materials were based on an initial study in which students chose the top two topics, namely football and film. The treatments used authentic reading materials was carried out in 3 meetings. After provided treatment using authentic material, in the last meeting students did a final test (post-test). The final procedure, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding their responses to the use of authentic material in learning reading. The questionnaire assessed students' perceptions of interest, motivation, and vocabulary development when using authentic materials.

The data obtained was administered in the form of a frequency table or score distribution. The categories are adopted from Sugiyono (2008, p. 182) as follows: *very high* (85-100), *high* (69-84), *moderate* (53-68), *low* (37-52), and *very low* (20-36). For the first step, the data were compared to the KKM (*kriteria ketuntasan minimum* [minimum criteria of mastery learning]) score of 75. Then, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and paired-sample t-tests in SPSS v.30 to determine significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores. The result of t-test was the final indicator to measure the significant differences between pre-test and post-test by comparing both scores to know the effect of using authentic materials on students reading comprehension achievement.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Students Reading Comprehension Achievement

The results showed the positive effect of using authentic material in teaching reading skill. Based on the data analysis, the highest score obtained in the pre-test was 70 and the highest score in post-test is 100. It is also in line with the average scores of post-test (80.8) that is higher than pre-test (56.8) with the difference of 24 points (see Table 3). In the pre-test, the frequency of reading comprehension scores on the pre-test is low and has not yet reached the KKM score. The distribution of pre-test score can be seen in the following table.

Table 1.

Distribution Frequency of Students' Pre-Test

Class Interval	Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
69-84	70	High	6	24
53-68	60	Moderate	9	36
37-52	50	Low	6	24
	40		4	16
Σ			25	100

The data in Table 1 above showed that the highest score was 70 within *high* category obtained as many as 6 students. Then the lowest score obtained on the pre-test was 40

within *low* category as many as 4 students (16%). Yet, there were also 6 students (24%) who got score of 50 and it was still in *low* category. Thus, there were 10 students (40%) in total who got low score. Besides, there were 9 students (36%) with *moderate* category. It means that even though there were 6 students that got good score of 70 in the higher category. Yet, they also could not pass the KKM score of 75. In other words, there is none of students that achieved KKM score.

To solve this, the authentic material was applied in their reading comprehension activity. One researcher acted as teacher taught English subject for the students using authentic text as a material for reading activities. After five treatments using authentic text, in the last meeting the teacher conducted again the test as the post-activity. The results of post-test score can be seen in the Table 2 below.

Table 2.
Distribution Frequency of Students' Post-Test

Class Interval	Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
85-100	100	Very High	4	16
69-84	80	High	16	64
	70		4	16
53-68	60	Moderate	1	4
Σ			25	100

Based on the Table 2 above, the highest score obtained in the post-test was 100 with category *very high* category of 4 students (16%), while the lowest score obtained was 60 within *moderate* category with only one student (4%). Then, there were 16 students (64%) got score of 80 and 4 students (16%) with score of 70 within *high* category. Only one student (4%) was still in *moderate* category. Even though there were 5 students did not pass the KKM score, four of them are within *high* category. In contrast, there were 20 students (80%) passed the KKM score in post-test. The results indicate a significant improvement in reading comprehension following the use of authentic materials. In other words, this data showed that there is a good influence of using authentic material on students' reading comprehension achievement. To know whether the improvement significant or not, the data of pre-test and post-test are administrated into the following table.

Table 3.
Analysis of Pre-Test and Post Test Scores

Score	N	Σ	M
Pre-Test	25	1420	56.8
Post-Test	25	2020	80.8
Gain		600	24

Based on the Table 3 above, it showed that the average student score on the pre-test is 56.8, while the average score on the post-test is 80.8. It can be concluded that there is a high increase in the average score on the students' pre-test and post-test. In other words, students' reading comprehension achievement scores increased before and after using authentic material.

To test the hypothesis, this study used t-test formula to determine the significance of the difference between pre-test and post-test results. For significance, this study used significance values of 5% ($\alpha=0.05$) and 1% ($\alpha=0.01$). As a result, based on the statistical analysis of the t-test, it showed that the t-observation value is 19.165 and the degree of freedom (*df*) is 24. The results of the t-test values are then consulted in the t-table both at the 5% level with a significant level (2.064) and at significant level 1% (2.797). It showed the results either at the 5% or 1% significance level with the t-observed value is higher than the t-table. It means that there is a significant difference between two scores. The calculation results are presented in Table 4 as follows.

Table 4.
t-Score Results

t-test	t-table	
19.165	5%	1%
	2.064	2.797

Based on the data in the Table 4 above, it can be seen that the t-test value is higher than the table-test value. In this regard, it showed that there is a significant difference between the results of students' pre-test and post-test scores in reading comprehension after using authentic material. It means that the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted and the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. Therefore, it can be said that the use of authentic materials in learning English can improve students' reading comprehension achievements.

4.1.2 Students Responses of Using Authentic Materials

The questionnaire contains student responses to learning English using authentic material. Students filled out the questionnaire at the final meeting after taking the posttest. The following table showed the results of the student questionnaire responses to the use of authentic materials in learning English in class X-10.

Table 5.
Students Responses of Using Authentic Materials

No.	Statements/ Questions	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	I am interested in learning using Authentic Materials	0	0	7	18	0
2.	Authentic Materials made easier to learning reading	0	0	2	12	11
3.	Authentic Materials made feel more motivated to read	0	0	3	14	8
4.	Authentic Materials expands knowledge of new vocabulary	0	0	2	23	0
5.	Learning using Authentic Materials is fun	0	0	4	9	12
6.	The Vocabulary in Authentic Materials is easy to remember	0	0	6	11	8
7.	I enjoy learning using Authentic Materials	0	0	7	18	0
8.	I am not interested learning using Authentic Materials	5	16	4	0	0
9.	Authentic Materials helps me more confident in English	0	0	5	14	6
10.	Authentic materials expand my knowledge in understanding any situation	0	0	6	14	5

Note: SD=strongly disagree; D=disagree; N=neutral; A=agree; SA=strongly agree

Table 5 above showed that students feel interested in learning using authentic materials, as evidenced by student responses to statements 1 and 8. From statement 1, it showed that 72% (18) of students agree and 28% (7) of them are neutral. Furthermore, in statement 8 student responses showed that 20% (5) of them is strongly disagree, 64% (16) of them is disagree and 16% (4) of them is neutral. Then, the student's response in statement 2 showed that 44% (11) of them is strongly agree, 48% (12) of them is agree and 8% (2) of them is neutral. Next, student responses to statement 3 showed that 32% (8) of them is strongly agree, 56% (14) of them is agree and 12% (3) of them is neutral regarding the use of authentic materials.

The notion that the students got motivated in learning using authentic material is also supported by students' responses in statement 5 which showed 48% (12) of students is strongly agree, 36% (9) of them is agree and 16% (4) of them is neutral. It also indicated that the students also had fun during learning using authentic materials. Apart from being fun, learning using authentic materials were also comfortable and helped students become more confident in speaking English. This is shown in statements 7 and 9. In statement 7, student responses showed that 72% (18) of students is agree and 28% (7) of them is neutral. Then, statement 9 showed that 24% (6) of them is strongly agree, 56% (14) of them is agree and 20% (5) of them is neutral.

Furthermore, students' positive responses were seen regarding the use of authentic materials for improving new vocabulary. They said that it was easy to remember the vocabulary. As a result, it could increase students' knowledge and understanding. This is proven by student responses to statements 4, 6 and 10. In statement 4, student responses showed that 92% (23) of them is agree and only 8% (2) of them is neutral. Then in statement 6, student responses showed that 32% (8) of them is strongly agree, 44% (11) of them is agree and only 24% (6) of them is neutral. Finally, on statement 10 the remaining responses showed that 20% (5) of them is strongly agree, 56% (14) of them is agree and 24% (6) of them is neutral.

The data above showed that most students reported increased interest, motivation, confidence, and vocabulary acquisition when using authentic materials. It increased their interest in reading, improved their motivation to learn, increased self-confidence, made their learning easier, and expanded their vocabulary knowledge which can help students understand text reading more easily. In other words, the authentic materials have a good influence on improving students' reading comprehension.

4.2 Discussion

The results show that many students are very interested and enthusiastic in the learning process when using authentic materials. During the learning activity, the students involved actively by asking many questions related to the reading theme. In this research, researchers used collaborative methods. This also increases the act of student in working together. Many students stated they prefer learning in groups because they can work together to exchange ideas in discussing a topic. Students' enthusiasm was seen when researchers distributed authentic texts and introduced authentic materials to students. This is done by adjusting the sustainability, exploitability and presentation factors of the

application of authentic materials in learning. As a result, most students enthusiastically mentioned examples of authentic materials.

Students also actively expressed their knowledge regarding the material to be discussed, because some students are interested and know the background of the topic to be studied. This raises students' curiosity about the authentic text provided. Therefore, the students are enthusiastic in completing assignments directed by researchers by understanding the reading text. Students reported positive engagement and enjoyment during the learning process. Students actively work together with each other to understand the reading text.

The application of authentic material helps students understand the text. The authentic texts bring students closer to the target culture, making the learning process more enjoyable and motivating (Peacock, 1997) and through the use of authentic materials students can achieve an understanding of how language is used properly in real life (Wong, Kwok, & Choi, 1995). It means that authentic material presents real language learning with real goals. Apart from that, students can easily understand the text when they are used to getting new vocabulary in each lesson. Students also acknowledged their knowledge of the text topic being studied. This helped students understand the text because they already have a picture that they know beforehand. This study contributes by integrating authentic materials with collaborative learning, demonstrating their combined effect on comprehension and motivation.

5. Conclusion

The use of authentic materials in English learning has an influence on increasing students' reading comprehension. This was obtained based on the pre-test and post-test results, which showed that authentic material had an influence on students' reading comprehension scores. An increase in student test scores was observed after learning with authentic materials. Scores improved significantly, confirming the effectiveness of authentic materials.

Furthermore, the use of authentic material increased students' reading motivation and expanded students' English vocabulary, making it easier for students to understand the content of the text. The results of the questionnaire also showed students' positive responses to the use of authentic materials. Students revealed that the use of authentic material increased their motivation to read, made it easier to learn English, expanded vocabulary, and helped increase their confidence in using English. Students also reported positive engagement and enjoyment during the learning process. These findings align with prior studies (Peacock, 1997; Wong, Kwok & Choi, 1995) and extend them by demonstrating effectiveness in the Aceh senior high school context.

This study contributes by integrating authentic materials with collaborative learning, demonstrating their combined effect on comprehension and motivation in senior high school contexts. Overall, authentic materials significantly improved reading comprehension and motivation, supporting their use in EFL pedagogy. However, the findings are limited by the small sample size and short intervention period, which may affect generalizability. So, future studies should examine long-term effects of authentic materials across diverse schools and explore their integration with digital platforms.

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CHILDREN'S EMPOWERMENT IN *THE LITTLE PRINCE*: A LITERARY ANALYSIS BASED ON ANSHORI'S FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Previous studies on Antoine de Saint Exupéry's *The Little Prince* have predominantly focused on its symbolism and philosophical meanings, leaving the dimensions of children's empowerment underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to examine how empowerment dimensions are depicted in *The Little Prince*, as the main character, through a multidimensional perspective. Employing a qualitative textual analysis design, this study adopts Anshori's (2016) conceptualization of children's empowerment focuses on the children's thoughts, actions, and emotional experiences. The primary data source is the novella, focusing on narrative events and character interactions that illustrate empowerment. Within the literary analysis framework, the researcher served as the primary instrument. The findings show the character embodies existential empowerment beyond conventional child agency. The Little Prince demonstrates intellectual independence, responsibility, and emotional sensitivity, which collectively shape a multidimensional conception of empowerment. Furthermore, this study of children's literature challenges the view that children are passive figures and highlights the text's critique of adult rationalism and materialism. In doing so, it highlights the pedagogical significance of literary texts in fostering reflective, ethically grounded individuals.

Keywords: *children's empowerment; children's literature; literary analysis; The Little Prince.*

1. Introduction

Children's literature plays a significant role in education and development, functioning as both enjoyment and a medium for meaning making. Through narrative engagement, children construct connections between fictional events and real-life experiences, helping them interpret and make sense of those experiences (Leland et al., 2022). In this process, literature broadens children's perspectives, stimulates imagination, and cultivates critical capacities such as curiosity and problem-solving. It also represents human behavior, including moral values and empathy. Through these depictions, children learn interpersonal relationships and the universality of emotional experience (Johnson, 2023). Consequently, literature equips children with both cognitive and affective resources to navigate the complexities of their social worlds.

Children's literature has evolved into a powerful educational medium, shaping behavior, psychological well-being, cultural awareness, and cognitive growth (Ismail, 2023). As edutainment, it integrates instruction with engagement, enabling children to internalize

values meaningfully. This integrative function positions literature as a significant tool for fostering children to internalize moral values more effectively through engaging and meaningful experiences (Pulimeno et al., 2020). In this sense, children's literature can be understood as a site of empowerment, where young readers are encouraged to actively interpret and respond to their experiences.

Beyond its focus on empowerment, children's literature has often been shaped by adult-centric perspectives, positioning children as passive recipients (Nodelman, 1992; Gulfusarak, 2014; Kurnia et al., 2024). Works like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* illustrate how children's voices are marginalized, illustrating the persistence of hierarchical power relations between adults and children (Kurnia et al., 2024). Such portrayals reinforce the construction of childhood as inferior and dependent. This condition is shaped by the significant involvement of adults in the authorship, review, and circulation of literary works, which reinforces unequal power relations between children and adult stakeholders (Sarland, 1999).

In recent children's literature development, representations of children more emphasize agency and autonomy rather than passivity and dependence. (Limantara & Soelistyo, 2025; Mathis, 2015). Anshori (2016) defines empowerment as granting authority, power, or ability to individuals. In the context of children's literature, this change portrays children as active sociological agents and they are capable of understanding, making decisions, and determining their own life choices. This perspective is relevant in works like *The Little Prince*, which challenge conventional views of childhood. As a unique and philosophical work that can be appreciated across different age groups, the novella portrayed a child figure who perceives the world through the heart, in contrast to the rigid and unimaginative outlook of adults (Hale & Fox, 2013).

Previous studies on *The Little Prince* have largely concentrated on its symbolism, moral values, ecological concerns, and philosophical themes. Despite the richness of these scholarly contributions, the portrayal of the child protagonist as an empowered agent remains underexplored, particularly through an integrated framework that examines cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions of empowerment. Such an investigation is important because it reveals how literary texts construct children's capacity for independent thinking, meaningful action, and emotional understanding. Therefore, this study aims to examine the representation of empowerment in *The Little Prince* through the protagonist's thoughts, actions, and feelings. In doing so, it contributes to children's literature studies by advancing a multidimensional perspective on child empowerment and agency, thereby moving beyond traditional symbolic and philosophical interpretations. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How is cognitive empowerment represented through the thoughts of the Little Prince?
2. How is behavioral empowerment represented through the actions of the Little Prince?
3. How is affective empowerment represented through the feelings and emotional experiences of the Little Prince?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Children's Literature

As argued by Hunt (1998), children's literature cannot be viewed merely as a form of entertainment, as it plays a crucial role in shaping social, cultural, and ideological perspectives. However, the figure of the child represented in such texts is not neutral, but rather a cultural construct shaped by adult assumptions and interests (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1998). This dynamic leads to what Nodelman (1992) describes as the "colonization" of childhood, in which adult authors position child characters within specific subject roles to

encourage the acceptance of values aligned with adult ideologies. From this perspective, empowerment in *The Little Prince* can be understood as Saint-Exupéry's attempt to offer an alternative subject position—one that challenges superficial adult perspectives while still operating within the linguistic and structural constraints of adult authorship, which remain intelligible across diverse age groups.

This ideological dimension of children's literature has important pedagogical implications, particularly in relation to how meaning is constructed and internalized by young readers. As a pedagogical medium, the quality of children's literature becomes a critical consideration. According to Johnson (2023), narrative elements such as language style, setting, characterization, plot, and theme play a central role in shaping how meaning is produced and received. Among these, characterization is especially influential, as children tend to engage deeply with literary figures and model their understanding of values and behaviours accordingly (Lukens, 1990). The portrayal of characters as brave, reflective, and independent can thus function as a mechanism to reinforce certain ideologies.

Consequently, the selection of children's texts requires critical attention to avoid reproducing stereotypes about unequal power relations (Ismail, 2023), especially given the historical tendency of some narratives to position children as subordinate figures rather than as empowered subjects.

2.2 Children's Empowerment

A growing body of research has demonstrated the applicability of empowerment theory based on Anshori's (2016) concept. Across diverse texts, child characters are consistently represented as active agents who confront family, social, and moral conflicts through various forms of engagement, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, ethical reflection, and interpersonal care (Anshori, 2016; Suryadi & Dariyana, 2022; Anshori & Khoiriyah, 2018; Kurnia et al., 2024). Collectively, these studies affirm that children in literary texts can be represented as active agents capable of moral reasoning, decision-making, and social engagement.

These studies provide comprehensive insights; they predominantly frame empowerment as combination of cognitive, behavior, and affective dimensions. This perspective can be explained more clearly by the concept of the *Cognitive Triangle*, which conceptualizes thoughts, emotions, and actions as mutually influential components of human experience (Beck, 2011). Within this framework, what children do, how they think, and how they feel are deeply interconnected, as decisions emerge from interpretation, and interpretation is shaped by emotional engagement. Without considering these internal dimensions, empowerment risks being reduced to mere agency, rather than a multidimensional process of subject formation.

In this regard, empowerment must be distinguished from agency. According to Drydyk (2013), agency refers to state of affairs, specifically, the extent to which a person is involved in an action or has the scope to achieve goals they value. On the other hand, empowerment is a process of change that can produce results, and that change will improve their lives. Thus, empowerment is not limited to what children do but extends to how they understand themselves and their lives.

The Little Prince offers a distinctively philosophical articulation of empowerment. This novella constructs empowerment through introspection, emotional depth, and existential reflection. The child protagonist embodies a form of childlike consciousness that resists negative social conditioning and instead prioritizes meaning making through affective and

relational understanding. Susilo (2025) notes that the main character engages with existential questions affectively, privileging the heart over rational logic. Furthermore, the enduring significance of the text lies in its dual audience, as it integrates visual creativity and philosophical complexity, allowing it to resonate with both children and adults.

2.3 *The Little Prince*

The Little Prince (*Le Petit Prince*) by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is a French children's novella first published in 1943 and subsequently translated into more than 250 languages (Hasanah & Manugeran, 2025). The work is widely recognized for its distinctive narrative, which conveys enduring moral themes such as responsibility, empathy, and human relationships. In addition to its thematic depth, the novella has achieved remarkable global recognition, ranking among the best-selling books worldwide alongside works such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Raihani & Sutrisno, 2025). Beyond its narrative appeal, the text is deeply informed by the author's lived experiences as a pilot and his reflective engagement with human nature (Hasanah & Manugeran, 2025). Written during wartime, Saint Exupéry infused the novella with existential reflection, portraying the Prince as a symbol of authenticity and childlike consciousness (Pratama & Sugandi, 2025).

Given its enduring popularity and thematic richness, scholarly engagement with *The Little Prince* spans a wide range of analytical perspectives. Previous studies have explored symbolic representations—such as the rose, the fox, and various adult characters—as vehicles of moral and philosophical meaning (Raihani & Sutrisno, 2025), alongside ecological readings (Mutmainnah & Qadriani, 2025), linguistic analyses (Azizah et al., 2025), and historically informed interpretations, including postcolonial perspectives (Nabipour, 2023). While these approaches provide valuable insights into the text's symbolic, environmental, and linguistic dimensions, relatively limited attention has been given to how the narrative constructs the child protagonist as an empowered agent. In particular, the role of the text in fostering agency, self-awareness, and personal growth in the child character remains underexplored.

Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a children's empowerment framework to re-examine *The Little Prince* beyond its commonly discussed moral and symbolic dimensions. This study applies empowerment theory, thought, action, and emotional awareness to show how the Prince is constructed as an active agent. By analyzing the Prince's interactions and decisions, this study aims to demonstrate how the text constructs a child figure who is capable of understanding complex relationships and navigating existential challenges, often with greater insight than adult characters. Therefore, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of children's literature as a site where empowerment is not only represented but also narratively enacted.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed qualitative textual analysis to examine representations of children's empowerment in *The Little Prince*. Textual analysis is defined as an approach aimed at examining how individuals interpret and construct meaning from the world around them (McKee, 2003). In this context, this strategy was applied to explore and interpret the character's thoughts, actions, and feelings as reflected in the narrative. This method emphasizes process, holistic interpretation, and meaning rather than quantifiable measures.

It is grounded in a holistic mode of interpretation that seeks to understand phenomena in their contextual and integrated complexity.

3.2 Research Instrument and Data Collections

Anshori's (2016) empowerment framework served as the primary analytical lens, guiding interpretation of thought, action, and feeling. Guided by this framework, the research focuses on examining how these dimensions are represented. The framework functions as the primary analytical instrument, enabling a systematic interpretation of the character's cognitive, behavioral, and affective expressions.

Data were collected through iterative close reading, note-taking, and identification of excerpts aligned with empowerment dimensions. Excerpts were coded in a classification table, categorizing quotations under cognitive, behavioral, or affective dimensions. To enhance analytical rigor, the text was read repeatedly, allowing for the refinement of categories and the consistent alignment of data with the research focus.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed Miles et al.'s (2014) interactive model: collection, condensation, display, and conclusion verification. Data collection involved systematic identification and selection of relevant textual excerpts from *The Little Prince*. This was followed by data condensation, a process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the data in accordance with the three dimensions of Children's Empowerment. In this stage, data were refined to ensure consistent alignment with the empowerment framework. Subsequently, the data were organized and presented in a structured tabular format to facilitate systematic comparison and interpretation. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions, in which the researcher interpreted the data and continuously refined the findings to ensure consistency and analytical coherence. In addition, to ensure the credibility of the data, the interpretive process was achieved. This process was supported through peer debriefing, involving regular consultation with a lecturer in English Language Department of UII, which allowed for critical reflection, validation of interpretations, and minimization of subjective bias.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Thought Empowerment

4.1.1 Thought Empowerment through Knowledge and Ideas

When *The Little Prince* manages to grasp an abstract concept that adults cannot understand, this shows that the response is an exercise of adult authority to dominate and reshape childhood. While adults see only what is obvious, the Little Prince immediately recognizes the narrator's childhood drawing for what it truly is.

The Little Prince's ability to express his own opinions without following the dictates of adults demonstrates intellectual independence. This intellectual independence shows that The Little Prince is capable of observing his surroundings through the background knowledge and imagination he possesses. In contrast where adults focus solely on logical matters, The Little Prince does not judge things spontaneously; he sees with his heart.

"What is essential is invisible to the eye" (Saint Exupery: 48)

This statement challenges empiricist adult logic by privileging emotional and intuitive knowledge over rational perception. This rigid form of adult rationality ultimately compels the narrator to relinquish his childhood potential (Raihani & Sutrisno, 2025).

Continuing the discussion on adult behavior, the encounters across planets function as a critique of adult rationality, where authority, materialism, and ego are exposed as socially constructed absurdities. Every time he visits them, he always thinks that these adults are illogical.

"The grown-ups are very strange" (*Saint Exupery*: 26)

The Little Prince forms unique opinions and conceptions that criticize power, arrogance, and materialism through his independent observation (Azzahra & Ningtyas, 2024). This kind of criticism actually represents Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's anxiety about World War II in 1943 that conveys a sense of alienation and inner silence. The book's dedication to Léon Werth, who is described as suffering from cold and hunger in France, shows that the serious adults of that era were often caught up in things like politics rather than caring about basic human values. In the narrative, adults are depicted as experiencing adult centric, where they only assign value to things that make them feel comfortable and ignore the emotional truths that children understand more honestly. Referring to the concept of the colonization of children's literature proposed by Nodelman (1992), the criticism presented here serves as a counter-critique directed at adults. Therefore, the actions of adults in the story—or the idea that adults are strange—reverse the social stigma associated with the perception of children's inferiority.

4.1.2 Thought Empowerment through Understanding Other's Feeling

When the pilot is in a bad mood due to his engine failure, a "*matter of life or death*" to his adult logic, the Little Prince ignores the mechanical crisis to focus on the narrator's creative spirit. He senses that drawing the sheep is a more vital act of connection than fixing the plane. This suggests that what adults perceive as urgent may not necessarily reflect deeper human needs.

"When a mystery is too overpowering, one dare not disobey. Absurd as it might seem to me, a thousand miles from any human habitation and in danger of death, I took out of my pocket a sheet of paper and my fountain-pen" (*Saint Exupery*: 7)

Adults often assume that children are incapable of understanding their feelings. However, the Little Prince understands that in isolation, far from human settlements, emotional needs are more urgent than mere mechanical repairs. A similar finding in *The Railway Children* by Anshori (2016), Bobbie, as a child, is capable of recognizing emotional distress and responding in ways that prioritize emotional relief. In certain situations, this enables individuals not only to focus on giving solutions, but also to engage in emotional regulation, thereby allowing them to find an effective resolution.

This perspective can be further illuminated by Raza (2023), whose research highlights the psychological distinctions between adults and children in constructing and prioritizing meaning. Adult cognition, often shaped by materialistic and utilitarian logic, tends to overlook or inadequately address the intrinsic human need for emotional connection. Consequently, values cantered on affect, intimacy, and togetherness are frequently marginalized within adult rational frameworks, revealing a fundamental mismatch between emotional needs and rationalist paradigms.

Furthermore, by recognizing the Pilot's distress and demanding a sheep, the Prince challenges the concept of adult-centered assumption that children are powerless and

incapable of managing their life. Shier (2012) argues that society tends to have inaccurate belief that adults are superior, whereas children are positioned as inferior, dependent, and powerless. However, when the Prince ignores the adult logic of the engine failure, he effectively refuses adult dominance by rejecting the Pilot's perspective of what is actually important. Instead of being steered to adult expectations of seriousness, the Prince establishes his own creative priority.

4.2 Action Empowerment

4.2.1 Action Empowerment through Doing Favor

Within the shared social environment of adults and children, agency is not exclusive to adults; children also play a meaningful role in contributing and maintaining their immediate surroundings. In *The Little Prince*, the child protagonist demonstrates a high degree of self-regulation, particularly through his understanding of discipline and responsibility. His care for the rose and removal of baobabs for saving his planet illustrate responsibility and foresight, aligning with Anshori's (2016) action empowerment.

"And when he watered the flower for the last time, and prepared to place her under the shelter of her glass globe, he realized that he was very close to tears" (Saint-Exupéry - p.22)

This episode illustrates his proactive agency that reinforces the representation of the child as capable of responsibility, foresight, and purposeful action. He also waters his Rose, places a screen to protect her from the wind, or puts her under a glass globe, he is providing physical assistance.

These actions extend beyond routine activities and instead reflect a sustained sense of self-awareness in managing daily obligations. This aligns with the concept of action empowerment proposed by Anshori (2016) also Drydyk (2013), which emphasizes the cultivation of responsible habits as a foundation for undertaking more complex roles in the future. By framing his duties as matters of discipline and care, the protagonist demonstrates a heightened level of agency, which is comparable to the empowered child figures in *The Railway Children*, where Bobbie, Peter, and Phyllis actively perform daily tasks to ease their parents' burdens.

Furthermore, the protagonist's ability to distinguish between beneficial and harmful elements in his planet reflects cognitive independence and forms an integral part of his empowerment. He develops and applies his own interpretive framework to manage his place, without reliance on adult instruction or external authority. This individual autonomy is not only cognitive but also ethical, as it shapes how he relates to his environment. From an ecological perspective, this particular situation also resonates how *The Little Prince* offers an implicit critique of human-centered worldviews by positioning the child as a caretaker of the natural world (Mutmainnah & Qadriani, 2025). Rather than endorsing human dominance over nature, the narrative emphasizes interdependence, care, and responsibility as central ethical principles. Although the protagonist appears to assume a protective role, the text ultimately resists celebrating control or domination, instead emphasizing relational ethics between humans and the environment.

4.2.2 Action Empowerment through Bravery

According to Anshori (2016), bravery is not solely reflected in the capacity to perform actions, but also in the willingness to accept consequences. The Prince's acceptance of the

snake's bite symbolizes his existential courage and conscious choice to return to his planet. Recognizing his physical issue, The Little Prince consciously accepts this act because he wants to do what he thinks is right for the rose. The Little Prince feels a duty, towards the rose.

"You know—my flower. I am responsible for her. And she is so weak!"
(Saint-Exupéry - p.60)

This decision reflects a deliberate and value-driven form of empowerment, in which the character prioritizes love and responsibility over self-preservation. Rather than being a passive resignation, the act represents an existentially informed choice that demonstrates moral courage in confronting an irreversible consequence for the sake of a deeply held commitment.

The child protagonist's decision to return to his home planet, despite the inherent risks involved, reflects a profound form of emotional responsibility and a deliberate resolution of existential conflict. This act demonstrates that The Little Prince exercises meaningful authority over his own life choices, positioning him as an agentive subject rather than a passive character within the narrative. Consequently, these findings affirm that caring for the Rose constitutes an expression of active involvement, where children are represented as sociological actors capable of using intelligence and courage in maintaining meaningful relational bonds.

Furthermore, within the framework of Anshori (2016), bravery in *The Little Prince* extends beyond conventional notions of fearlessness to encompass the acceptance of ultimate consequences, including death, as a conscious and value-driven choice. This form of existential courage operates at a deeper level than the forms of bravery depicted in *The Railway Children*, where Peter's confession reflects moral accountability, or in narratives such as Tania's courage in confronting fear of supernatural threats. In contrast, the Little Prince's decision to embrace death in order to return to his Rose signifies a comprehensive sense of autonomy and existential power, underscoring his complete authority over the direction of his life choices.

4.3 Feeling Empowerment

4.3.1 Feeling Empowerment through Empathy

Empathy refers to the capacity to understand, share, and emotionally engage with the feelings, thoughts, and conditions of others. In *The Little Prince*, this dimension of feeling empowerment is evident in the protagonist's interaction with the narrator during the episode in which he requests a drawing of a sheep.

"No! This sheep is already very sickly. Make me another" (Saint-Exupéry – p.7)

His rejection of the image, based on the perception that the sheep appears weak or suffering, reflects a heightened affective sensitivity and interpretive awareness. Collectively, these instances illustrate that empathy in the narrative is not passive emotional resonance, but an active form of relational awareness that informs ethical judgment and action.

This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Anshori and Khoiriyah (2018) on Kanika G.'s *Tania's Monsoon Adventure*, which demonstrates that the child protagonist exhibits heightened emotional sensitivity toward the suffering of other living beings. In that study, Tania believes causing harm to animals is ethically inappropriate, as animals, like

humans, possess intrinsic life value. Collectively, these findings indicate that empathy in child characters is consistently represented through affective responses and moral concern for the well-being of others. Similarly, in *The Little Prince*, empathy is articulated through emotional attunement and ethical awareness, reinforcing the broader representation of children as morally conscious and relationally sensitive beings within literary narratives.

4.3.2 Feeling Empowerment through Unselfishness

In the narrative progression of *The Little Prince*, the child protagonist's journey across various asteroids introduces him to a range of adult figures, including a king and a businessman, each of whom embodies distinct manifestations of adult rationality oriented toward control, possession, and authority. These encounters illustrate adult obsessions with power and possession, contrasting with the Prince's care for the Rose.

"But the little prince was wondering . . . The planet was tiny. Over what could this king really rule?" (Saint-Exupéry – p.24)

"This man," the little prince said to himself, "reasons a little like my poor tippler . . ." (Saint-Exupéry – p.31)

This paradoxical condition exposes the emptiness of authority that is detached from relational and social responsibility. The Little Prince's reaction to this encounter reflects critical awareness, as he questions the legitimacy and meaning of power that is not grounded in responsibility or interpersonal connection. In this sense, the episode functions as a narrative critique of adult-centric conceptions of authority, while simultaneously reinforcing the protagonist's developing capacity for reflective judgment and ethical inquiry.

In contrast to the adult characters encountered throughout the narrative, the Little Prince's relationship with his Rose is characterized by selfless care rather than possessive ownership. He does not perceive the Rose as an object to be controlled, but as a living being that requires attention, protection, and emotional investment. His actions—watering the Rose, shielding her from the wind, and offering reassurance and affection—illustrate that the value of a relationship is grounded not in possession, but in responsibility, care, and emotional commitment. This relational orientation demonstrates a high degree of empathy and ethical sensitivity, which stands in sharp contrast to the adult characters in the story, who are predominantly driven by material possession and the pursuit of power.

Across the three dimensions of empowerment, the child protagonist of *The Little Prince* consistently embodies a child figure with significant autonomy and moral agency in thought, action, and feeling. Through his interactions with the narrator and the various experiences he undergoes during his interplanetary journey, the narrative constructs a representation of childhood that, while appearing innocent, is imbued with a form of wisdom that often exceeds that of adults. The child's mode of understanding is grounded in affective and relational perception, whereas the adult characters tend to privilege rigid rationality and material logic. This contrast is further reinforced through the depiction of adult figures who are portrayed as materialistic, arrogant, and self-centered. However, rather than being presented didactically, these traits are subtly critiqued through The Little Prince's simple yet incisive reflections and his actions as the caretaker of his planet, which expose the limitations and contradictions in adult worldviews.

Compared to prior studies on children's empowerment, this analysis extends the discussion into a more existential dimension. Whereas earlier research typically frames

empowerment in terms of everyday experiences, the present study shows that empowerment in *The Little Prince* operates at a deeper philosophical level. The protagonist is not only autonomous in his decisions but also bears profound responsibility. Moreover, he actively interrogates and critiques adult behavior, thereby positioning childhood as a site of ethical reflection rather than mere developmental immaturity.

Thus, child empowerment in this narrative functions not only as a counter-discourse to adult centrism but also as a broader critique of adult existence itself. By prioritizing fundamental human values such as care, responsibility, and emotional awareness, the novella transcends age-based categorization, making it meaningful for both children and adults. In line with this perspective, children's literature is often conceptualized as a "window of knowledge" that enables young readers to understand life through characters, illustrations, and narrative situations (Kurnia et al., 2024). Within this framework, *The Little Prince* is particularly significant, as it offers foundational ethical and emotional values that are essential for readers prior to adulthood, while simultaneously inviting adult readers to re-examine their own perspectives.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the child protagonist in *The Little Prince* can be conceptualized as an empowered child figure, whose empowerment is articulated through three interrelated dimensions: thought, action, and feeling. Here we can see that children are not merely innocent beings or passive participants in society. Rather, children are portrayed as individuals who possess intellectual agency, moral clarity, and relational awareness.

The findings contribute to children's literature studies by challenging adult-centered interpretive frameworks that often position children as incomplete beings. Instead, this study foregrounds childhood as a site of critical consciousness, thereby aligning with broader discourses on child agency and empowerment. Furthermore, the text's implicit critique of adult rationalism and materialism reveals an ideological tension in which adult-centered values are destabilized through the child's perspective.

However, this study is limited in its exclusive focus on the child protagonist, without a systematic analysis of adult characters. Consequently, the critique of adulthood embedded in the narrative remains under-explored. Future research is therefore encouraged to examine both child and adult representations using alternative theoretical frameworks to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the text. Given that *The Little Prince* is a cross-age literary work that uses childhood perspectives to reflect on adult existence, further analysis of adult characterization may enrich understanding of its ideological complexity and contribute more broadly to children's literature studies.

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EXPLORING JAPANESE POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN *MORIARTY THE PATRIOT*: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM JAMES MORIARTY'S UTTERANCES

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Abstract

This study investigates the politeness strategies employed by William James Moriarty in the anime *Moriarty the Patriot* from a pragmatic perspective to identify the types of politeness strategies used by the character and examine their communicative functions within social interactions. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the data were collected from episodes 1–11 through observation, listening, and transcription techniques. The data were then analyzed using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which classifies politeness strategies into bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The findings reveal that all four strategies appear in William's utterances, with negative politeness and positive politeness occurring most frequently. These strategies are used not only to maintain social harmony and demonstrate respect, but also to construct authority, manipulate psychological responses, and control communication in various situations. Furthermore, the study shows that Japanese politeness is highly contextual and closely connected to indirectness, social hierarchy, interpersonal relationships, and communicative intentions. This research contributes to pragmatic studies on Japanese politeness in anime, particularly within the crime-thriller genre, by highlighting the dynamic relationship between politeness, power, and psychological communication in fictional discourse.

Keywords: *Anime; Brown and Levinson; Japanese pragmatics; Moriarty the Patriot; politeness strategies; William James Moriarty.*

1. Introduction

Language conveys meaning while reflecting social and cultural values. In anthropological linguistics, language is regarded as a social practice that reflects norms, ways of thinking, and patterns of human interaction Veronika (2025). This is evidently clear in Japanese society, where language is closely intertwined with cultural values such as social hierarchy, harmony, and respect. Consequently, the choice of linguistic forms in Japanese cannot be separated from the situational context and the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee. Ignatieva & Trazanova (2022) argue that words carry moral and symbolic weight that shapes social relationships. The choice of linguistic forms in Japanese is closely related to situational context and the social relationship between speaker and addressee. Thus, Japanese language use is not merely structural but also deeply connected

to cultural values. One clear example is linguistic politeness. Li & Gao (2025), state politeness in Japanese is expressed through *keigo*, considerate expressions, and pragmatic strategies aimed at maintaining harmony. In practice, politeness functions not only as a norm of etiquette but also as a social strategy for negotiating power, social distance, and communicative goals.

As media evolves, Japanese language use can be observed not only in real-life interactions but also in popular media such as anime. Anime therefore provides a valuable source for examining how politeness strategies are represented in fictional discourse. Nesa & Rahayu (2024) state that anime symbolically reflects Japanese linguistic and cultural practices through characters, dialogue, and plotlines. It is also widely used as a resource for learning Japanese language and culture because it presents diverse contextual and communicative language styles. Consequently, anime offers relevant linguistic data for the qualitative analysis of politeness phenomena.

The anime *Moriarty the Patriot* presents a distinctive linguistic context by adapting a British social setting into Japanese through specific linguistic strategies. William James Moriarty is portrayed as an aristocratic intellectual whose rhetorical skills reflect strategic language use. In this context, linguistic choices function not only as communication tools but also as instruments for constructing intellectual authority, symbolic dominance, and psychological influence. This demonstrates that linguistic politeness in anime is not always associated with normative compliance, but can also operate as a complex pragmatic strategy.

Despite growing research on language use in anime, studies on linguistic politeness in criminal-intellectual contexts remain limited. Previous research has mainly examined honorific language in family or comedy anime, language stereotypes in comedy genres, and the educational role of anime in general such as research by Aibonotika, A., et al. (2025), language stereotypes in the comedy genre by Toşu, I (2025), or the educational role of anime in general by Nesa & Rahayu (2024). Little attention has been given to how politeness strategies are used by morally ambiguous characters who display intellectual and social superiority. This gap highlights the limited discussion of the meanings and functions of linguistic politeness in complex anime characters. Therefore, this study explores politeness strategies in a criminal-intellectual anime context and contributes to pragmatic analysis in media linguistics.

Based on the discussion above, this study examines Japanese politeness strategies in the utterances of William James Moriarty in *Moriarty the Patriot* from a pragmatic perspective. The study aims to identify the types of politeness strategies used, analyze their realization in different social contexts and relationships, and examine their communicative functions. Using a qualitative pragmatic approach, the analysis considers situational context, social relationships, and communicative intentions reflected in the character's utterances. Theoretically, this study contributes to research on Japanese politeness in anime and the pragmatic role of language in character construction. Practically, it may serve as a reference for Japanese language learning, especially in understanding the contextual use of politeness in fictional discourse.

2. Literature Review

Japanese politeness is situated within pragmatics, which examines language as a socially contextualized act. Within this framework, politeness is understood not merely as a normative expression of etiquette but also as a linguistic strategy for managing social relationships, maintaining interactional harmony, and protecting the self-image of both

speakers and addressees. Politeness in Japanese reflects general principles of courtesy and the Japanese linguistic system, including the use of keigo and indirect expressions, as well as strategies for obscuring meaning (*aimai hyougen*). Previous studies have demonstrated how these linguistic forms operate pragmatically in communication. Auliya et al. (2025) found the expression “*chotto*” in the anime “*Hyouka*” functions as a negative politeness strategy aimed at minimizing potential threats to the interlocutor. Auliya et al found result aligning with Pramita et al, (2023), who show that politeness in anime is conveyed through word choice, intonation, and implicature. Taken together, these studies suggest that Japanese politeness should be understood as a dynamic communicative practice shaped by communicative intentions and social relationships rather than as a fixed set of linguistic norms.

The representation of language in anime further demonstrates that popular media functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a site for constructing character identities and reflecting broader social values. Aibonotika, A., et al. (2025) study found that the honorific language used in the anime “*Kumichou Musume to Sewagakari*” reflects the social roles and hierarchical relationships among the characters. Meanwhile, study by Salsabilla, D., et al. (2025) examined violations of the principle of politeness in *tsundere* characters and found that breaches of politeness are actually used to portray a character. Aibonotika, A., et al. (2025). Another study with the title “Forms of Social Interaction in Yuuki Yaku’s Anime “*Jaku Chara Tomozaki-Kun*” Putri and Haryanti (2024), demonstrated that characters’ psychological backgrounds and social status significantly influence patterns of social interaction. Collectively, these studies highlight how anime reflects social roles, stereotypes, and psychological backgrounds, though most focus on comedy or youth genres rather than crime-thriller context. Few studies examine politeness strategies in morally complex characters such as William, making this study a novel contribution to pragmatic analysis in anime. This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive pragmatic analysis of how politeness strategies function not only to maintain social harmony but also to construct intellectual authority, symbolic power, and communicative intentions. Accordingly, this study views politeness as a strategic and context-dependent pragmatic phenomenon. This perspective is further supported by Hakimi (2024), who emphasized that politeness plays a crucial role in communication, particularly through the contextual use of *kotowaza* within speech practices.

2.1 Pragmatics

Pragmatics studies meaning based on context, including the relationship between speaker, addressee, and communicative purpose. In Japanese language studies, pragmatics is widely used to analyze politeness, indirectness, and implied meanings, as Japanese communication is strongly influenced by social hierarchy and interpersonal relationships. Li & Gao (2025), argued that dialogues in anime should not be understood merely as fictional linguistic expressions, but also as representations of social practices, cultural ideologies, and interactional norms that provide valuable pragmatic data because they reflect how characters negotiate identity, authority, and social relationships through language. Pragmatics serves as the primary foundation for analyzing linguistic politeness as a contextual phenomenon that cannot be understood in isolation from social situations and relationships. Similarly, Rahmawati et al. (2023) demonstrated that pragmatic strategies shape communicative roles and interactional purposes in both face-to-face and online communication. Research by Mahmudi et al. (2021) and Prasetya et al. (2022) further showed that language use varies according to social roles and hierarchical relationships, such

as those between teachers and students. Other languages also employs similar techniques, such as Wiranty and Ramaniyar (2023)'s study on the Malay language in Pontianak. Collectively, these studies indicate that pragmatics provides an important theoretical framework for understanding linguistic politeness as a contextual and socially constructed phenomenon.

2.2 Brown and Levinson's Theory

Brown & Levinson (1987) classified politeness strategies as mechanisms used to minimize threats to an interlocutor's face, commonly referred to as Face Threatening Acts (FTA). The classification of these politeness strategies is as follows: (1) bald on-record, which conveys meaning directly; (2) positive politeness, which emphasizes closeness and solidarity; (3) negative politeness, which respects the interlocutor's freedom; and (4) off-record, which conveys meaning indirectly and allows multiple interpretations.

Despite being widely applied in pragmatic studies, Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory has also received considerable criticism, particularly in relation to non-Western cultural contexts. Several scholars argue that Brown and Levinson's framework reflects a Western bias because it is based on individualistic concepts of face and autonomy. In Japanese and other East Asian cultures, politeness is more closely related to social harmony, group relationships, and contextual sensitivity. As a result, some researchers question the theory's ability to fully explain the indirectness, ambiguity, and hierarchical relations common in East Asian communication. Nevertheless, recent studies by Li & Gao (2025) and Maruki (2022) suggest that Brown and Levinson's framework remains relevant for analyzing Japanese linguistic politeness when adapted to local cultural norms and interactional contexts.

2.3 The Concept of Politeness in the Japanese Language

According to Ide (1989) and Nakane (1970), the concept of politeness in Japanese is rooted in cultural principles such as social hierarchy, harmony (*wa*), and an awareness of one's own position (*uchi-soto*). Although these studies remain foundational in understanding Japanese social interaction, recent research has emphasized that Japanese politeness is also closely related to intercultural communication and contextual interpretation. McConachy (2019) argues that pragmatic awareness is strongly connected to intercultural understanding, while Idemaru, K., et al., (2019) demonstrate that Japanese politeness is frequently conveyed implicitly through multimodal and phonetic features. Furthermore, Oatey & Wang (2019) highlight the importance of maintaining face, harmony, and contextual sensitivity in communication. Maruki (2022) also highlights that Japanese communication places a high value on social harmony, so adapting to the context of a situation is far more important than simply stating one's intentions or personal desires bluntly. In Japanese social interaction, overly direct speech—such as refusing, criticizing, or giving orders may be considered impolite because it can threaten the interlocutor's comfort and social harmony. The development on politeness in Japanese language also come in the form of code-mixing as evident in the study done by Pramesti & Hermawan (2024) that found Indonesian students combine Indonesian and Japanese to create communication that feels both polite and formal.

2.4 Keigo (*Sonkeigo*, *Kenjougo*, *Teineigo*)

As part of the Japanese politeness system, *keigo* is generally classified into three main categories: *sonkeigo* (honorific language), *kenjougo* (humble language), and *teineigo*

(polite language). These linguistic forms reflect the speaker's attitude, social status, and relational position toward the interlocutor. In Japanese communication, the use of *keigo* functions not only as a marker of politeness but also as a means of maintaining social harmony and expressing sensitivity to hierarchical relationships. Recent studies have further demonstrated that the use of *keigo* extends beyond everyday communication into popular media such as anime. The study by Maruki (2022) shows that *keigo* in popular media such as anime is often used strategically to build the image of a character and certain communication purposes, even if it is not always normative. This perspective reinforces the view that Japanese linguistic politeness operates as a context-dependent pragmatic strategy closely associated with characterization, social power, and interpersonal dynamics.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in pragmatics. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to understand linguistic phenomena contextually through the interpretation of speech meaning within a social context, rather than through numerical measurement. Meanwhile, the pragmatic approach was chosen because the study focuses on language use within the context of communicative situations. Pragmatics explores the relationship between linguistic form, meaning, and the underlying social context.

3.2 Data Source

The data source for this study consists of the utterances produced by William James Moriarty in the anime *Moriarty the Patriot*. The study analyzed only episodes 1–11 of the first season. These episodes were selected purposively because they contain the initial development of William James Moriarty's character, including various formal and informal interactions that prominently demonstrate the use of linguistic politeness strategies within different social and communicative contexts. In addition, these episodes provide diverse interactional settings involving hierarchical relationships which are relevant to the objectives of this study.

Example of data:

「アーグルトン伯爵、はじめてお目にかかります。William James Moriarty と申します。」 - William

[*Argleton hakushaku, hajimete omenikakarimasu. William James Moriarty tomoushimasu*] - William

"Earl Argleton. Pleasure to meet you. My name is William James Moriarty." - William

「私に何か用かな」 - Earl

[*Watashi ni nanika yoo ka na*] – Earl

"Do you have any business with me?" – Earl

Data 1 (Episode 1, 14:33)

3.3 Data Collection

The data were collected through observation, listening, and transcription techniques. The researcher repeatedly watched episodes 1–11 of *Moriarty the Patriot* to identify William

James Moriarty's utterances containing politeness strategies. During observation, attention was given to situational context, including character relationships, social hierarchy, communicative intentions, and emotional setting. Relevant utterances were then manually transcribed and organized into data sheets. The transcription focused on utterances that met three criteria: (1) containing politeness strategies, (2) having clear interactional context, and (3) being relevant to pragmatic analysis. After transcription, the utterances were classified according to the politeness strategy categories proposed by Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory. To maintain data accuracy, the researcher rechecked the dialogue context and compared the transcription with available subtitles and audio pronunciation.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using the interactive qualitative analysis model proposed by Miles B. et al. (2014). This analytical model views qualitative data analysis as a continuous process conducted alongside data collection. The analysis consisted of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and categorized William James Moriarty's utterances containing politeness strategies through non-participant observation and transcription. The utterances were then classified based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. In the data display stage, the utterances were organized into analytical tables according to politeness type, conversational context, social relationships, and pragmatic function. This process helped identify recurring linguistic patterns and contextual tendencies throughout the narrative. The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions by interpreting the communicative functions and pragmatic meanings of each strategy in relation to character construction, social hierarchy, and communicative intentions. To ensure analytical rigor, interpretations were supported by contextual dialogue evidence and relevant theories of pragmatics and Japanese politeness. Verification was conducted through repeated examination of transcripts, subtitles, dialogue context, and audio pronunciation. In addition, intercoder reliability was applied by comparing coding results with categorizations from previous politeness studies to reduce subjective bias and strengthen analytical consistency.

3.5 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through credibility and analytical consistency procedures. To maintain credibility, the researcher repeatedly rewatched selected episodes of *Moriarty the Patriot* to verify utterances, conversational context, speaker intentions, and character relationships. Transcriptions were also checked against the audio, subtitles, and scene context to minimize interpretive errors. To enhance analytical rigor, the researcher applied consistent coding procedures throughout the analysis process by classifying utterances according to the politeness strategy framework proposed by Brown and Levinson's (1987). Interpretations were based on contextual evidence, including situational background, social hierarchy, communicative purpose, and character relationships. Since this study used publicly available anime data, no privacy issues were involved. However, linguistic and cultural interpretations were conducted carefully to avoid cultural misrepresentation or overgeneralization of Japanese communication practices.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on data collected from dialogue excerpts featuring William James Moriarty in the anime “Moriarty the Patriot”, the following elements of Japanese linguistic politeness are as listed:

Episodes	Politeness Strategies			
	Bald on Record	Positive Politeness	Negative Politeness	Off Record Strategy
Episode 1	2	1	2	1
Episode 2	4	2	-	4
Episode 3	8	2	2	-
Episode 4	6	7	3	1
Episode 5	4	1	4	1
Episode 6	3	2	4	1
Episode 7	-	4	7	1
Episode 8	1	-	-	-
Episode 9	-	-	-	-
Episode 10	-	3	1	1
Episode 11	2	4	5	1

Based on the findings, all four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson’s (1987) were identified in the utterances of William James Moriarty throughout episodes 1–11 of Moriarty the Patriot. The distribution of these strategies varies across episodes depending on the conversational context, social relationships, and communicative purposes of the character. Among the identified strategies, negative politeness appears relatively dominant in several episodes, particularly episodes 5, 6, 7, and 11. This suggests that William frequently employs indirectness, mitigation, and respectful expressions to maintain social distance and avoid imposing directly on others. Positive politeness is also frequently observed, especially in episodes 4, 7, and 11. This strategy is to create psychological closeness and gain the trust of his interlocutors. In contrast, bald on-record strategies are predominantly found in episodes 2, 3, and 4, while off-record strategies appear less frequently but remain significant because they reflect ambiguity and implied meaning, both of which are characteristic features of Japanese communication. These findings suggest that linguistic politeness in the anime functions not only as a form of social etiquette but also as a pragmatic strategy for constructing William’s intellectual image, symbolic authority, and communicative influence. However, in episode 8, only one data point is cited for the bald on record strategy classification. This is because William’s utterance does not comply with the criteria for politeness strategies based on Brown & Levinson’s (1987) theory, and is therefore marked with the symbol “-”. However, in episode 9, no data was found because there is no dialogue from William in this episode.

4.1 Bald On-Record

「アーグルトン伯爵、はじめてお目にかかります。William James Moriarty と申します。」
- William

[*Argleton hakushaku, hajimete omenikakarimasu. William James Moriarty tomoushimasu*] - William

“Earl Argleton. Pleasure to meet you. My name is William James Moriarty.” - William

「私に何か用かな」 - Earl

[*Watashi ni nanika yoo ka na*] – Earl

“Do you have any business with me?” – Earl

Data 1 (Episode 1, 14:33)

In data 1, William James Moriarty employs a bald on-record strategy through a direct self-introduction to the Earl without preliminary small talk or indirect opening expressions. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), bald on-record strategies are characterized by directness and clarity in conveying communicative intentions. William immediately states his purpose of introducing himself, which demonstrates efficiency and confidence in interaction. Pragmatically, this utterance may potentially threaten the Earl's negative face because William interrupts the Earl's personal space and ongoing activity without prior invitation. However, the utterance simultaneously reflects Japanese linguistic politeness through the use of *kenjougo* (humble language), particularly in the expressions 「お目にかかります」 (*ome ni kakarimasu*) and 「申します」 (*moushimasu*). These forms position William in a socially lower and respectful stance toward the Earl, who occupies a higher aristocratic status. The use of humble expressions softens the directness of the bald on-record strategy and reduces potential Face Threatening Acts (FTA). This shows that Japanese politeness strategies are often hybrid and context-dependent, combining direct communication with linguistic forms that maintain social harmony and hierarchy. The interaction also reflects William's pragmatic competence and strategic self-presentation. Although he speaks directly, his use of honorific language helps maintain an image of refinement, intelligence, and aristocratic etiquette. Therefore, the utterance functions not only as self-introduction but also as a strategy for constructing authority and gaining social legitimacy.

4.2 Negative Politeness

「選曲様のレストラン付近にまで下民がいるということが船内特にでも這いずりまわっているということか」 - Blitz

[*Senkyoku yo no resutoran fukin ni made gemin ga iru to iu koto ga sen'nai toku ni demo haizuri mawatte iru to iu koto ka*] - Blitz

“If people from the lower classes are near the first-class dining room, that means they're all over the ship, right?” – Blitz

「災難でしたね。よろしかったらこれで」 - William

[*Sainandeshita ne. Yoroshikattara kore de*] - William

“A shame isn't it? If you don't mind, use this.” – William

「ああすまんだ」 - Blitz

[*Aa, sumanda*] - Blitz

“Ah, my thanks.” – Blitz

Data 2 (Episode 6, 10:02)

In data 2, William James Moriarty employs a negative politeness strategy through the expression 「よろしかったら」 (*yoroshikattara*), meaning “if you do not mind” or “if you would like.” According to Brown and Levinson (1987), negative politeness functions to minimize imposition and respect the interlocutor's autonomy or negative face. Rather than directly instructing Blitz to use the offered item, William frames his utterance as an optional

suggestion, thereby reducing pressure on the interlocutor and maintaining interpersonal distance. The pragmatic context of the interaction further strengthens the use of this strategy. Blitz is emotionally agitated after his pants become wet and expresses hostility toward lower-class passengers through discriminatory language such as 「下民」 (*gemin*), meaning “commoners” or “lower-class people.” In this tense atmosphere, William’s response is notably calm, restrained, and considerate. Instead of confronting Blitz’s anger directly, William strategically employs polite and indirect language to de-escalate the situation. The phrase 「災難でしたね」 (*sainan deshita ne*), meaning “That was unfortunate,” also functions as an expression of empathy, allowing William to acknowledge Blitz’s discomfort before offering assistance. From a pragmatic perspective, William’s utterance shows how negative politeness functions as a form of social control and emotional management. Through indirect and considerate language, he maintains the interlocutor’s dignity while guiding the interaction toward a calmer and more cooperative atmosphere. Although the utterance appears polite, it also reflects William’s strategic communicative competence and psychological awareness. The interaction further reflects Japanese communication culture, particularly the preference for indirectness and conflict avoidance. William’s linguistic choices demonstrate sensitivity to social harmony and interpersonal balance, showing that Japanese politeness strategies are shaped not only by formal rules but also by pragmatic intentions and situational context.

4.3 Positive Politeness

船中で上映された症について話せる相手が欲しくて」 - 男

[*Fune naka de jouei sa reta-shou ni tsuite hanaseru aite ga hoshikute*] – Otoko

“I’d like to talk to someone about the show being performed on the ship.” – Lelaki

「これは見ものでしたね。しかし僕はそれほどバレエに精通して」 - William

[*Kore wa mi mono deshitané. Shikashi boku wa sore hodo bare-ni seitshuu shite*] – William

“It’s really an interesting watch, isn’t it? It is a shame I don’t have any knowledge about ballet.” – William

Data 3 (Episode 7, 18:16)

In data 3, William James Moriarty employs a positive politeness strategy through the expression 「これは見ものでしたね」 (*Kore wa mimono deshita ne*), meaning “It was truly an impressive performance, wasn’t it?” According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness strategies function to create solidarity, reduce social distance, and strengthen interpersonal relationships between speaker and interlocutor. The use of the sentence-final particle 「ね」 (*ne*) is pragmatically significant because it invites agreement and shared emotional alignment from the interlocutor. Rather than presenting his opinion as entirely individual, William frames the statement as a mutually recognizable evaluation, thereby fostering interactional closeness. This linguistic choice reflects a communicative strategy aimed at building rapport and maintaining smooth social interaction. William further strengthens this positive politeness strategy through the following statement, 「しかし僕はそれほどバレエに精通して」 (*However, I am not particularly knowledgeable about ballet*). Pragmatically, this expression reflects modesty and self-lowering behavior, preventing William from appearing intellectually dominant despite his sophisticated demeanor. By admitting limited expertise, he reduces social distance and creates a more

balanced interaction. More broadly, the dialogue shows that positive politeness in Japanese communication functions not only as friendliness but also as a strategy for interpersonal negotiation. William's utterances demonstrate his ability to manage social interaction through empathy, shared evaluation, and modest self-presentation.

4.4 Off Record Strategy

「それだけじゃない、他にもありますよ。一つ一つ教えて差し上げましょうか」 – William

[*Sore dake janai, hoka ni mo arimasu yo. Hitotsu hitotsu oshiete sashiagemashou ka*] – William

"It's not just that—there are other places too. Must I really have to tell you about each one?" – William

「乗客名簿に 宝石店ショート乗っていて。殺すつもりはなかった」 – Eddie

[*Joukyaku meibo ni houseki ten shooto notte ite. Korosu tsumori wa nakatta*] – Eddie

"The passenger list states that he is the owner of a jewelry store. I had no intention of killing him." – Eddie

Data 4 (Episode 11, 17:32)

In data 4, William James Moriarty employs an off-record politeness strategy through the utterance 「一つ一つ教えて差し上げましょうか」 (*Hitotsu hitotsu oshiete sashiagemashou ka*), meaning "Shall I explain each one to you individually?" According to Brown & Levinson (1987) off-record strategies function by conveying meaning indirectly, allowing the speaker to imply intentions without stating them explicitly. In this interaction, William does not directly accuse Eddie of murder but gradually guides the conversation toward an implicit conclusion that pressures Eddie psychologically to admit his involvement. Pragmatically, the utterance carries a strong implicature despite its polite structure. This indirectness minimizes open confrontation while increasing psychological pressure. As a result, Eddie responds defensively by claiming he "had no intention of killing him," indicating that William's indirect utterance successfully prompted a self-defensive confession without explicit coercion. The use of the expression 「差し上げましょうか」 (*sashiagemashou ka*), a polite and humble form meaning "shall I offer/explain," further strengthens the complexity of the interaction. Linguistically, the expression appears courteous and cooperative. However, pragmatically, the utterance functions as a rhetorical mechanism of dominance. William maintains an elegant and composed manner while subtly cornering the interlocutor, showing that politeness serves not only to preserve harmony but also as a manipulative strategy to control conversation and assert intellectual superiority. This interaction reflects the hybrid nature of Japanese politeness, where indirectness and ambiguity maintain social decorum while concealing persuasive intent. In the anime, these communication patterns are transformed into psychological tools for interrogation and manipulation.

Overall, William's politeness strategies shift between direct and mitigated speech. Bald on-record strategies are used in situations requiring firmness and control, while positive and negative politeness help maintain social relationships and subtly influence interlocutors. Off-record strategies reflect indirect communication rich in implicature, allowing William to convey hidden meanings without explicit statements. The use of these strategies highlights William's dual role as both a charismatic intellectual and a strategic manipulator. The findings contribute to pragmatic studies of Japanese politeness in popular media,

particularly within the crime-thriller anime genre. Unlike previous studies that focused on comedy or slice-of-life anime, this research shows that politeness strategies can function beyond normative etiquette as mechanisms of manipulation, ideological control, and strategic negotiation. Thus, the study expands Japanese pragmatic research by emphasizing the relationship between politeness, power, and psychological communication in fictional discourse.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of William James Moriarty's utterances shows that Japanese politeness functions not only as a social norm but also as a pragmatic strategy. All four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987)—bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record—were identified in *Moriarty the Patriot*, with negative and positive politeness appearing most frequently. These strategies are used according to communicative context, social relationships, and conversational goals. The findings reveal that politeness in the anime functions beyond conventional etiquette, serving as a tool for constructing authority, influencing interlocutors, and maintaining psychological control. The study also demonstrates that Japanese politeness is highly contextual and closely related to indirectness, social harmony, and communicative intentions. Overall, this study contributes to pragmatic research on Japanese politeness in anime, particularly within the crime-thriller genre, by showing how politeness strategies can function as mechanisms of manipulation, symbolic power, and intellectual dominance. However, since this study focuses only on William James Moriarty in *Moriarty the Patriot*, future research is encouraged to examine broader anime genres, character types, and cross-cultural politeness strategies.

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REPRESENTING SOCIAL RELATIONS THROUGH ADDRESS TERMS IN *ZOOTOPIA*

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Abstract

This study investigates how terms of address in Disney's *Zootopia* represent social relations, particularly unequal power relations and interpersonal closeness. Terms of address in conversation reflect various aspects of social relationships, including power relations, social distance, frequency of interaction, and emotional closeness. Employing a qualitative discourse analysis approach, the study analyzes address terms used by characters in both formal and informal interactions throughout the film. The study addresses two research questions: (1) How do terms of address reveal unequal power relations in formal settings? And (2) How do terms of address reveal interpersonal closeness in informal situations? The analysis integrates Eggins' theory of tenor within the interpersonal metafunction framework and van Leeuwen's theory of social actor representation. The findings reveal that formal interactions are predominantly characterized by formalization (71.4%) and honorification (87%), indicating the influence of institutional hierarchy and social distance on language choice. In contrast, informal interactions are dominated by appraisement (55.7%) and informalization (68.4%), reflecting familiarity, emotional closeness, and frequent social contact among characters. The findings demonstrate that address terms function not only as linguistic markers of identity but also as indicators of social hierarchy and interpersonal relationships. However, since this study focuses solely on a single animated film as a representation of social relations, future studies are encouraged to compare address-term usage across different films, genres, or cultural contexts.

Keywords: *discourse analysis; social actor; terms of address; Zootopia*

1. Introduction

Discourse refers to language used in social contexts, where meaning is constructed not only through words but also through interaction and social practices (Gee, 2025). Instead of analyzing language as isolated sentences, discourse studies examine communication in everyday life, media, institutions, and communities. Through discourse, people build identities, express opinions, create relationships, and reflect social values. Therefore, discourse analysis has become an important field in linguistics because it helps explain how language influences society and is also influenced by society.

One language phenomenon that is closely related to discourse is the use of terms of address. Terms of address are words or expressions used by speakers to address or refer to other people in communication. They may include personal names, titles, kinship terms, and

nicknames that reflect social relationships and attitudes between speakers. According to Wardhaugh (2010), terms of address are closely related to social identity, power, solidarity, intimacy, and politeness. One common form of terms of address is nicknames. Nicknames are informal labels assigned to individuals or groups, often based on appearance, personality, achievements, habits, or social ties. Unlike official names, nicknames often contain emotional, symbolic, and evaluative meanings. They may express affection, humor, admiration, criticism, or solidarity depending on the context in which they are used (Adams, 2009). Therefore, nicknames are not only simple labels, but also meaningful forms of language that reflect how speakers view and position others in social interaction. Terms of address function as identity markers and facilitate social interaction, particularly in digital communication contexts (Zhou et al., 2021).

Discourse analysis has also been widely used in film studies because films provide examples of language use in meaningful social contexts. Film dialogues exemplify social interaction, identity construction, and contextual communication, making cinema a valuable site for discourse analysis (Wardana & Fauziati, 2025). Films may also represent ideology, social values, and cultural issues through language and narrative choices (Rarasati & Zanawi, 2024). Therefore, films can be useful objects of discourse analysis, especially to examine how language builds identity and social relationships.

Terms of address also show how power dynamics can change in society. As Wardaugh and Fuller (2014) mentioned, the distinguished term for someone may have a particular purpose which shows respect, power and identity. In society, terms of address function to give the particular person with specific terms of address privilege, status, duty and even the expectation from society. On the other hand, terms of address may function as degrading, insulting and threatening someone else (Brook, 2025). Therefore, the terms of address are also closely related to positive and negative politeness (Holmes & Wilson, 2022) although this study focuses on terms of address between characters in *Zootopia* film to represent social relation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Research

Research on the animated film *Zootopia* has been conducted from various perspectives, including semantics (Simanjuntak & Damanik, 2025) and systemic functional linguistics (Choudry & Chaudhary, 2020), semiotics (Murdiyanti & Prastiwi, 2025) pragmatic (Andries et al, 2025; Budiarta & Gaho, 2021), discourse (Ivchenko, 2021; Naovarattanakorn & Tangkiengsirisin, 2019; Batubara & Nasution, 2020) and social issue and cultural studies (Beaudine et al, 2017; Chew, 2019; Fritz, 2020; Sandlin & Snaza, 2018). These studies show that *Zootopia* functions as a complex multimodal text that reflects social identities, ideological tensions, and communicative practices.

From a linguistic perspective focusing on semantics and systemic functional linguistics, the research from Simanjuntak and Damanik (2025) demonstrate that idiomatic expressions contribute to social meaning and interaction among characters. Meanwhile, Choudhry and Chaudhary (2020) demonstrate that Judy Hopps is portrayed as an active and empowered character through an analysis of transitivity, although this representation remains influenced by broader ideological structures. From a pragmatic perspective, Andries et al. (2025) analyze violations of the principle of politeness using Leech's framework and find that such violations function as strategies for constructing social conflict and marginalization. Similarly, Budiarta and Gaho (2021) examine deictic expressions and find

that personal deictics dominate, emphasizing the importance of context in interpreting meaning and character interactions.

Within semiotics and cultural studies, research from Murdiyanti and Prastiwi (2025) further reveal how the film represents discrimination and social inequality through semiotic signs. Similarly, Beaudine et al. (2017) apply critical race theory to address how *Zootopia* represents the stereotypes and racism toward Black Americans as marginalized groups. Chew (2019) further interprets the film as a site of systemic conflict, where a utopian narrative coexists with underlying ideological tensions. Elman (2022) critiques the representation of disability in the film within a neoliberal framework. Fritz (2020) argues that the film subtly promotes neoliberal values such as individualism and consumerism, despite the overt message of tolerance it presents. Similarly, (Sandlin and Snaza, 2018) highlight contradictions in the film's portrayal of racism, noting that it simultaneously critiques and reproduces stereotypes.

Within discourse studies approach research from Batubara and Nasution (2020) apply Derrida's theory of deconstruction to reveal that the identities of main characters such as Judy Hopps and Nick Wilde are not fixed but constantly shifting. This finding highlight that meaning in the film is unstable and constructed through discourse rather than innate characteristics. Naovarattanakorn and Tangkiengsirisin (2019) find that female characters tend to employ cooperative linguistic features, reflecting traditional gender norms. Furthermore, Ivchenko (2021) emphasizes the role of humor in revealing hidden ideologies from an ecolinguistic perspective.

Overall, these studies show that language and representation in *Zootopia* are deeply connected to ideology, identity, and social relations. From a critical discourse perspective, several studies examine the ideological dimensions represented in *Zootopia*. These studies demonstrate that the film does not merely function as entertainment, but also reflects broader social ideologies and discursive struggles within society. These studies also show how film helps audiences understand the characters' feelings when they face discrimination and injustice. Therefore, this study addressed *Zootopia* from a slightly different perspective: in terms of address to show how it has a connection to social relations and connections.

2.2 Research Gap

Terms of address in literature and film contribute to characterization and relational dynamics. One example is *Zootopia*, an animated film produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios. The film portrays a modern anthropomorphic society where linguistic interactions reflect social issues such as prejudice, stereotypes, and inequality. In this context, terms of address become important language tools used to express familiarity, humor, sarcasm, or emotional closeness.

For instance, Nick Wilde addresses Judy Hopps as 'Carrots,' while Judy refers to Nick as 'Sly Fox.' These terms of address highlight species identity, personality traits, and evolving relational dynamics. The repeated use of these terms of address illustrates the progression of trust, friendship, and mutual understanding between the characters.

Although many studies have discussed terms of address in social, cultural, and digital contexts, research on terms of address in animated films as discourse phenomena remains limited. Therefore, analyzing terms of address in *Zootopia* reveals how language constructs identity, represents social relations, and conveys social messages in popular media, this

study contributes to discourse analysis by situating term of address within filmic representation of social relations and identity construction.

This study addresses the gap that terms of address are closely related to how speakers and interlocutors construct connections in terms of power, contact, and affective involvement (Eggins, 2004). Therefore, to address this gap, this study employs (van Leeuwen, 2008) social actor theory and how this social actor is called in the particular situations which are known as terms of address which are divided into two different divisions: categorization and nomination. Categorization includes functionalization (roles in society), identification (classification, relational, and physical), and appraisal (positive or negative nicknames). Nomination includes formalization (surname with or without title), semiformalization (given name plus surname), and informalization (given name only), along with honorification, affiliation, and detitulation (van Leeuwen, 2008). Considering the limited discussion about terms of address in animated films, this study focuses on how terms of address in *Zootopia* represent power relations and social closeness between characters. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the following research questions: (1) How do terms of address reveal unequal power in formal settings? (2) How do they express closeness in informal situations?

3. Research Method

3.1 Data and Source of Data

This study applied qualitative research by using film script as the source of data. Film, including both scenes and scripts, can serve as research data (Mikos, 2018). The source of data of this research is the *Zootopia* film script which was taken from <https://www.scriptslug.com/script/zootopia-2016> and to validate the accuracy, the researchers cross-checked the script against the film before proceeding to data analysis. After validation, specific parts of the script representing social relations were selected for analysis. This study took terms of address as the point of departure to investigate the power relation between characters and their closeness in *Zootopia* film.

3.2 Data Collecting Technique

The data consists of terms of address obtained from the *Zootopia* film script. A total data of 184 instances of address terms were collected, with 8 data excluded because they were neutral vocatives (e.g., 'hello'. 'hi') lacking social significance. Data collection was manually archived by using word processing software. The first step involved watching the film three to five times and taking notes on address terms. The second step involved reading the script and validating the notes by cross checking address terms. The third step was obtaining the context of the conversation. Repeated viewing ensured that conversational context was not overlooked (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010). The collected data were then organized in spreadsheet software for analysis. This study applied triangulation between script analysis and repeated film viewing to enhance validity, while systematic coding to ensure reliability. As the study used publicly available film material, no human subjects were involved, and ethical approval was not required.

3.3 Data Analyzing Technique

In the process of analysis, this research applied two theoretical frameworks: interpersonal metafunction theory, especially tenor aspects as context of situations (Eggins,

2004; Martin & Rose, 2007) and the discourse analysis theory about social actor which analyze how social actors are represented through the use of terms of address in the conversation. Step one classified address terms according to social actor representation (categorization and nomination). Step two examined tenor aspects of situational context, based on repeated film viewing. Step three quantified the data using spreadsheet functions (COUNTIF, SUM, and percentage calculations). These figures were used to identify patterns and distributions, providing an overview of discourse in *Zootopia*.

4. Results and Discussion

This research shows that informal tenor realizations include 52 instances of categorization, dominated by appraisal (55.7%) and classification/relational identification (15.3% each). In nomination, the data found are 38 data which are dominated by informalization with 68.4%. This data distribution shows that this *Zootopia* has informal settings to show to the viewer. Informal tenor realizations show that address terms are used among characters who share closeness or appraisal, whether positive or negative. The informal settings in the data can show how the main character and other characters have their private life with friends, family, and colleagues.

Table 1.

Social Actor Representation in Terms of Address and their informal tenor realization

Social Actor Representation	Terms of Address	number	%	Examples in data
Categorization	Appraisal	29	55.7	Honey, Little baby bunny
	Identification:	8	15.3	Fox, rabbit, carrot
	Classification			
	Identification:	8	15.3	Pal, Dad
	Relational			
	Identification:	5	9.6	Little bunny, big guy
	Physical			
	Functionalization	2	3.8	Officer fluff, Chief buffalo butt
Total		52	100	
Nomination	Formalization	6	15.8	Chief Bogo, Clawhauser
	Informalization	26	68.4	Judy, Doug, Emmit
	Semiformalization	6	15.8	Gideon Grey, Benjamin Clawhauser
Total		38	100	

In terms of formal settings in tenor realization shown in table 2, the categorization has 33 data dominated by classification indicating 33.3% of overall data in categorization. Categorization here is about calling someone based on their age, gender, race and ethnicity, class and even wealth (van Leeuwen, 2008). In nomination, data found are 81 data which were dominated by formalization by 71.4% and 87% for honorification. The data indicate that *Zootopia* contains more formal scenes than informal ones. The formal scene shows how the main character performs her duties as a police officer while facing the mysterious case threatening the peaceful society of *Zootopia*.

Table 2.*Social Actor Representation in Terms of Address in formal setting and the realization*

Social Actor Representation	Terms of Address	number	%	Examples in data
Categorization	Appraisalment	2	6.06	Stupid carrot, dumb bunny
	Identification:	11	33.3	Fox, Lady, Rabbit
	Classification			
	Identification:	6	18.2	Copper, Buddy, dudes
	Relational			
	Identification:	6	18.2	Little guy, little Toot-toot
	Physical			
	Functionalization	8	24.2	Chief Bogo, Cadets
Total		33	100	
Nomination	Formalization	25	71.4	Chief, Officer Hopps, Hopps
	Informalization	6	17.1	Chief Bogo, Judy,
	Semiformalization	4	11.4	Nicholas Wilde, Assistant Mayor Bellwether
Total		35	100	
	Title: Honorification	40	87	Madam, Mr. Big, Sir, Mr. Otterton
	Detitulization	6	13	Clawhauser, Judy, Hopps
Total		46	100	

The data percentage and number in table 1 and table 2 reveal that the discourse of terms of address can be used to show the social relation among characters. The distance between two characters from once acquaintance to becoming closer and becoming best friends is well-represented in the film by using the terms of address. Although in some cases, appraisalment is used by strangers, often to express annoyance. The detailed explanation of this data will be shown in the result section of this paper.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Informal Situation and Tenor Realization

In this paper, the informal situation and tenor realization as mentioned in the previous part is used to show the private life of the character. In the data analysis, the informal realization found is dominated by high affective involvement followed by frequent contact (Eggins, 2004). The data used for high affective involvement is shown in table 3. Table 3 also shows that the term of address has different types. These types are closely related to the situational context. (Martin & Rose, 2008) in the film.

Table 3.*The example of data informal tenor with high affective involvement*

Data Num	Example of utterance	Terms of Address type
Data 110	I trusted you, Nicky .	Appraisalment
Data 112	Daddy ! It's time for our dance!	Relational Identification
Data 113	B: No icing anyone at my wedding! A: I have to, baby . Daddy has to.	Appraisalment
Data 92	And if you want this pen, you're going to help me find this poor, missing otter or the only place you'll be selling popsicles is the prison cafeteria. It's called a hustle, sweetheart	Appraisalment
Data 74	Bon voyage-e, flat foot !	Physical identification

The context of the data can be understood from the scenes in which they appear. In Data 110, Mr. Big addresses Nicholas Wilde as “Nicky,” indicating a sense of trust and familiarity toward him. In Data 112, the term is used by the Mafia boss’s daughter when addressing her father, reflecting a familial or kinship relationship. In Data 113, the term “Baby” is employed by the Mafia boss to refer to his daughter in a wedding scene, expressing affection and emotional closeness.

Furthermore, in Data 92, the term “Sweetheart” is used by Judy Hopps toward Nicholas Wilde after she plays a recording of his voice; this suggests a nuanced interaction, potentially signaling irony or strategic intent. In Data 74, the term “Flatfoot” is used by a thief to address Judy Hopps while she is attempting to catch him. This term is derived from Judy’s identity as a rabbit and functions as mockery directed at Judy’s identity.

Table 4.

The example of data informal situation with frequent contact

Data Num	Example of utterance	Terms of Address type
Data 99	Rabbit , I did what you asked! You can't keep me on the hook forever.	Classification
Data 101	Darling , I've forgotten your name.	Appraisal
Data 100	Flash, Flash, hundred-yard dash . Buddy, it's nice to see you.	Appraisal
Data 105	Second, you're a very sore loser. See you later, Officer Fluff	Functionalization, Physical identification
Data 128	B: I'm not the only one who saw him A: Nick	Informalization

The informal setting with frequent contact data can be understood from the scenes in which they appear. In Data 99, Nicholas Wilde uses the term “Rabbit” to address Judy Hopps, referring to her species. This occurs when he feels frustrated at having to follow Judy’s lead in an investigation. In Data 101, the term “Darling” is used by Nicholas Wilde when addressing Judy Hopps in an effort to create a sense of closeness or soften the interaction. In Data 100, Nicholas Wilde calls out to Flash, “Flash, Flash, run a hundred yards,” which indicates the bond that has already formed between them. Additionally, in Data 105, Nicholas Wilde calls Judy Hopps “Officer Fluff” as he says goodbye. This term stems from Judy’s soft, fluffy appearance. In Data 128, Judy calls Nicholas Wilde “Nick,” using his first name. This occurs when Nicholas Wilde defends his friend.

4.1.2 Formal Situation and Tenor Realization

Table 5.

The example of data formal tenor with hierarchic power

Data Num	Example of utterance	Terms of Address type
Data 39	Officers Grizzoli... Fangmeyer, Delgato. Your teams take missing mammals from the Rainforest District.	Formalization & Honorification
Data 42	Hey, Officer Hopps .	Formalization & Honorification
Data 43	Chief Bogo? Sir, you said there were 14 missing mammal cases	Formalization & Honorification
Data 45	Sir , I'm not just some token bunny	Honorification

Data 76 **Hopps!** Abandoning your post. Inciting a Formalization
scurry. Reckless endangerment of rodents

Table 5 presents data regarding formal titles and hierarchical authority, which can be understood from the context in which the data appears. In Data 39, Chief Bogo addresses his subordinates as “Officers Grizzoli, Fangmeyer, and Delgado” when assigning them tasks. This use of formal titles reflects the institutional hierarchy and respect for their official ranks within the police force. In Data 42, Chief Bogo addresses Judy Hopps as “Officer Hopps” when assigning her a task, indicating recognition of her position as a police officer. Similarly, in Data 43, Judy Hopps addresses Bogo as “Chief Bogo,” which indicates her acknowledgment of Bogo’s higher rank and authority. Additionally, in Data 45, Judy Hopps uses the term “Sir” when addressing Bogo, reinforcing the power dynamic between them and signaling respect for her superior. In Data 76, Chief Bogo refers to Judy Hopps as “Hopps” after learning that she left her post while chasing a thief. The use of her last name without a formal title maintains a professional tone while conveying authority and a slightly reprimanding attitude within that hierarchical relationship.

Table 6.

The example of data formal tenor with infrequent contact

Data Num	Example of utterance	Terms of Address type
Data 152	Officer Hopps! Officer Hopps!	Formalization & Honorification
Data 89	This is important, sir	Honorification
Data 69	Uncool, rabbit . My tax dollars pay your salary	Classification
Data 70	Hey, hey! You, bunny !	Classification
Data 71	Sir . If you have a grievance, you may contest your citation in traffic court.	Honorification

In Data 152, a reporter addresses Judy Hopps as “Officer Hopps” during a press conference when asking her to explain a situation. This form of address is formal and reflects respect for Judy’s institutional role as a police officer. In Data 89, Judy Hopps addresses Nicholas Wilde as “Sir” when asking for information, indicating a polite and formal stance despite the lack of close familiarity between them at that point in the interaction. In Data 69, the term “Rabbit” is used by a car owner to address Judy Hopps after receiving a parking ticket. Although it refers to her species, this term functions as an expression of anger and dissatisfaction. Similarly, in Data 70, a shop owner addresses Judy Hopps as “Bunny,” also referring to her species. This term of address is used in a critical context, as the speaker assumes that Judy has ignored a crime occurring in front of her. Finally, in Data 71, Judy Hopps addresses the shop owner as “Sir” after mistakenly assuming that he is one of the car owners she had ticketed. This form of address signals politeness and respect, reflecting a formal interaction.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Closeness and Affective Involvement

The film *Zootopia* shows the pattern of how Judy Hopps as the main character has a relationship with Nick Wilde. The closeness of these two characters is shown in the scene where both of them have a deeper connection. Their first encounter occurs during Judy’s

investigation of a case threatening *Zootopia*'s peace. In the first encounter, they call each other with particular distance by calling sir and officer and they even call each other based on race, rabbit and fox. However, when they have a deeper understanding, they call each other by using the specific terms of address. This finding confirms the research result from Budiarta and Gaho (2021) which shows that the person deixis 'You' and 'I' which refer to Judy Hopps and Nick Wilde's relationship.

The process of characters becoming closer and having high affective involvement may represent the real social relation. The closer the interpersonal relationship, the more flexible the use of address terms becomes. This also works for people who have negative affective involvement. They also will call with negative terms of address which are more degrading and insulting (Brook, 2025), although close friends and sworn enemies may both use distinctive address terms, friends employ them to reduce distance as positive politeness, while enemies use them to increase distance reflecting the negative politeness (Holmes & Wilson, 2022).

4.2.2 Social Hierarchy based on Skepticism

This research also shows that the data distribution forms a pattern that the formal and informal tenor realizations have slightly different. The analysis identified 114 formal tenor instances and 90 informal tenor instances. This pattern shows that the *Zootopia* film has more context in formal settings rather than in informal settings. The formal settings have more data than the informal one, meaning that the unequal power plays a significant role in understanding the film. The film has more formal scenes than the informal one because the main character's story is to become the best police although she has physical weakness despite her small physical stature. However, she could become one because she maximizes her agility to win over the criminals. Her efforts show how she fights against discrimination on an institutional level (Ivanchenko, 2021; Murdiyanti & Prastiwi, 2025; Naovarathanakorn & Tangkiengsirisin, 2019).

Because the story is about her career as the police officer, the use of address terms signifying the power relation is apparent. The use of honorification and also formalization is dominating the findings. It means that the use of honorification and formalization is the representation of the social relation in real communication. The more distant the relationship, the more formal the terms of address used and the higher the power in social relation, the more flexible the way someone calls the others who have lower position in terms of power (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). This film also shows how the main character builds trust so that her working environment does not see her with skepticism in asymmetric social hierarchy when military ranks are the symbol of authority (van Wietmarschen, 2022). This also works for the second main character, Nick Wilde, who is perceived as deceptive. Nick Wilde is helping Judy to reveal the mysterious criminal case and he changed from deceptive to trusted individuals, building his esteem and standing before authority comes as he is appointed as police officer (Anderson, 2017).

4.2.3 Institutional and Cultural Racism Metaphor

The practice of institutional and cultural racism is apparent through the film, and this confirms Bowser's discussion (2017) about Racism by applying three levels of racism by James Jones. At an institutional level, racism in *Zootopia* is noticeable by the existence of bigger mammals such as buffalo, rhinoceros, and hippopotamus while the rest are the predators. Judy Hopps and Nick Wilde, who are considered small mammals and deceptive

animals, are the evidence of how institutional racism is represented. This institutional level of racism is also unconscious racism (Bowser, 2017) because the environment was created that way, therefore the way other police officers in *Zootopia* perceive rabbit and fox seems normal and unquestioned.

This racism representation also confirms the findings from Beaudine et al (2017) which make Judy Hopps the example of how people expect to have better life regardless of their physical appearance. However, Judy Hopps as a rabbit has given the example of how racism both institutional and cultural racism can shatter every dream. Cultural racism is also represented by job-based identity which is obviously mentioned in address terms where Judy Hopps is called closely to physical appearance and race. This confirms the findings from Murdiyanti and Pratiwi (2025). In addition, this racism in the *Zootopia* film represents the latent racial issue which brought more devastating consequences (Sandlin & Snaza, 2018).

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that terms of address in *Zootopia* operate within two primary contexts: formal and informal settings. In formal settings, tenor realizations in formal settings are dominated by formalization (71.4%) and honorification (87%). Within categorization, classification (33.3%) and functionalization (24.2%) appear most frequently. These data reveal that formalization and honorification are used to address someone who has higher power or addressing someone unfamiliar often involves occupational roles to convey respect. The use of functionalization and classification, on the other hand, shows that calling someone who has never been met before can use the occupational role to show respect but, in some cases, classification is used by someone who insult and disrespect the main character in the film. The main character is sometimes addressed with derogatory racialized terms such as 'rabbit' or 'bunny.' In the film, 'rabbit' symbolizes marginalized groups, while 'fox' reflects stereotypical associations with criminality. Both characters, Judy and Nick, receive injustice and discrimination since they face institutional and cultural racism within the social hierarchy.

In informal settings, the most predominant terms of address are informalization and appraisal by 68.4% and 55.7%. Findings indicate that greater closeness leads to more flexible address terms. Informalization typically involves given names, signaling closeness between characters. Appraisal demonstrates that closer relationships foster unique, personalized address terms. This shows that the characters who have close relations in this film can have their own terms of address which only they possess by them, not the other characters. The film illustrates how social relations can be revealed through address terms. The analysis of *Zootopia* provides significant findings that may inform future research into whether the social relationship between two people can be indicated by the way they call each other. Although this claim requires further validation through future research, future studies should investigate other films with complex social and personal relations, as well as real-world contexts.

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DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION IN TEXT-BASED ENGLISH FOR FRONT OFFICE INSTRUCTION IN VOCATIONAL TOURISM EDUCATION: A MIXED METHOD STUDY

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Abstract

This study investigates how digital technology is integrated into text-based English for Front Office (EFO) instruction to support language literacy, digital literacy, and employability skills in vocational tourism education. The integration of digital technology in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has often been tool-oriented, with limited attention to teachers' pedagogical practices in vocational contexts. The study employed a mixed-method design with an explanatory sequential approach involving 20 English teachers from vocational tourism schools. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that teachers utilize various digital technologies, including learning management systems, presentation tools, communication applications, video editing tools, virtual tours, and AI-based applications. These technologies are integrated through multimodal literacy practices such as role-play simulations, video projects, virtual tour narratives, and interactive assessments that engage students in reading, writing, speaking, and digital meaning-making. However, teachers face challenges related to limited infrastructure, varying levels of digital literacy competence, student motivation, and increased instructional workload. The study concludes that pedagogically grounded digital technology integration enhances text-based EFO learning by supporting language literacy and digital literacy in authentic workplace contexts. The findings imply the need for continuous teacher professional development and institutional support to promote sustainable literacy-oriented digital pedagogy in vocational tourism education. This study contributes to literacy-oriented ESP pedagogy by foregrounding teachers' digital pedagogical practices in vocational tourism education.

Keywords: *digital literacy; English for Front Office; English language literacy; text based English language teaching; technology integration.*

1. Introduction

Digital literacy is essential in vocational education, as workplace demands increasingly require multimodal communication (sThelma et al., 2024). In the digital era, literacy extends beyond the ability to read and write printed texts to include the capacity to interpret, produce, and communicate meaning through digital and multimodal texts. This transformation has important implications for English language teaching, particularly in vocational tourism programs, where communication increasingly takes place through digital platforms, online systems, and technology-mediated interactions. Consequently, English instruction in vocational contexts must integrate language literacy and digital literacy to remain relevant to contemporary workplace communication (Kumar,2023; Kusuma Dewi et al.,2024)

In the hospitality industry, particularly for front office staff, digital literacy underpins professional communication (Stylianou & Pericleous, 2025). Front office staff are required to manage email correspondence, online reservation systems, digital guest feedback, and hotel information platforms while maintaining professional communication standards. Therefore, students in English for Front Office (EFO) classes are expected not only to develop English proficiency but also to acquire the digital literacy skills necessary to function effectively in authentic workplace settings. Without adequate digital literacy, students may face difficulties transferring their language skills into professional practice, which can negatively affect their employability in the tourism sector (Chemli et al., 2024; Zuñiga-Collazos et al., 2025).

Digital literacy is closely linked to employability skills in vocational education. Employability skills include communication, adaptability, collaboration, -solving, and effective technology use (Mahajan et al., 2022; Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023) . Furthermore, Scheepers et al., (2024) highlight that digital career competencies are a crucial component, encompassing not only technological proficiency but also soft skills such as communication and teamwork. This underscores the importance of a balanced skill set for contemporary employability. As employers increasingly seek candidates who demonstrate both digital literacy and strong interpersonal skills, vocational education institutions must prioritize these competencies in their curricula to align with workforce demands (Nikou et al., 2022). Digital literacy in ESP contexts should be understood not merely as technical competence, but as situated literacy practices embedded within professional communication and multimodal meaning-making.

Text-Based Language Teaching is a pedagogical approach that supports workplace-oriented language learning (Alfehaid & Alkhatib, 2020). This approach emphasizes the use of authentic texts that reflect real communication practices in specific professional contexts. In EFO instruction, text-based learning enables students to engage with workplace-related texts such as service dialogues, reservation emails, hotel information sheets, and complaint-handling responses. Through these texts, students learn not only linguistic forms but also communicative purposes, professional conventions, and genre structures relevant to the hospitality industry (Kaharuddin & Arafah, 2019). However, when text-based instruction is implemented without digital support, it may become less interactive and less aligned with students' digital literacy practices and contemporary learning experiences.

The integration of digital technology offers opportunities to strengthen text-based EFO learning by enabling multimodal and interactive literacy practices. Digital tools such as learning management systems, multimedia platforms, video-based tasks, and virtual

simulations allow students to engage with texts in more meaningful and authentic ways. Through activities such as role-play simulations, video projects, and virtual tours, students can practice language use in contexts that closely resemble real workplace situations. These practices support the development of both language literacy and digital literacy, which are essential components of employability skills in vocational tourism education (Zuñiga-Collazos et al., 2025).

Despite the growing body of research on digital technology integration in English language teaching, several gaps remain. First, existing studies often focus on specific tools, prioritize language skills over digital literacy, and emphasize student outcomes rather than teachers' practices, such as mobile applications or learning management systems, while giving limited attention to pedagogical processes and instructional design. Second, research on ESP and vocational English often prioritizes language skills development, while digital literacy is treated as a supplementary or supporting component rather than a core learning outcome. Third, studies on digital technology integration in vocational education tend to emphasize students' perceptions or learning outcomes, with limited attention given to teachers' pedagogical practices and challenges. Teachers play a central role in mediating technology use and shaping literacy practices in the classroom, yet their instructional strategies, constraints, and adaptive responses remain underexplored. Understanding teachers' practices is crucial for developing sustainable and context-sensitive digital pedagogy. There is therefore a need for research that investigates how teachers integrate digital technology into text-based ESP instruction to support literacy development and employability skills.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the integration of digital technology in text-based English for Front Office learning from a pedagogical perspective. Rather than focusing solely on technological tools or learning outcomes, this study explores how teachers use digital technology to support literacy-oriented instructional practices, how these practices contribute to students' employability skills, and what challenges and adaptive strategies emerge in authentic classroom contexts. Specifically, this study aims to describe: (1) the types of digital technologies used by EFO teachers in vocational tourism schools, (2) how digital technology is integrated into text-based EFO instruction to support language literacy and digital literacy, (3) the challenges teachers face in implementing digital literacy-oriented instruction, and (4) the pedagogical strategies they employ to address these challenges. By foregrounding teachers' practices, this study contributes to the field of language literacy and ESP pedagogy by extending discussions of text-based instruction toward literacy-oriented digital pedagogy in vocational education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 English Language Literacy

English language literacy encompasses a set of skills and practices integral to effective communication and comprehension in the English language. English language literacy is not merely the ability to read and write but a complex interplay of various skills, including critical thinking, cultural understanding, and technological proficiency. It is particularly relevant in dynamic fields such as tourism, where effective communication can significantly enhance interactions and experiences.

English language literacy in vocational education has become a crucial component in preparing students for the complexities of modern workplaces. The landscape of vocational education increasingly reflects the need for comprehensive literacy skills that extend beyond basic reading and writing. According to Xu and Zhao (2023), vocational literacy includes not only language proficiency but also the ability to navigate the interconnections between different forms of communication, such as oral, written, and digital literacies, which are essential in modern service industries. Successful vocational programs must integrate these literacies into their curricula to equip students with the necessary skills to thrive in increasingly competitive job markets.

Recent literature emphasizes the importance of aligning vocational education with industry demands through enhanced English language literacy programs. Xinming (2023) points out that traditional vocational training models have often focused narrowly on technical skills and disciplinary knowledge, leaving gaps in students' communication capabilities. This gap is concerning in a globalized economy where employers seek individuals who not only possess technical expertise but also demonstrate strong problem-solving, innovative thinking, and effective communication. Therefore, vocational education must adapt to include core literacy competencies, bridging language skills with practical applications relevant to students' future careers (Xiangyu, 2023).

Furthermore, the advent of digital technology has revolutionized the way English language is taught and learned in vocational settings. Fakhruddin and Larasaty (2024) highlight that digital tools can significantly enhance students' literacy development, particularly in speaking and pronunciation, which are critical for vocational success. The integration of technology allows for diverse learning modalities, catering to various student needs and learning environments. Thus, combining digital resources with pedagogical best practices offers a promising pathway to advance English language literacy in vocational education, preparing students for the demands of a digital economy while fostering lifelong learning habits.

2.2 Digital Literacy

Digital literacy has emerged as an essential set of competencies in the current digital age, where technology influences nearly all facets of professional and personal life. According to Dai, (2024), digital literacy encompasses the ability to access, evaluate, and create information using digital technologies, integrating skills such as media literacy and information literacy to equip individuals with the comprehensive skill set needed for effective participation in a digitally-oriented society. This multifaceted approach emphasizes not only the technical skills associated with digital tools but also critical thinking and interpretative abilities necessary for effective communication within the digital realm.

A significant aspect of digital literacy is its contextualization within various educational frameworks, emphasizing its role in fostering lifelong learning. Ostanina et al., (2023) articulate that developing digital competence among students, especially in higher education, is paramount for preparing future innovators and leaders. Higher education institutions must adapt their curricula to include digital literacy education as an integral part of training, ensuring that students are equipped to face the challenges of an increasingly digital workforce. Research indicates that embedding digital literacy within various educational contexts can enhance both engagement and retention among students, as it enables them to apply their knowledge practically in real-world scenarios.

2.3 Technology Integration in English Language Teaching

Technology integration in English Language Teaching (ELT) refers to the seamless incorporation of digital tools and resources within the pedagogical framework to enhance language acquisition and teaching effectiveness. Various theoretical models have emerged to guide educators in effectively embedding technology into their instructional practices. One prominent framework is the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) model, which emphasizes the interplay between technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge within teaching environments (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). They argue that effective technology integration requires teachers to possess not only a strong understanding of their subject matter but also an awareness of how to utilize technology pedagogically to facilitate learning. This integrated perspective compels educators to rethink their approaches and adapt their methodologies to optimize student engagement and comprehension in the language learning process.

Research demonstrates that the successful integration of technology in ELT can lead to enhanced student motivation and engagement. For instance, Timotheou et al., (2022) highlight findings that suggest technology positively affects students' performances when utilized appropriately in learning contexts (Timotheou et al., 2022). Saud's study illustrates that educators' perceptions significantly influence the effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in ELT, emphasizing the need for ongoing professional development to build teachers' confidence and competence (Saud, 2023). A supportive environment coupled with adequate training can enable teachers to leverage digital tools to create interactive learning experiences, thereby fostering a more vibrant and responsive educational atmosphere.

The present study adopts the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) as its primary theoretical lens. TPACK provides a comprehensive perspective for examining how teachers integrate technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge in text-based English instruction. Through this framework, the study investigates how teachers utilize digital technologies to support language literacy, digital literacy, and workplace communication skills simultaneously within Front Office English classes. By focusing on teachers' pedagogical practices, the study contributes to a more integrated understanding of technology-enhanced literacy development in vocational tourism education.

2.4 Review of Previous Studies

Research on English language teaching in vocational education has increasingly focused on three interconnected areas: genre-based or text-based pedagogy, digital technology integration, and the development of employability-related competencies. A review of previous studies reveals several important trends while also highlighting methodological limitations, conceptual gaps, and unresolved pedagogical issues that warrant further investigation.

A prominent trend in the literature is the growing use of genre-based approaches to enhance learners' professional communication skills. Wang (2021) examined the use of a genre-based approach in Business Translation teaching to enhance learners' professional language competence. Using a quasi-experimental design, the study compared students receiving genre-based instruction with those taught through traditional methods. Data from

translation performance tests showed that genre-based instruction significantly improved translation accuracy, genre awareness, and communicative purpose understanding. While the findings confirm the pedagogical value of genre-based instruction in professional language education, the study is limited to translation contexts and does not address digital technology integration or vocational tourism education.

Similarly, Chang (2024) investigated genre and task based English instruction in a Hospitality and Tourism technical course during emergency remote learning. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the study analysed instructional materials and reflective teaching notes. The results indicated that genre-task integration enhanced student engagement and contextualized tourism-related language use. However, digital technology served primarily as a delivery medium rather than as an integrated component of literacy development.

To answer this call, Izzah et al., (2025) examined the use of Kahoot in a genre-based English teaching model for vocational students through a design-based and quasi-experimental approach. Data from achievement tests, questionnaires, and classroom observations showed increased motivation, engagement, and genre understanding. Nevertheless, the study focused mainly on learning outcomes and offered limited insight into teachers' pedagogical strategies or broader literacy development.

Beyond classroom instruction, studies have highlighted the role of digital literacy in employability. Nikou et al., (2022) found a strong relationship between digital competence, English communication skills, and employability readiness among vocational students. Similarly, Stylianou & Pericleous (2025) reported that digital communication skills significantly influenced employability in tourism education. However, both studies examined employability as an outcome and did not explore how such competencies are pedagogically developed through text-based ESP instruction.

These existing studies frequently examine genre-based instruction, digital technology use, and employability skills as separate areas of inquiry. Research on genre-based pedagogy often focuses on language development without considering digital literacy, whereas studies on educational technology commonly emphasize technological tools rather than literacy development. Similarly, employability research tends to investigate outcomes of communication and digital competence without examining how these competencies are developed pedagogically in classroom settings. As a result, there is limited theoretical understanding of how language literacy, digital literacy, and workplace communication skills can be integrated within a single instructional framework.

Furthermore, unresolved pedagogical issues persist in vocational English language education. Although previous studies acknowledge the importance of digital tools and professional communication skills, little attention has been given to how teachers design and implement text-based English instruction that simultaneously develops language proficiency, digital literacy, and workplace readiness. This issue is particularly relevant in vocational tourism education, where students are expected to communicate effectively across multiple digital and professional contexts. Existing research provides limited evidence regarding how teachers select technologies, adapt pedagogical strategies, and connect instructional content to authentic workplace communication demands.

To address these limitations, the present study adopts the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) as its primary theoretical lens. The TPACK framework offers a comprehensive perspective for examining how teachers

integrate technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge in text-based English instruction. By investigating teachers' practices in Front Office English classes, this study seeks to contribute to a more integrated understanding of how language literacy, digital literacy, and workplace communication skills can be developed simultaneously in vocational tourism education.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-method design. This design was chosen to obtain a comprehensive understanding of digital technology integration in text-based English for Front Office (EFO) learning by combining quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative phase was conducted first to identify general patterns of digital technology use among teachers, followed by a qualitative phase to explore pedagogical practices, challenges, and strategies in greater depth. This approach is appropriate for literacy-oriented research that seeks to explain not only what happens in classrooms, but also how and why instructional practices are enacted.

3.2 Research Context and Participants

This study was conducted in vocational tourism schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK Pariwisata*) in Bali, Indonesia. In this context, English for Front Office (EFO) is a core subject designed to prepare students for communication tasks in the hospitality industry. The learning context reflected the increasing integration of digital technology in vocational education, particularly following curriculum demands and instructional practices that encourage blended and digital learning modes.

The participants of this study were 20 English teachers teaching in vocational tourism schools across Bali. The teachers were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria: (1) they taught English subjects related to tourism, particularly *English for Front Office*; (2) they had experience integrating digital technology into their instructional practices; and (3) they were willing to participate voluntarily in the study. The participating teachers represented various schools with different levels of technological infrastructure and institutional support. The selection of 20 English teachers was considered appropriate for the purposes of this explanatory sequential mixed-method study. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling because they possessed specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives, namely experience teaching English for Front Office (EFO) and integrating digital technology into their instructional practices.

3.3 Research Instruments

This study employed three research instruments: a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview guide, and a document analysis checklist. All instruments were designed to explicitly capture teachers' practices in integrating digital technology to support language literacy and digital literacy in text-based *English for Front Office* (EFO) instruction. Each instrument is described below.

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended items using a Likert-scale format. It was designed to identify the types of digital technologies used by teachers and the frequency of their use in EFO classes. The items covered several categories of digital tools, including

learning management systems, presentation and visual design tools, communication applications, multimedia and video-editing tools, virtual tours, and AI-based applications. In addition, selected items focused on how these technologies were used to support literacy-related activities, such as reading workplace texts, writing professional messages, practicing spoken interaction, and engaging in multimodal meaning-making.

The semi-structured interview guide contained open-ended questions aimed at exploring teachers' pedagogical practices and reasoning in greater depth. The interview questions explicitly addressed how teachers integrated digital technology into text-based instruction to develop students' language literacy (e.g., understanding and producing workplace texts) and digital literacy (e.g., using digital platforms critically and meaningfully). The interviews also explored teachers' perceptions of employability skills development, the challenges they encountered in implementing literacy-oriented digital instruction, and the strategies they adopted to address contextual constraints.

The document analysis checklist was used to examine instructional documents and digital learning artifacts, such as lesson plans, teaching materials, students' written texts, video projects, and online learning activities. The checklist focused on identifying key features of text-based instruction and digital literacy practices, including the use of authentic workplace texts, multimodal tasks, digital platforms, and opportunities for students to engage in reading, writing, speaking, and digital meaning-making. This instrument enabled the researcher to triangulate reported practices with actual instructional evidence.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The data were collected by following some procedures. The first stage was the preparation stage, which involved obtaining ethical clearance and securing formal approval from the principals of the participating vocational tourism schools. This stage ensured that the research complied with institutional and ethical requirements and that all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their voluntary involvement.

After receiving the necessary approvals, the questionnaire distribution stage was conducted. The questionnaires were distributed online using Google Forms and shared with all participating English teachers. This method was chosen to facilitate efficient data collection and to allow teachers to respond at their convenience. The questionnaire data provided an initial overview of the types of digital technologies used in English for Front Office instruction and the frequency of their use.

Following the preliminary analysis of the questionnaire responses, the interview stage was carried out. Semi-structured follow-up interviews were conducted with selected teachers to clarify emerging patterns and to explore teachers' pedagogical perspectives in greater depth. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. The interviews focused on how digital technology was integrated into text-based instruction, the challenges encountered, and the strategies adopted to support language literacy and digital literacy. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in data transcription and analysis.

The final stage involved document analysis. Relevant instructional documents and digital learning artifacts, such as lesson plans, teaching materials, students' assignments, and online learning activities, were collected and analyzed. This procedure aimed to examine how digital technology and text-based instruction were reflected in actual classroom

practices. Document analysis also served to triangulate data from questionnaires and interviews, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two main stages, following the explanatory sequential mixed-method design. Quantitative data analysis was carried out first, followed by qualitative data analysis to explain and elaborate the quantitative findings. In the quantitative phase, data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis focused on frequencies and percentages to identify the types of digital technologies used by teachers and the frequency of their use in *English for Front Office* instruction. The results of this phase provided an overall picture of digital technology integration and served as a basis for selecting participants and determining focal issues for the qualitative analysis.

In the qualitative phase, data from semi-structured interviews and document analysis were analyzed using thematic analysis. The steps are: first, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by repeatedly reading interview transcripts and instructional documents to gain an overall understanding of participants' experiences and practices. Second, initial codes were generated by systematically identifying meaningful segments of data related to technology integration, language literacy development, digital literacy practices, pedagogical challenges, and instructional strategies. Both interview and document data were coded to facilitate cross-data comparison. Third, the initial codes were reviewed and grouped into broader categories based on conceptual similarities and recurring patterns. Fourth, these categories were further refined into potential themes that captured significant aspects of teachers' experiences and pedagogical practices. Fifth, the themes were reviewed and refined by examining their coherence within and across data sources to ensure that they accurately represented the dataset. Finally, the themes were clearly defined, named, and organized to provide a coherent explanation of how teachers integrated digital technology in literacy-oriented EFO instruction.

3.6 Trustworthiness and Validation

To ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative findings, the study employed four criteria: a) Credibility was achieved through data triangulation (questionnaire, interview, observation) and member checking by sharing interview transcripts with participants for validation; b) Transferability was addressed by providing detailed contextual descriptions of schools, participants, and teaching environments, allowing readers to assess applicability to similar contexts; c) Dependability was established by maintaining an audit trail of data collection procedures and coding decisions; d) Confirmability was ensured through researcher reflexivity and peer debriefing with colleagues in the English Education Department.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of this study are presented based on the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings, following the explanatory sequential mixed-method design. The findings are organized into four main themes: (1) types of digital technologies used in EFO instruction, (2) pedagogical integration of digital technology in text-based literacy practices,

(3) challenges in implementing digital literacy-oriented instruction, and (4) teachers' pedagogical strategies in addressing these challenges.

4.1 Types of Digital Technologies Used in EFO instruction

The findings from the questionnaire indicate that teachers in vocational tourism schools employ a wide range of digital technologies to facilitate English language learning. These technologies can be grouped into eight main categories as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Types of Digital Technologies Used in EFO Instruction

Category	Tools Used	Percentage
Communication Apps	WhatsApp	17%
Presentation & Interactive Media	PowerPoint, Canva	16%
Learning Management Systems (LMS)	Google Classroom, Moodle	15%
Gamified Learning Platforms	Kahoot!, Quizizz, Wordwall	14%
Meeting & Collaboration Apps	Zoom, Google Meet	13%
Multimedia & Video Editing	CapCut, Filmora	12%
AI & Self-Learning Tools	Duolingo, Grammarly, ChatGPT	8%
Virtual & Simulation Tools	Google Earth, VR Tour	5%

Table 1 shows that WhatsApp is the most frequently used digital tool. These findings are significant because they demonstrate that digital technology integration in vocational English education is driven primarily by pedagogical utility rather than technological sophistication. Teachers selected tools that effectively supported communication, text-based learning, and classroom management, suggesting that successful technology integration depends on the alignment between technological affordances and instructional objectives. From a theoretical perspective, the findings support the TPACK framework, which emphasizes that effective technology integration emerges from the interaction of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge rather than from technology use alone. The predominance of communication platforms, presentation tools, and learning management systems indicates that teachers intentionally selected technologies that complemented text-based pedagogy and workplace-oriented language instruction. These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that teachers are more likely to adopt digital technologies that support classroom communication and instructional organization before integrating more complex digital tools (Pădurean, 2025 ;Rimadhona et al., 2025).

The findings also have important pedagogical implications for vocational tourism education. Rather than focusing exclusively on advanced technologies, teachers can foster both language literacy and digital literacy through accessible and familiar digital tools when these are embedded within meaningful communicative tasks. The results suggest that digital technologies are most effective when used to facilitate authentic workplace communication, collaborative learning, multimodal text production, and learner engagement. This highlights the need for professional development programs that help teachers move beyond technical competence toward pedagogically informed technology integration. The finding supports the view that digital tools can function as mediational means for literacy development when

they are integrated into authentic communicative tasks (Chenchen, 2024; Dahalan et al., 2023; Ravichandran & Mahapatra, 2023; Triastuti & Riazi, 2020; Yang, 2023).

The study contributes to the growing body of research on digital literacy and vocational language education by demonstrating how literacy development occurs through the combined use of communication, collaboration, and multimodal technologies. While previous studies have often examined technology use, literacy development, or employability skills separately, the present findings illustrate how these dimensions intersect within English for Front Office instruction. This contributes to a more integrated understanding of technology-enhanced literacy practices in vocational contexts and provides empirical evidence for the role of digitally mediated instruction in preparing students for communication demands in contemporary tourism workplaces.

4.2 Pedagogical Integration of Digital Technology in Text-Based Literacy Practices

Qualitative findings indicate that digital technology is integrated into English for Front Office (EFO) instruction through a range of text-based and multimodal pedagogical practices. It can be seen from Table 2.

Table 2. *Pedagogical Integration of Digital Technology in Text-Based Literacy Practices*

No.	Type of Practice	Representative Interview Excerpts
1	Lesson planning and organization through LMS	<i>"Every semester, I upload all materials and tasks on Google Classroom so students can access them anytime."</i> (Teacher A, interview)
2	Presentation and content delivery using visual media	<i>"If the slides are only text, students get bored quickly. Canva helps me design attractive visuals related to tourism themes."</i> (Teacher F, open-ended questionnaire)
3	Synchronous speaking practice and role-play via Zoom	<i>"I used Zoom for hotel service simulation. Students acted as receptionists and guests—it felt like an authentic situation."</i> (Teacher C, interview)
4	Informal communication and microlearning through WhatsApp	<i>"I often send voice notes for pronunciation practice. It's simple, and students can listen repeatedly."</i> (Teacher H, interview)
5	Project-based video production	<i>"Students made a short video of front-office dialogue wearing uniforms. They were very enthusiastic."</i> (Teacher L, interview)
6	Virtual exploration and tour-based activities	<i>"Students explored tourist spots virtually and described them as if they were tour guides."</i> (Teacher N, open-ended questionnaire)
7	Independent learning using AI-based tools	<i>"ChatGPT helps students generate sample dialogues quickly, but I always remind them to revise and understand the context."</i> (Teacher S, interview)
8	Digital assessment and feedback	<i>"Digital quizzes are fun for students. They enjoy competing while learning vocabulary."</i> (Teacher M, interview)

Table 2 presents a range of digital pedagogical practices employed by English teachers in text-based English for Front Office (EFO) instruction. The findings show that teachers integrate digital technology across multiple stages of the teaching–learning process, including lesson planning, content delivery, classroom interaction, assessment, and independent learning. At the planning and organizational level, teachers commonly use learning management systems to structure instruction and provide continuous access to learning materials. This practice indicates that digital technology functions as a foundational support for organizing literacy resources, rather than as an isolated teaching tool (Sumarno, 2023). Visual presentation tools are also widely used to support the delivery of tourism-related content, enabling teachers to combine written texts with contextual images and visuals.

During instructional interaction, synchronous platforms such as Zoom are employed to facilitate role-play and speaking practice, allowing students to perform workplace-related dialogues in simulated professional settings. Informal communication platforms, particularly WhatsApp, extend learning beyond the classroom by enabling ongoing interaction, microlearning activities, and pronunciation practice. These findings suggest that literacy learning in EFO contexts occurs across both formal and informal digital spaces.

In addition, project-based video production emerges as a key practice for integrating language use with multimodal communication. Virtual tours and exploration activities, although less frequently used, provide opportunities for contextualized descriptive language practice. The use of AI-based tools and digital assessment platforms further illustrates how teachers support independent learning, feedback, and formative assessment through digital means.

The findings in Table 2 highlight that digital technology integration in EFO instruction is pedagogically driven rather than tool-driven. Teachers select and use digital tools based on their relevance to instructional goals, particularly the development of language literacy and workplace communication skills. This supports previous research arguing that effective digital literacy integration depends on pedagogical alignment rather than technological sophistication (Laksani et al., 2020). Digital technology integration in text-based EFO learning supports a holistic literacy framework, where language literacy, digital literacy, and employability skills are developed simultaneously. The findings reinforce the need for pedagogical guidance and institutional support to ensure that digital practices remain literacy-oriented, contextual, and ethically informed in vocational education.

4.3 Challenges in Integrating Digital Technology in Text-Based EFO Instruction

The results of qualitative data analysis show that teachers faced challenged during integrating digital technology in text based EDO instruction. It can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3.

Challenges in Integrating Digital Technology in Text-Based EFO Instruction

No.	Theme of Challenge	Representative Interview Excerpts
1	Infrastructure limitations	<i>“The internet connection is often unstable, so sometimes online role-play or video tasks cannot run smoothly.”</i> (Teacher B, interview)

No.	Theme of Challenge	Representative Interview Excerpts
2	Digital competence gaps	<i>"I can use basic tools, but for AI or video editing, I still need more training."</i> (Teacher D, interview)
3	Student motivation	<i>"Some students install learning apps like Duolingo, but they do not use them consistently without reminders."</i> (Teacher G, interview)
4	Teacher workload	<i>"Preparing digital materials and managing different platforms takes much more time than traditional teaching."</i> (Teacher K, interview)

Table 3 shows that despite the widespread use of digital technology in EFO instruction, teachers continue to face significant challenges that affect the consistency and depth of digital literacy-oriented practices. Infrastructure limitations remain a major barrier, particularly unstable internet connections and limited access to devices, which restrict the implementation of multimedia tasks and synchronous online activities.

Digital competence gaps also emerged as a persistent issue. While teachers are generally confident using basic digital tools, many reported difficulties in adopting more advanced technologies such as AI-based applications, video editing software, and virtual reality. Student motivation further complicates digital integration, as self-directed learning tools require a level of autonomy that not all students consistently demonstrate. Additionally, teachers reported increased workload due to the need to design digital materials, monitor multiple platforms, and provide continuous feedback.

The challenges identified in Table 3 reflect broader issues related to the digital divide in education. Infrastructure constraints continue to shape what is pedagogically feasible in vocational classrooms, particularly in contexts where access to technology is uneven. This indicates that technology integration is not solely determined by teachers' willingness or competence, but is strongly influenced by institutional readiness, including infrastructure, technical support, and policy alignment (Mane, 2025). In addition to structural constraints, issues related to student motivation highlight the need for pedagogical scaffolding in digital literacy-oriented instruction. Self-learning applications can only be effective when students are supported in setting goals, monitoring their progress, and reflecting on their learning processes. Without such guidance, the potential of digital tools for independent learning remains limited.

Taken together, these challenges suggest that successful integration of digital technology in text-based EFO learning depends not only on access to tools, but also on systemic support, pedagogical guidance, and sustainable workload management. Addressing these factors is essential to ensure that digital practices effectively contribute to language literacy, digital literacy, and employability skills development.

4.4 Teachers' Solutions and Adaptive Strategies

The results of the qualitative data analysis reveal that the teachers employed some strategies to cope with the challenges, as it shown in Table 4.

Table 4.

Teachers' Strategies in Addressing Digital Integration Challenges

No.	Strategy Theme	Interview Excerpts
1	Self-learning and peer mentoring	<i>"I learned how to use Canva and CapCut from YouTube and from sharing with other teachers at school."</i> (Teacher E, interview)
2	Collaborative material sharing	<i>"We had a shared Google Drive where teachers upload materials so we don't have to start from zero."</i> (Teacher J, interview)
3	Offline and low-tech adaptations	<i>"For students with limited internet, I give downloadable videos and flexible deadlines."</i> (Teacher M, interview)
4	Gamification and motivation strategies	<i>"Using quizzes and digital badges helps students stay motivated and participate more actively."</i> (Teacher P, interview)

Table 4 illustrates that teachers demonstrate strong digital resilience by adopting a range of adaptive strategies to address challenges in integrating digital technology into text-based EFO instruction. Collaborative material sharing emerged as an important institutional strategy, with schools establishing shared digital repositories for teaching resources. This practice not only reduced individual workload but also promoted consistency in instructional quality across classrooms. Building on this collaborative approach, teachers also implemented offline and low-tech adaptations to accommodate students with limited access to devices or internet connectivity. These efforts ensured continuity of learning and supported more equitable participation in digitally mediated instruction.

In addition to addressing structural constraints, teachers employed gamification strategies to enhance student motivation and engagement. Tools such as digital quizzes, badges, and competitive elements were used to create more interactive learning environments, particularly for vocabulary development and formative assessment. Together, these strategies demonstrate how teachers actively negotiate contextual limitations while maintaining a focus on literacy-oriented instruction.

From a broader perspective, these practices reflect teachers' capacity to adapt and innovate within constrained educational contexts. The reliance on self-directed learning and peer mentoring aligns with the concept of teacher professional learning ecosystems (Tammets et al., 2022), where informal learning, collaboration, and experimentation play a central role in pedagogical development. In this regard, collaborative resource sharing not only enhances efficiency but also fosters collective knowledge building and strengthens teachers' confidence in implementing digital pedagogy.

At the same time, the use of offline and low-tech adaptations highlights teachers' sensitivity to issues of equity and access, reinforcing the importance of context-aware rather than technology-driven approaches. Meanwhile, gamification illustrates how teachers strategically sustain student engagement in vocational settings, where interactive and goal-oriented learning is particularly effective. When aligned with pedagogical objectives, such strategies can support formative assessment and meaningful language use.

These findings suggest that teachers' digital resilience is a key factor in successful technology integration. Their adaptive strategies enable the continued development of language literacy, digital literacy, and employability skills despite structural limitations,

underscoring the need for institutional support and professional learning communities to sustain teacher-led innovation.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the integration of digital technology in text-based English for Front Office (EFO) instruction in vocational tourism schools, focusing on the types of digital technologies used, pedagogical practices, challenges, and teachers' adaptive strategies. In line with the research objectives, the findings show that teachers employ a wide range of digital tools, including learning management systems, visual presentation platforms, communication applications, video-editing tools, virtual tours, and AI-based applications. These technologies are integrated pedagogically through text-based and multimodal practices such as role-play simulations, video projects, virtual exploration, and digital assessment, enabling the simultaneous development of language literacy, digital literacy, and employability skills.

The study also reveals that teachers face persistent challenges related to infrastructure limitations, digital competence gaps, student motivation, and increased workload. Despite these constraints, teachers demonstrate strong digital resilience by engaging in self-directed learning, peer mentoring, collaborative material sharing, low-tech adaptations, and motivational strategies. These adaptive practices highlight teachers' central role in mediating digital technology use and sustaining literacy-oriented instruction in vocational ESP contexts. This study extends ESP and vocational literacy scholarship by conceptualizing digital technology integration as a literacy-oriented pedagogical practice rather than merely technological adoption.

Based on the findings, several policy implications can be proposed. Educational institutions and policymakers should strengthen digital infrastructure in vocational schools and provide sustained professional development focused on literacy-oriented digital pedagogy, rather than on technical training alone. Institutional support systems, such as collaborative teacher communities and shared digital repositories, should be formally recognized and supported to reduce teacher workload and promote sustainable innovation. Future studies are recommended to explore students' perspectives and learning outcomes related to digital literacy-oriented EFO instruction. Longitudinal and classroom-based studies could provide deeper insights into how digital and language literacy develop over time. Further research may also examine the ethical and pedagogical implications of AI use in vocational English learning, particularly in relation to critical digital literacy and employability skills.

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PERCEPTION–PRACTICE GAPS IN BLENDED LEARNING: ENGLISH TEACHERS’ PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN TEACHING WRITING AT ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Blended learning (BL) has been widely recognized as a promising approach for enhancing English language teaching and learning. This study investigated the perception–practice gap in blended learning implementation among English language teachers at Addis Ababa University, particularly in teaching writing skills. A convergent mixed-methods design was employed by combining survey data collected from 31 English language teachers with semi-structured interviews conducted with six participants. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately and later integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of teachers’ perceptions and classroom practices. The findings revealed that teachers valued blended learning for improving student motivation, flexibility, learner autonomy, and access to learning resources. However, its actual implementation remained limited and largely informal. In practice, blended learning was mainly restricted to material sharing, task assignment, and communication through messaging applications. Major challenges include unreliable internet connectivity, inadequate technological infrastructure, insufficient practical training, and weak institutional support as key contributors to the perception–practice gap. The findings suggest that successful blended learning implementation requires institutional investment in technological infrastructure, sustained professional development, and stronger policy support. The study contributes to current discussions on technology integration in English language teaching by highlighting the contextual realities of blended writing instruction in Ethiopian higher education.

Keywords: *blended learning; ELT teachers; perception–practice gap; writing instruction; institutional challenges*

1. Introduction

Blended learning (BL), commonly defined as the integration of face-to-face and online instruction, has become increasingly prominent in higher education. It combines classroom interaction with the flexibility of digital technologies and is widely recognized for its potential to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Dziuban et al., 2018). While blended learning is often promoted for its flexibility and learner-centered nature,

recent studies indicate that its implementation remains uneven across disciplines and educational contexts, particularly in language education where traditional pedagogical practices continue to influence classroom instruction (Lim et al., 2019; Hrastinski, 2022).

In English language teaching (ELT), blended learning has been associated with several pedagogical benefits, especially in writing instruction. Online platforms provide learners with opportunities to access authentic materials, practice independently, collaborate with peers, and receive feedback beyond classroom time, while face-to-face instruction supports immediate interaction and guidance (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). However, the successful integration of these instructional modes requires purposeful pedagogical design and teacher readiness to ensure meaningful interaction and continuous feedback during writing development.

However, previous research consistently highlights a gap between teachers’ positive perceptions of blended learning and their actual classroom implementation. Teachers often recognize the pedagogical value of blended learning conceptually but struggle to integrate it systematically into writing instruction, where sustained feedback and iterative drafting are essential. This perception–practice gap occurs when teachers value blended learning but encounter difficulties implementing it effectively because of institutional, pedagogical, and technological constraints (Al-Senaidi et al., 2009; Lim et al., 2019). Such constraints commonly include insufficient training, heavy workload, weak institutional support, and limited access to technological resources.

In developing contexts, these challenges are often more severe. In Ethiopia, although higher education institutions increasingly promote technology-enhanced learning, implementation remains constrained by infrastructural limitations such as unstable internet connectivity, limited access to digital tools, and inadequate technical support (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). These challenges are further complicated by students’ reliance on digital communication practices outside formal academic contexts, which do not necessarily translate into academic writing competence. Consequently, blended learning practices often remain fragmented and inconsistent, particularly in writing instruction where continuous interaction and feedback are crucial.

At the same time, there is increasing recognition that university students expect more flexible and technology-supported learning environments. Recent research suggests that well-designed blended learning can improve student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement when supported by appropriate pedagogy and institutional infrastructure (Means et al., 2013; Hrastinski, 2022). However, such outcomes depend largely on teachers’ digital competence, institutional readiness, and sustained pedagogical support rather than on technology availability alone.

Although global and regional interest in blended learning continues to expand, limited empirical attention has been given to how the perception–practice gap manifests in Ethiopian higher education, particularly in the context of English writing instruction. Most previous Ethiopian studies have focused on general ICT integration rather than the specific pedagogical challenges associated with implementing blended learning for writing development. This study therefore examines the perception–practice gap in blended learning within Ethiopian higher education, with particular emphasis on writing instruction at Addis Ababa University. By situating the study within this context, the research contributes to current discussions on technology integration in ELT, especially the tension between institutional promotion of digital learning and the realities of classroom practice.

Accordingly, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do English language teachers perceive BL for teaching writing skills?
2. How do teachers implement BL in writing instruction?
3. What challenges contribute to the perception–practice gap?

2. Literature Review

Blended learning (BL) has become an important instructional model in higher education, combining face-to-face interaction with online learning components. Rather than simply adding technology to traditional teaching, it is often described as a “thoughtful fusion” of in-person and online experiences that aims to make use of the strengths of both modes (Garrison & Vaughan, 2018). Although definitions vary, most emphasize the intentional integration of instructional approaches and technologies to improve flexibility and engagement (Oweis, 2018).

Face-to-face learning allows for direct interaction, immediate feedback, and social engagement (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004), while online learning supports flexibility and self-paced participation (Blake, 2011). Bringing these modes together can support learner autonomy while maintaining instructional guidance and social interaction through carefully designed learning environments (Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2020).

Research shows that blended learning can lead to improved learning outcomes compared to purely face-to-face or fully online instruction. Studies indicate that students in blended environments often benefit from increased flexibility and personalization, which can enhance satisfaction and engagement (Means et al., 2013; Abrami et al., 2011). Blended learning is also associated with deeper learning processes when discussion and reflection are effectively integrated into instruction (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Overall, these findings suggest that BL is most effective when it is implemented in a purposeful and pedagogically sound manner.

2.1 The Role of Digital Pedagogy and ICT

In higher education, the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a key role in supporting innovative teaching practices. Digital pedagogy involves more than simply using tools; it requires aligning technology with instructional goals (Bates, 2019).

In English language teaching (ELT) contexts, Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis, and social media platforms are increasingly used to support communication and writing practice. Applications like Telegram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, although not originally designed for education, are widely used for collaboration and interaction (Ariantini et al., 2021). These tools allow learners to extend language use beyond the classroom and engage in authentic communication, while also supporting drafting, peer feedback, revision, and iterative writing development, which are central to process-based writing instruction.

However, effective ICT integration depends on more than access to technology. Teachers’ beliefs, skills, and institutional support play a crucial role in determining the success of implementation. Positive attitudes alone are not sufficient to ensure meaningful integration, as challenges such as limited training, workload demands, and contextual constraints often hinder effective practice.

The TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) explains that effective technology integration requires the alignment of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. In ELT writing instruction, this involves designing learning tasks that integrate drafting,

feedback, and revision through digital tools rather than using technology only for content delivery.

Without sufficient training and infrastructure, digital pedagogy may remain limited, widening the gap between intended and actual classroom practice.

2.2 The Perception–Practice Gap

A common issue in educational research is the gap between teachers’ beliefs and their classroom practices. Although many teachers recognize the value of blended learning, they often continue to rely on traditional instructional methods. This perception–practice gap reflects the influence of both individual and contextual factors.

Teacher readiness is a key factor influencing implementation. Limited training and low confidence in using technology can hinder effective adoption. Institutional challenges such as unclear policies, heavy workloads, and lack of technical support also restrict meaningful integration. Student readiness may further influence instructional decisions, particularly when learners lack digital skills or confidence in using online tools.

Rather than operating independently, these factors interact dynamically. Teacher competence, institutional conditions, and student digital literacy collectively shape the extent to which blended learning is implemented in practice, creating multi-layered barriers to effective adoption.

Recent studies further indicate that students’ digital literacy and self-efficacy influence their engagement in blended environments, which in turn affects classroom implementation practices. Despite growing research on blended learning, limited attention has been given to how these factors interact in resource-constrained contexts. In particular, there remains a gap in understanding how teachers’ positive perceptions translate into actual classroom practices in writing instruction. Addressing this gap is essential for improving blended learning implementation in higher education.

2.3 Blended Learning in the Ethiopian Context

In Ethiopia, the adoption of blended learning presents both opportunities and challenges. English instruction has traditionally been teacher-centered, while recent national policies aim to promote technology integration in education. However, implementation remains constrained in practice.

Ongoing challenges include unreliable internet access, limited availability of digital devices, and high technology costs. In addition, many instructors lack adequate training in online course design, which often results in limited use of blended learning strategies, such as restricting online activities to static material sharing rather than interactive learning tasks.

These infrastructural and pedagogical constraints are particularly critical in writing instruction, where continuous feedback, revision, and iterative interaction are essential for developing writing competence. At the same time, technology is expected to support rather than replace the teacher’s role, particularly in writing instruction where guidance and feedback remain central to student development.

2.4 Challenges in Implementing Blended Learning

Despite its benefits, blended learning faces several challenges. Teacher resistance to change remains an issue, as some educators are more comfortable with traditional teaching approaches. In addition, many institutions lack reliable infrastructure and technical support, which limits effective implementation.

Digital literacy also plays a significant role in determining how blended learning is used. When teachers or students lack confidence with technology, its application tends to remain basic rather than transformative.

These challenges are interconnected rather than isolated. Limited infrastructure, low digital competence, and weak institutional support collectively constrain meaningful blended learning implementation, even when teachers hold positive attitudes toward its use. As a result, structural and contextual constraints often prevent consistent and effective application of blended learning practices in higher education.

2.5 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Education has shifted from traditional uniform instruction toward more flexible, technology-supported learning environments. Traditional pedagogy emphasized uniform instructional delivery, whereas contemporary digital learning environments facilitate differentiated instruction that accommodates learners' diverse needs, learning paces, and abilities.

This study is grounded in Social Constructivism and Connectivism. Social Constructivism emphasizes learning through interaction, collaboration, and shared meaning-making (Saleem et al., 2021). In writing instruction, this perspective is reflected in peer feedback, collaborative writing activities, and group revision processes, where learners construct knowledge through social engagement.

Connectivism focuses on learning within digital networks where knowledge is distributed across technological platforms and social systems (Siemens, 2005). In blended learning environments, students engage continuously with online resources, digital communication tools, and technology-mediated feedback, which support the development of writing skills and learner autonomy.

Together, these theories conceptualize writing development as both a social and networked process in which interaction and digital connectivity jointly influence learning outcomes. Based on these perspectives, blended learning implementation serves as the independent variable, while students' writing skills and learning motivation function as the dependent variables. The relationship among these variables is mediated by contextual factors, including ICT tools, teacher implementation practices, and institutional support systems.

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) tools such as online discussion forums, virtual classrooms, and messaging applications facilitate interaction, feedback exchange, and collaborative writing activities. These tools influence the effectiveness of blended learning in supporting writing development.

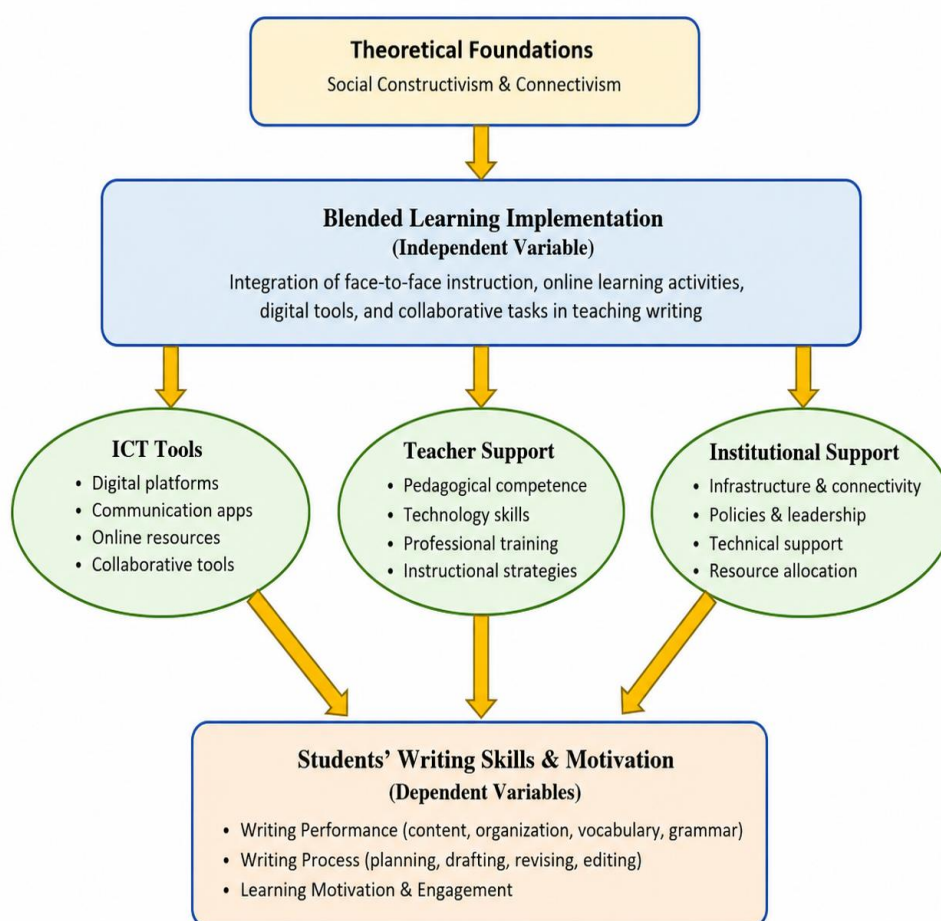
The framework is further informed by the Complex Adaptive Blended Learning System (CABLS) model (Wang et al., 2015), which conceptualizes blended learning as a system comprising six interconnected components: learner, teacher, technology, content, learning support, and institution. In the Ethiopian higher education context, each component reflects specific challenges affecting blended learning implementation. The learner component is constrained by limited digital literacy and unequal access to devices. The teacher component is influenced by insufficient training in blended pedagogy. The technology component is affected by unreliable internet connectivity and limited infrastructure. The content component is often not redesigned for interactive digital learning environments. The learning support component is weakened by inadequate technical

assistance, while the institutional component is constrained by limited policy implementation and resource allocation.

These interconnected challenges explain why blended learning implementation in Ethiopian higher education remains partial and fragmented rather than fully systematic, particularly in ELT writing instruction. The resulting conceptual framework illustrates the relationships among blended learning implementation, contextual mediating factors, and student outcomes in writing skills and learning motivation.

Figure1.

Conceptual framework for blended learning in ELT writing instruction (Adapted from Wang et al., 2015)



3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation. This design is appropriate when a researcher aims to compare and relate statistical trends with participants lived experiences in a single study (Creswell, 2022).

Quantitative data were used to examine teachers’ perceptions and implementation practices of blended learning, while qualitative data provided deeper insight into contextual and pedagogical factors influencing classroom practice. The two datasets were merged during interpretation through comparison of themes and statistical results to build a

comprehensive explanation of findings. This integration strengthened triangulation and improved the validity of the results.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study were English language instructors teaching Freshman English Skills II courses at Addis Ababa University. Structured questionnaires were distributed to 36 ELT instructors, and 31 of them returned completed questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 86.1%.

The participants represented a highly experienced and academically qualified group of instructors. All respondents were senior professionals with advanced academic qualifications, including Master of Arts (MA) degrees in English Language Teaching and related fields, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees, or advanced PhD candidacy status. In addition, all participants had more than ten years of teaching experience in higher education institutions, indicating significant professional expertise in English language instruction.

To complement the survey data, six senior ELT instructors were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews. These interview participants provided deeper insights into the practical experiences, pedagogical differences, and institutional realities associated with the implementation of blended writing instruction at the university.

3.3 Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to select English language teachers teaching Freshman English Skills II courses at Addis Ababa University. This sampling technique was chosen because the study specifically focused on writing instruction in English language courses. Therefore, teachers who were directly involved in teaching the target course were considered appropriate participants for the study.

The selected instructors were expected to provide relevant information related to classroom practices, the use of blended learning, and the challenges encountered during instruction. Using purposive sampling helped the researcher gather data that were closely related to the objectives of the study and the actual teaching context.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire containing both closed-ended and open-ended items, as well as semi-structured interviews. These instruments were selected because they provided both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions and practices regarding blended learning in writing instruction. The questionnaire enabled the researcher to gather data from a relatively large number of participants in a systematic and efficient manner, while the interviews provided opportunities for participants to explain their experiences, challenges, and teaching practices in greater depth. The combination of these instruments also supported data triangulation, which strengthened the credibility of the findings.

3.4.1 Closed-Ended Questionnaire

The closed-ended questionnaire was designed to examine teachers' practices, experiences, and perceptions of blended learning in writing instruction. It included items related to the frequency of blended learning use, the digital tools employed, and teachers' perceptions of its usefulness, flexibility, and effectiveness. Additional items explored

perceptions of student motivation, participation, and satisfaction. Sample statements included: “Blended learning improves students’ writing performance,” “Digital tools make writing instruction more engaging,” and “I regularly integrate online activities into my writing lessons.”

Participants responded using a three-point Likert scale (Disagree, Neutral, Agree). This simplified scale was adopted to reduce ambiguity, facilitate clearer response choices, and minimize central tendency bias. It also allowed for efficient analysis of general patterns in teachers’ perceptions and practices rather than highly fine-grained attitudinal distinctions. The use of a structured Likert-scale questionnaire ensured consistency in measurement and enabled systematic comparison of responses across participants.

3.4.2 Open-Ended Questions

The questionnaire also included open-ended questions that allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences with blended learning. These questions focused on areas such as challenges faced during implementation, teaching strategies used in blended writing classes, digital platforms employed, and the level of institutional support available.

The inclusion of open-ended questions was important because it enabled participants to provide explanations and examples that could not be captured through fixed-response items alone. These responses provided valuable qualitative insights that complemented and enriched the quantitative findings.

3.4.3 Interview Questions

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six teachers to gain deeper insights into their experiences with blended learning in writing instruction. The interviews included guiding questions related to teachers’ classroom practices, perceptions of blended learning effectiveness, challenges encountered, and strategies used to support students’ writing development.

The semi-structured format was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to ask predetermined questions while also giving participants the flexibility to expand on issues they considered important. This approach helped generate detailed and context-specific information.

Although the interviews were not audio-recorded, detailed notes were taken during and immediately after each interview to ensure that participants’ responses were captured accurately. To enhance reliability, the researcher reviewed and organized the notes immediately after each session and confirmed key points with participants during the interviews whenever clarification was needed. In addition, the interview notes were carefully compared with questionnaire responses to ensure consistency across the collected data.

3.5 Reliability and Validity of Instruments

The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient to determine internal consistency. The analysis demonstrated acceptable to high internal consistency across all three sections:

- a. Part I (Practices and Experiences): $\alpha = .90$
- b. Part II (Perceptions of Effectiveness): $\alpha = .95$
- c. Part III (Impact on Motivation): $\alpha = .75$

In alignment with methodological standards, Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 were considered acceptable, while values exceeding 0.80 indicated high reliability.

To ensure face and content validity, the instruments were subjected to expert review by two specialists in English Language Teaching (ELT) and educational technology. Furthermore, a pilot test was conducted with writing instructors who were outside the main study sample. Feedback from the pilot test was utilized to refine the wording, improve clarity, and ensure the contextual relevance of individual items before final administration.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software and summarized using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to systematically describe teachers' perceptions and classroom practices.

Qualitative data derived from the open-ended questionnaire items and semi-structured interview notes were analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2021) inductive thematic analysis framework. The qualitative data were systematically coded and categorized into overarching themes, which included blended learning practices, institutional challenges, and teacher experiences in writing instruction.

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative datasets was carried out during the interpretation phase. Statistical results were directly compared against the qualitative explanations to achieve data triangulation, thereby developing a more comprehensive and robust understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical procedures and received formal approval from the Addis Ababa University Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection. Before participating, all individuals were fully informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was subsequently obtained from all participants.

To maintain strict anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms or alphanumeric codes were used instead of participant names, and all collected data were securely stored in password-protected digital files. The study was conducted in full compliance with internationally accepted ethical standards for educational research, ensuring respect for persons, beneficence, and robust data protection throughout.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This section presents findings related to ELT teachers' practices, perceptions, and experiences regarding blended learning (BL) in teaching writing at Addis Ababa University. Quantitative data were collected from 31 teachers through a structured questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained from open-ended responses and semi-structured interviews with six teachers.

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to analyze questionnaire data. The questionnaire employed a three-point Likert scale (1 = Disagree, 2 = Neutral, 3 = Agree). Mean scores closer to 1 indicate disagreement, scores around 2 indicate neutrality, and scores closer to 3 indicate agreement.

Qualitative findings were analyzed thematically and integrated with survey results through triangulation.

4.1.1 Teachers’ Practices and Experiences in Blended Learning

Table 1.

Teachers’ Practices and Experiences in Blended Learning (N = 31)

Dimension	Item	M	SD
BL Practices	I use multiple digital platforms when teaching writing skills.	1.58	0.87
	I use BL to teach different English language skills.	1.45	0.80
	I apply BL whenever internet access is available.	1.52	0.87
	I rarely use BL in my teaching.	2.32	0.90
BL Knowledge	I have sufficient knowledge to implement BL effectively.	2.32	0.86
	I know how to design lessons using BL approaches.	2.29	0.85
	I am familiar with digital tools used in BL.	1.74	0.76
	I have received adequate training on BL.	1.77	0.80
Barriers to BL	Teaching with BL is time-consuming.	1.55	0.61
	Available computer facilities are inadequate.	2.65	0.73
	Poor internet connectivity limits BL use.	2.65	0.68
	Students’ limited digital skills make BL difficult.	1.16	0.51
Institutional Support	College management supports technology integration.	1.06	0.37
	Teachers regularly use technology in teaching.	2.10	0.58
	The college provides adequate BL training.	1.29	0.64

Note. Scale: 1 = Disagree, 2 = Neutral, 3 = Agree.

Survey findings indicated limited implementation of blended learning among ELT teachers. Most participants reported infrequent use of digital platforms and blended approaches in writing instruction. Although teachers demonstrated moderate conceptual understanding of BL, their familiarity with digital tools and practical implementation skills appeared limited.

The main barriers identified were inadequate computer facilities, unreliable internet connectivity, and insufficient institutional support. In contrast, student digital skills were not generally viewed as a major challenge.

Interview findings triangulated the survey results. Teachers explained that BL was mainly used for sharing materials, assigning tasks, and communicating with students through platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram rather than for structured blended instruction. Participants also emphasized that weak internet access, limited infrastructure, and lack of practical training reduced consistent implementation of BL.

4.1.2 Teachers’ Perceptions of Blended Learning Effectiveness

Table 2.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Blended Learning Effectiveness (N = 31)

Dimension	Item	M	SD
Learning Effectiveness	BL is effective for teaching English, particularly writing skills.	2.77	0.50
	BL helps students make better learning progress.	2.84	0.45
	BL enhances students’ learning opportunities.	2.97	0.17
	BL can be more effective than face-to-face instruction in some contexts.	2.29	0.70

Student Engagement & Interaction	BL promotes active student participation.	2.52	0.63
	BL provides a more interactive learning experience.	2.13	0.68
	BL encourages collaboration among students.	2.42	0.59
	BL increases students' motivation to participate.	2.52	0.61
Flexibility & Learner Autonomy	BL allows more time to engage with learning materials.	2.45	0.60
	BL offers flexible timing for learning activities.	2.90	0.33
	BL enables students to learn at their own pace.	2.45	0.65
	BL encourages responsibility for learning.	2.45	0.60
Access to Learning Resources	BL enables access to a wide range of resources.	3.00	0.00
	BL allows access to materials anytime and anywhere.	2.71	0.50
	BL provides diverse learning resources.	2.77	0.47
	BL helps students locate additional resources easily.	2.52	0.60

Note. Scale: 1 = Disagree, 2 = Neutral, 3 = Agree.

Teachers generally perceived blended learning positively, particularly in relation to learning flexibility, learner autonomy, and access to learning resources. Participants strongly agreed that BL expands learning opportunities and supports student progress.

Perceptions of student engagement and interaction were moderately positive. While teachers believed that BL encourages participation and collaboration, views regarding interactivity were less consistent.

Interview findings supported these results. Teachers stated that BL helps students draft, revise, and receive feedback beyond classroom time, which is particularly useful in writing instruction. However, participants also noted that BL was often used for communication and material sharing rather than for highly interactive learning activities.

4.1.3 Student Motivation, Satisfaction, and Challenges

Table 3.

Student Motivation, Satisfaction, and Challenges in BL (N = 31)

Dimension	Item	M	SD
Student Motivation	Students show higher motivation in BL settings.	2.61	0.66
	Students produce better writing outcomes in BL.	2.35	0.73
	Classroom participation improves through BL.	2.45	0.77
	Students make noticeable writing progress through BL.	2.16	0.92
	Students participate more actively in BL than in traditional classes.	2.84	0.48
Student Satisfaction	BL provides personalized learning opportunities.	2.58	0.71
	BL allows convenient online feedback.	2.42	0.76
	Students achieve better academic results in BL contexts.	2.39	0.77
	Students are generally satisfied with BL sessions.	2.29	0.78
	BL increases confidence in independent writing tasks.	2.23	0.79

Challenges	Students struggle with time management in BL.	2.23	0.75
	Some students prefer face-to-face instruction.	2.32	0.66
	Limited internet access and devices hinder learning.	2.71	0.62
	Students are reluctant to participate due to limited experience.	2.23	0.79
	Some students prefer direct teacher guidance.	2.10	0.87

Note. Scale: 1 = Disagree, 2 = Neutral, 3 = Agree.

Teachers generally perceived BL as motivating for students, particularly in terms of participation and engagement. However, perceptions regarding improvements in writing performance and academic outcomes were more moderate.

Teachers also reported moderate levels of student satisfaction with BL, especially regarding personalized learning opportunities and flexible feedback. At the same time, technical limitations and students’ preference for face-to-face instruction remained important challenges.

Interview findings confirmed these patterns. Teachers explained that students often participate actively in online activities but may experience difficulties related to internet access, device availability, and independent learning skills. Several participants also noted that some students continue to prefer direct teacher guidance during writing activities.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Perception–Practice Gap in Blended Learning

The findings of this study revealed a clear gap between teachers’ positive perceptions of blended learning and its actual implementation in classroom practice. Although teachers valued blended learning for flexibility, learner autonomy, access to resources, and student participation, its practical use remained limited primarily to communication and material-sharing activities through platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram.

These findings suggest that positive perceptions alone are insufficient for meaningful pedagogical integration. Teachers generally recognized the potential of blended learning but lacked the practical skills, technological infrastructure, and institutional support necessary for systematic implementation (Lim et al., 2019; Mishra & Koehler, 2006). The findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that teachers often demonstrate favorable attitudes toward educational technology while facing difficulties integrating it effectively into classroom practice (Hrastinski, 2022; Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020).

The findings also reflect the principles of social constructivism and connectivism, which emphasize interaction, collaboration, and technology-mediated learning. Although blended learning has the potential to support collaborative writing and peer feedback, these interactive dimensions were only partially realized because of practical and institutional constraints.

4.2.2 Institutional and Infrastructural Barriers

The study identified unreliable internet connectivity, inadequate computer facilities, insufficient practical training, and weak institutional support as the major barriers affecting blended learning implementation.

Teachers repeatedly described blended learning adoption as depending largely on individual effort rather than coordinated institutional systems. This finding indicates that institutional culture and technological readiness strongly influence the success of blended

learning implementation. The findings align with the Complex Adaptive Blended Learning System (CABLS) framework, which highlights the interconnected roles of infrastructure, institutional support, teachers, learners, and technology in blended learning environments (Wang et al., 2015).

The findings also reflect broader patterns of digital inequality reported in African higher education contexts, where infrastructural and institutional limitations continue to shape educational innovation unevenly (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). These interconnected challenges limited the effective and systematic integration of blended learning practices in writing instruction.

4.2.3 Implications for Writing Instruction

Teachers particularly valued blended learning for writing instruction because it enabled students to draft, revise, and receive feedback beyond classroom time. This finding supports earlier research suggesting that blended environments can strengthen process-based writing instruction when implemented systematically.

The findings further suggest that blended learning can support important stages of the writing process, including collaborative drafting, peer review, asynchronous feedback, and multiple revision cycles (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Zhang & Zou, 2022). These features may help students engage more actively in writing development by providing additional opportunities for reflection, interaction, and revision beyond face-to-face classroom sessions.

However, teachers also emphasized that increased participation does not automatically result in improved writing performance. Effective blended learning implementation therefore requires not only technological access but also pedagogically structured activities, teacher guidance, and students' readiness for independent learning.

4.2.4 Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to ongoing discussions on technology integration in ELT by focusing specifically on writing instruction in Ethiopian higher education, a context that remains underexplored in blended learning research.

Unlike many previous studies conducted in broader language-learning settings, this study demonstrates how infrastructural, institutional, and pedagogical constraints shape the gap between teachers' positive perceptions of blended learning and their actual classroom practices.

The findings suggest that strengthening blended learning implementation in higher education requires:

1. practice-oriented professional development focused on the practical integration of BL into writing instruction,
2. continuous pedagogical and technical support that helps teachers move from conceptual awareness to classroom implementation,
3. reliable internet connectivity and improved technological infrastructure,
4. adequate access to computers, digital devices, and learning management systems,
5. institutional policies and administrative support that actively encourage blended pedagogy,
6. opportunities for teachers to share experiences and effective BL practices, and
7. interactive approaches that support collaborative writing, peer feedback, revision, and learner autonomy.

5. Conclusion

This study examined ELT teachers’ practices, perceptions, and experiences regarding blended learning in teaching writing at Addis Ababa University. The findings revealed a notable discrepancy between teachers’ positive perceptions of blended learning and its limited implementation in classroom practice. Although teachers acknowledged its potential to enhance learner motivation, flexibility, autonomy, and access to learning resources, its use was largely confined to communication and material-sharing activities. Consequently, while blended learning was perceived to increase student engagement, its contribution to writing performance remained moderate due to limited pedagogical integration.

The findings suggest that the challenges surrounding blended learning implementation are primarily rooted in systemic and institutional factors rather than teacher attitudes. Inadequate ICT infrastructure, unreliable internet connectivity, insufficient professional training, and limited institutional support emerged as the principal barriers. These results indicate that successful blended learning implementation requires a coordinated alignment of technological resources, institutional policies, and pedagogical support alongside teacher readiness.

From a theoretical perspective, the study extends the application of the CABLS framework by demonstrating how weaknesses in institutional and technological components can hinder the effective integration of blended learning. The findings also support social constructivist and connectivist perspectives, emphasizing that meaningful learning in blended environments depends on sustained interaction, collaboration, and active learner participation. Practically, the study highlights the importance of investing in technological infrastructure, providing continuous practice-oriented professional development, and establishing supportive institutional policies that promote interactive and process-oriented writing instruction.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. As a case study conducted in a single institution with a relatively small sample of ELT teachers, the findings may not be readily generalizable to other higher education contexts. In addition, the reliance on self-reported data and the absence of audio-recorded interviews may have limited the depth and richness of the qualitative findings. Future research should therefore involve multiple institutions, larger and more diverse participant groups, and the inclusion of students’ perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of blended learning implementation and its impact on writing development in higher education settings.

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EMOTIONAL LANGUAGE IN SELF-IMPROVEMENT BOOK BLURBS: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC APPROACH TO AFFECTIVE READER ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

This study examines how emotional language functions as an affective strategy in self-improvement book blurbs and how it triggers reader engagement from a psycholinguistic perspective. Self-improvement books constitute a rapidly expanding genre, making their promotional blurbs a significant site for linguistic analysis. Blurbs function as affective instruments that mediate reader perception and engagement, yet the emotional language mechanisms operating within them remain undertheorised. Using a qualitative descriptive-analytic approach, the study integrates three complementary frameworks: Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), Halliday's Interpersonal Metafunction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), and the Affect Infusion Model (Forgas, 1995). Six blurbs from Brianna Wiest's bestselling self-improvement books (2016–2025) were selected for genre consistency, publication range, and international recognition. The analysis reveals that emotional language is systematically constructed across three appraisal systems, namely Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, forming a coherent affective architecture. These resources are strategically deployed through interpersonal choices of mood, pronoun, and modality to construct an affective writer-reader relationship. Emotional language appears to facilitate reader engagement through affective and evaluative processes, operating as a cognitive heuristic that shapes readers' decisions to engage with the text. This study contributes to discourse analysis by demonstrating how emotional language in self-improvement blurbs strategically constructs affective relationships that drive readers engagement.

Keywords: *Affect infusion model; affective strategy; appraisal theory; book blurbs; emotional language; reader engagement; self-improvement; systemic functional linguistics.*

1. Introduction

Although promotional discourse has received increasing scholarly attention, the affective mechanisms through which self-improvement blurbs shape reader engagement remain insufficiently examined. This gap is particularly noteworthy given the growing commercial and cultural prominence of the self-improvement genre, where paratextual elements play a crucial role in attracting and persuading potential readers. Self-improvement

books represent one of the fastest-growing segments in global publishing, with sales reaching \$708 million in 2022 (Marketdata LLC, 2023). As this genre continues to expand, paratexts such as blurbs have become increasingly significant as mediators of reader perception, serving as readers' first point of interaction with a book. These short texts play an important role in shaping readers' initial perceptions of whether a book aligns with their personal interests and needs. Batchelor (2018), through Genette's Paratextual Theory, argues that paratexts such as blurbs are not passive frames but texts that actively shape readers' perceptions and decisions. In the context of self-improvement books particularly, blurbs carry particular weight in self-improvement texts, as readers must swiftly determine relevance.

Readers rapidly evaluate a book's personal relevance, often relying on emotional resonance as a key interpretive cue. Research suggests that emotionally charged language facilitates deeper cognitive engagement and stronger perceptions of self-relevance during language comprehension, leading readers to seek not only information but also emotional connections that resonate with their personal experiences and concerns (Imbir, Pastwa, & Walkowiak, 2023; Fields & Kuperberg, 2012). Consequently, the process of assessing a book's appeal is inherently affective as well as cognitive. This tendency is particularly pronounced in the self-improvement genre, where readers intentionally seek texts that address emotional challenges, personal aspirations, and the development of self-concept (Gwynne, 2024; Natan & Tiatry, 2024). Within this context, emotional language functions not merely as a stylistic feature but as a fundamental mechanism through which blurbs establish personal relevance and foster reader engagement. Moreover, because blurbs are concise promotional texts that are typically read within seconds, readers are unlikely to engage in extensive analytical processing. Instead, they often rely on immediate emotional responses as cognitive shortcuts for evaluating a book's relevance and potential value. This pattern aligns with Forgas's (1995) Affect Infusion Model (AIM), particularly the heuristic processing strategy, whereby affective cues significantly influence judgments when cognitive effort is limited. Accordingly, emotional language in blurbs serves a crucial persuasive function by capturing attention, enhancing perceived personal relevance, and motivating readers to engage further with the text.

Academic focus on this area has grown in recent years. Studies on blurb structure have identified recurring rhetorical movements in both fiction and self-help genres (Godis, 2017). Separately, interpersonal language research has demonstrated that mood, pronouns, and modality in self-improvement texts significantly influence reader engagement (Hassan et al., 2025). On the other hand, the Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) offers a comprehensive framework for identifying how emotional language is systematically expressed in texts, encompassing both explicit affective expressions and implicit evaluative frameworks. However, a significant gap remains. Existing blurb studies focus primarily on structural patterns without examining affective lexical strategies, while interpersonal language research in self-improvement has been conducted on full-length texts rather than blurbs as compressed, high-stakes texts.

Among the most prominent authors in this genre is Brianna Wiest, whose self-improvement books have gained internationally recognized readership (Wiest, n.d.). Six blurbs from Brianna Wiest's bestselling works (2016-2025) were selected for consistency, temporal range, and global readership. These criteria position Brianna Wiest's blurbs as a representative corpus for examining affective strategies. To address this gap, this study examines how emotional language functions as an affective strategy in the blurbs of Brianna

Wiest's self-improvement books (2016-2025) and how this strategy triggers reader engagement from a psycholinguistic perspective. Specifically, this study addresses three questions:

- 1) What types of emotional language appear in self-improvement book blurbs?
- 2) How is emotional language employed as an effective strategy?
- 3) How does emotional language trigger reader engagement from a psycholinguistic perspective?

2. Literature Review

Book blurbs function as strategic paratexts shaping reader perception and engagement (Batchelor, 2018). Within Genette's paratextual framework, blurbs are interpretive thresholds that actively influence how readers approach a text. Genre analyses of blurbs in fiction and self-help (Godis, 2017) reveal recurring rhetorical structures, particularly descriptive and promotional moves. These studies emphasize structure but neglect the linguistic mechanisms that generate affective engagement.

Research in self-improvement discourse highlights the role of interpersonal language in fostering engagement. Hassan et al. (2025) show that the use of pronouns, mood, and modality in self-help books plays a significant role in building rapport and encouraging reader involvement. Sari (2018) shows that personal reference and repetition function as persuasive strategies, reinforcing immediacy and relevance. These findings suggest that self-improvement texts rely heavily on linguistic features that create a sense of immediacy and personal relevance. Nevertheless, such studies tend to examine full-length texts or general non-fiction blurbs, leaving the highly condensed and strategic nature of self-improvement book blurbs underexplored.

Central to this study is Halliday's Interpersonal Metafunction (SFL), which examines how mood, pronouns, and modality construct social relationships, positioning blurbs as affective strategies that build intimacy with readers, thereby establishing interpersonal closeness and affective resonance. Within this metafunction, linguistic choices such as mood (imperative vs. declarative), pronoun use, and modality are not merely grammatical features but interpersonal strategies that position the writer in relation to the reader and actively shape the affective tone of the text. In the context of self-improvement book blurbs, these interpersonal resources function as affective strategies that build an intimate writer-reader relationship, creating a sense of personal address and emotional proximity that encourages reader engagement.

Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) provides a framework for analyzing affect, judgment, and appreciation, enabling nuanced examination of implicit evaluative cues in blurbs. Supporting this approach, Troiano et al. (2023) demonstrate that emotional meaning is often conveyed implicitly through evaluative structures rather than explicit emotion words. This is particularly relevant for blurbs, where persuasion relies on subtle evaluative cues rather than overt emotion words. Therefore, Appraisal Theory enables a more nuanced analysis of how emotional language operates beyond surface-level lexical choices.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, emotional language can also be understood as a mechanism that triggers reader engagement. Forgas (1995), through the Affect Infusion Model (AIM), explains that individuals rely on heuristic processing when making quick judgments, especially in low-effort cognitive situations. Since blurbs are typically brief and processed rapidly, readers are likely to depend on emotional cues as cognitive heuristics in

evaluating a book's relevance. Recent psycholinguistic studies (Berger et al., 2023; Sabag-Shushan et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2025) confirm that emotionally charged vocabulary enhances attention, comprehension, and engagement.

Despite the growing body of research, a significant analytical gap remains. While Appraisal Theory, SFL Interpersonal Metafunction, and the Affect Infusion Model have each been applied independently in related fields, no study has yet integrated these three frameworks to systematically examine how emotional language operates as an affective strategy specifically within self-improvement book blurbs. The highly condensed and persuasive nature of blurbs as promotional texts demands a multi-layered analytical approach that existing studies have not yet provided. Furthermore, the psycholinguistic mechanisms by which emotional language in such short texts triggers reader engagement remain insufficiently theorized. To address this gap, the present study analyzes six blurbs from Brianna Wiest's self-improvement books (2016–2025), employing this theoretical triangulation to provide a comprehensive and empirically grounded explanation of how emotional language functions affectively and cognitively in self-improvement book blurbs.

3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytic approach to examine emotional language in self-improvement book blurbs and its role in reader engagement. A qualitative approach is selected because the focus of this study lies in the interpretive and functional dimensions of language, which require close and in-depth textual analysis rather than quantitative measurement. Qualitative textual analysis is appropriate for examining how meanings and emotions are embedded in discourse, as this method emphasizes interpretation of contextual and affective meanings rather than statistical generalization (Baxter, 2020; Alejandro & Zhao, 2023). Furthermore, qualitative content analysis enables researchers to interpret linguistic patterns and uncover underlying emotional and persuasive functions within textual data through systematic yet context-sensitive analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The descriptive-analytic design further allows for systematic identification and explanation of linguistic patterns across the corpus without reducing the richness of meaning to quantifiable units.

The corpus consists of six blurbs from Brianna Wiest's bestselling works (2016–2025), selected for genre consistency, temporal range, and global readership. The corpus was purposively selected based on three criteria. First, all six works belong to the self-improvement genre, ensuring thematic and generic consistency across the data. Second, the publication range spanning nearly a decade allows for observation of consistent affective strategies across different titles and periods. Third, Brianna Wiest's globally recognized bestseller status across major platforms such as Amazon and Audible serves as an indicator of broad and sustained reader engagement, positioning her blurbs as a representative corpus for analysis.

Blurbs were collected from official print editions and verified against Amazon and Goodreads to ensure accuracy. Each blurb was then transcribed in full and prepared as the primary unit of analysis. The unit of analysis is the clause and lexical item, consistent with Appraisal Theory and SFL requirements, as both Appraisal Theory and the SFL Interpersonal Metafunction require close attention to grammatical and lexical choices within and across clauses. The data analysis is conducted through a three-stage analytical framework organized as follows:

1. Identification of emotional language using Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), with focus on the Attitude subsystem encompassing Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation. This stage addresses the first research question concerning the types of emotional language present in the blurbs.
2. Analysis of interpersonal strategies via Halliday's Interpersonal Metafunction within Systemic Functional Linguistics, directing attention toward mood choices (particularly imperative and declarative clauses), pronoun patterns (especially the second-person pronoun "you"), and modality markers. This stage addresses the second research question concerning how emotional language operates as an affective strategy.
3. Interpretation through the Affect Infusion Model (Forgas, 1995), with specific focus on heuristic processing as the cognitive pathway most relevant to the rapid, low-effort reading context of blurbs. This stage addresses the third research question concerning the psycholinguistic triggers of reader engagement.

Findings were iteratively cross-checked against criteria from all three frameworks to ensure analytical consistency. Analytical rigor was further ensured through iterative triangulation across frameworks and peer validation of coding decisions.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings and discussion based on the three research questions. First, it identifies the types of emotional language found in self-improvement book blurbs. Second, it examines how emotional language is employed as an affective strategy to persuade and connect with potential readers. Third, it explores how such emotional language may trigger reader engagement from a psycholinguistic perspective. The findings are presented and discussed sequentially, supported by textual evidence from the selected blurbs and interpreted in relation to relevant theories and previous studies.

4.1 Types of Emotional Language in Self-Improvement Book Blurbs

The appraisal analysis of six book blurbs by Brianna Wiest, published between 2016 and 2025, identifies emotional language operating across three interconnected systems within Martin & White's (2005) Appraisal Theory framework: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Each system contributes a distinct layer to the overall affective architecture, as reflected in the representative excerpts in Table 1.

Table 1.

Types of Emotional Language in Brianna Wiest's Book Blurbs (Representative Excerpts)

Book	System	Sub-type	Excerpt from Blurb	Affective Function / Analysis
The Mountain Is You (2020)	Attitude	Affect – Insecurity/Anxiety (negative)	"we resist efforts to change, often until they feel completely futile"	Inscribed negative affect. Names the reader's pain accurately to build empathic rapport before offering resolution.

Book	System	Sub-type	Excerpt from Blurb	Affective Function / Analysis
The Mountain Is You (2020)	Attitude	Affect – Satisfaction/Hope (positive)	"we can step out of our own way and into our potential"	Invoked positive affect via spatial metaphor. Converts negative affect into forward emotional momentum.
The Life That's Waiting (2025)	Attitude	Affect – Freedom/Vision (positive)	"not pushed by your fears but moved by your vision"	Contrastive affect structure. Parallelism determines emotional liberation, negative propulsive force replaced by positive motivational force.
101 Essays (2016)	Attitude	Appreciation – Valuation (social esteem)	"global bestseller and social media phenomenon"	Evaluates the book's worth via external social validation. Collective approval reduces reader risk and amplifies desirability.
When You're Ready... (2022)	Attitude	Appreciation – Reaction (somatic)	"Wiest's words are a balm for any soul on the journey of their own becoming"	Tactile somatic metaphor frames the text as therapeutic relief, targeting readers in emotional pain.
The Pivot Year (2023)	Attitude	Judgment – Propriety/Moral courage	"finding the courage to become who you've always wanted to be"	Positive moral judgment. Frames self-transformation as courageous, elevating the ethical stakes of personal growth.
The Mountain Is You (2020)	Engagement	Entertain – Bare assertion (all-caps)	"THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT SELF-SABOTAGE."	Monoglossic, typographically intensified assertion. Collapses social distance and forecloses negotiation.
When You're Ready... (2022)	Engagement	Entertain – Counter-expectation	"Healing is not a one-time event."	Dialogic contraction via counter-expectation. Creates cognitive tension that pulls the reader forward into the text.

Book	System	Sub-type	Excerpt from Blurb	Affective Function / Analysis
The Life That's Waiting (2025)	Graduation	Force – Intensification (temporal + focus)	"all this time" / "not just waiting to begin" / "the life you actually want"	Temporal amplifier ("all this time") graduates accumulated longing, focus sharpeners ("not just", "actually") narrow the emotional claim to its most recognizable form.

4.1.1 Attitude

Across all six blurbs, affect follows a consistent arc: inscribed negative affect precedes invoked positive affect, establishing recognition before resolution. This sequencing is not accidental: it functions as the structural backbone of each blurb, ensuring that the reader first feels recognised before being offered resolution.

A key distinction within this pattern is the difference between inscribed and invoked affect (Martin & White, 2005). Negative affect tends to be inscribed explicitly, as in "*we resist efforts to change, often until they feel completely futile*" (The Mountain Is You, 2020), which names the reader's experience with precision. As shown in Table 1, positive affect, by contrast, is predominantly invoked through spatial and directional metaphors, as in "*we can step out of our own way and into our potential*" (The Mountain Is You, 2020) and "*not pushed by your fears but moved by your vision*" (The Life That's Waiting, 2025). This asymmetry increases reader identification because the resolution feels discovered rather than imposed. The Life That's Waiting represents the most advanced instance of this strategy, relying almost entirely on figurative imagery to carry its affective load, which may reflect a rhetorical maturation across Wiest's publishing trajectory from 2016 to 2025.

Appreciation operates alongside Affect to assign value to the text and the human experience it addresses. Rather than targeting the reader's internal emotional states, it shapes their evaluative orientation toward the book itself. As shown in Table 1, valuation is achieved through social proof ("*global bestseller and social media phenomenon*"), reaction through somatic metaphor ("*a balm for any soul*"), and composition through aesthetic elevation ("*healing ceremony*"). Each dimension generates a distinct form of desire: for the text's credibility, its therapeutic quality, and its aesthetic significance respectively. Judgment, the third sub-type, appears less frequently but performs a targeted function: it pre-emptively affirms the reader's capacity for change. Instances such as "*finding the courage to become who you've always wanted to be*" (The Pivot Year, 2023) frame self-transformation as morally courageous and intellectually accessible, reducing resistance before the self-improvement work has even begun.

4.1.2 Engagement

At the level of Engagement, all six blurbs rely predominantly on bare monoglossic assertions: unhedged, unattributed truth claims that position the author's voice as the single authoritative perspective. This enacts what Martin & White (2005) describe as dialogic

contraction, foreclosing alternative readings and presenting claims as self-evident universal truths. The all-caps examples in Table 1, such as *"This Is A Book About Self-Sabotage"* (The Mountain Is You, 2020), reinforce this contraction through paralinguistic force. Assertions function affectively by foreclosing negotiation, positioning the reader's experience as pre-validated. The counter-expectation structure, as in *"Healing is not a one-time event"* (When You're Ready, This is How You Heal, 2022), is particularly effective by contradicting a widely held assumption; it creates cognitive and affective tension that compels the reader forward into the text. The emotional significance of this pattern lies not only in what is asserted but in how assertion itself performs confidence. The reader does not need to be persuaded; they need only to feel that their experience has already been anticipated and understood.

4.1.3 Graduation

Graduation does not introduce new categories of emotional language; instead, it calibrates the intensity of the Attitude and Engagement resources already present. Force and Intensification is the dominant mechanism, applied symmetrically to both negative and positive affect so that pain feels total and the promise of relief feels equally absolute. Temporal maximizers such as *"always wanted to be"* link aspiration to the reader's entire identity history, while universal quantifiers such as *"a balm for any soul"* expand emotional reach to every possible reader circumstance. Scientific-register amplifiers such as *"at a cellular level"* enhance perceived credibility by invoking empirical authority. Focus and Sharpening operates more selectively but with precise rhetorical effect: words such as exact, not just, and actually narrow emotional claims to their most specific and therefore most recognisable forms. The word actually is particularly forceful in that it implies the reader has been living inauthentically, constructing the promised life as urgent and affectively compelling.

Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation form a cohesive affective composition positioning blurbs as persuasive instruments. Affect sets each blurb's logic through its negative-to-positive arc. Focusing on the reader's evaluative orientation, Appreciation and Judgement go further. Through monoglossic authority, engagement presents assertions as self-evident, and graduation ensures both promise and suffering are felt at maximum intensity. These elements create an affective architecture inspiring the reader to act by making them feel capable, understood, and inspired.

4.2 How Emotional Language Is Employed as an Affective Strategy

After identifying the types of emotional language present in the blurbs (RQ1), this section examines how Wiest strategically deploys them to construct an affective relationship with her readers. Three interpersonal resources are the focus of the analysis, which is based on Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) Interpersonal Metafunction within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL): modality markers, pronoun patterns, and mood choices. As Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) argue, every clause enacts a social relationship between writer and reader that is simultaneously informational and relational. In self-improvement blurbs, this interpersonal dimension is constitutive: the affective charge of the text depends fundamentally on how the reader is positioned within it. As shown in Table 2, the full range of interpersonal features identified in the corpus.

Table 2.

Interpersonal Resources as Affective Strategies in Brianna Wiest's Book Blurbs

No.	Interpersonal Resource	Specific Feature	Excerpt from Blurb	Book	Affective Function
1	Mood: Declarative	Unhedged assertion of reader's inner state	"Healing is not a one-time event."	When You're Ready (2022)	Performs emotional authority, produces affect of recognition where reader feels seen rather than persuaded
2	Mood: Declarative	Declarative as psychological diagnosis	"Coexisting but conflicting needs create self-sabotaging behaviors."	The Mountain Is You (2020)	Validates reader's pain by naming it with certainty; normalizes struggle before offering resolution
3	Mood: Declarative (typographic imperative)	All-caps declarative functioning as command	"THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT SELF-SABOTAGE."	The Mountain Is You (2020)	Collapses social distance, commands attention and forecloses negotiation, enacts urgency
4	Mood: Declarative (typographic imperative)	All-caps direct address	"THIS IS THE YEAR YOU CHANGE YOUR LIFE"	The Pivot Year (2023)	Transforms declarative into directive, positions reader as the immediate agent of change
5	Pronoun: Second-person (you/your)	Anaphoric repetition of direct address	"The life that you are proud of. The life that you actually want."	The Life That's Waiting (2025)	Positions reader as central subject, collapses distance between reader and content
6	Pronoun: Second-person (you/your)	Direct personal address in promise	"each will leave you thinking: this idea changed my life"	101 Essays (2016)	Creates anticipated personal impact, makes transformative promise feel individually targeted
7	Pronoun: Inclusive first-person plural (we/our)	Solidarity construction through shared struggle	"This is why we resist efforts to change."	The Mountain Is You (2020)	Performs co-membership in pain, lowers reader resistance, normalizes failure as universal

No.	Interpersonal Resource	Specific Feature	Excerpt from Blurb	Book	Affective Function
8	Pronoun: Inclusive first-person plural (we/our)	Shared experience of unmet expectations	"Other people are not here to love us in the exact way we think they should."	Ceremony (2021)	Author enters reader's emotional world, dissolves author-reader hierarchy through solidarity
9	Modality: High-value (will)	Future certainty marker	"each will leave you thinking"	101 Essays (2016)	Presents transformation as predetermined outcome, pre-empts reader self-doubt
10	Modality: High-value (can)	Capacity assertion	"we can step out of our own way and into our potential"	The Mountain Is You (2020)	Encodes reader's self-efficacy as factual, removes conditional framing from transformation
11	Modality: Zero modalization	Declarative without modal, reality construction	"The life where you are not pushed by your fears but moved by your vision."	The Life That's Waiting (2025)	Constructs the ideal life as already real and waiting, removes conditionality entirely
12	Modality: Low-value (can)	Softened epistemic opening	"It can begin with a one-time event."	When You're Ready (2022)	Opens possibility rather than prescribes outcome, creates empathetic, reader-centred tone
13	Modality: Deontic (should)	Obligation-framed advice	"why you should pursue purpose over passion"	101 Essays (2016)	Frames self-improvement as moral imperative while embedding reader in advisory relationship
14	Pronoun + Modality combined	Second-person + high-value modal	"The journey is convincing your mind to act consistently on what your heart already knows it wants to do."	The Pivot Year (2023)	Combines personal address with certainty that reader's desire is presented as already known and real

4.2.1 Mood Choices

The dominant mood structure across all six blurbs is the declarative, which in Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) framework positions the writer as knower and the reader as recipient. In these blurbs, however, the declarative is not deployed to inform in the conventional sense. Declarative mood functions as emotional authority, articulating the reader's inner state as self-evident truth. Statements such as *"Healing is not a one-time event"* (Table 2, row 1) and *"Coexisting but conflicting needs create self-sabotaging behaviors"* (row 2) present intimate psychological realities as self-evident truths that require neither qualification nor evidence. In Appraisal Theory terms, these are monoglossic assertions enacting dialogic contraction (Martin & White, 2005), closing off alternative readings. The interpersonal effect is that the writer assumes maximum epistemic authority over the reader's inner world, which is simultaneously bold and affectively powerful precisely because it names what the reader may not yet have found words for. This pattern is consistent with Hassan et al.'s (2025) observation that non-expert-authored self-help texts rely heavily on the declarative mood to construct a personal and motivational register. What distinguishes Wiest's blurbs is that her declaratives are directed inward toward the reader's psychology, repurposing the declarative from an informational tool into an affective mirror.

The imperative mood, while grammatically absent in most blurbs, is enacted at the pragmatic level through typographic intensification. The all-caps examples in Table 2 (rows 3 and 4) function as paralinguistic markers of maximum force, reducing author-reader distance and enacting urgency. Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) maintain that interpersonal meaning is not reducible to grammatical form, and in this context the typographic presentation does the work that grammar does not: it removes the possibility of casual reception and demands the reader's full psychological engagement.

4.2.2 Pronoun Patterns

Pronoun choice is the most consistently deployed affective strategy in the corpus, operating through two complementary configurations: second-person singular (you, your) and inclusive first-person plural (we, our). Each constructs a distinct dimension of the author-reader relationship. The second-person pronoun reaches its highest density in *The Life That's Waiting* (2025) (Table 2, row 5), where it anchors nearly every clause of the blurb. As Halliday (2014) identifies, pronouns define who the participants are in a communicative exchange and what roles they occupy. The sustained address makes the reader the sole subject of the discourse: not an audience consuming a text but the protagonist of the entire textual world. This frames engagement as personalized acquisition rather than transactional consumption, making the purchase feel less like acquiring a product and more like claiming something already intended for them. Hassan et al. (2025) similarly identify second-person pronouns as characteristic of motivational self-help writing, where they function to make readers feel personally engaged rather than generically addressed.

The inclusive "we" (Table 2, rows 7 and 8) operates with a different but equally deliberate affective purpose. By placing herself within the community of struggle, Wiest positions herself not as a therapist diagnosing a patient but as a fellow traveller who has navigated the same emotional terrain. This removes the asymmetry that would otherwise characterise the author-reader relationship, normalising pain as a shared human condition rather than an individual deficiency. A developmental trajectory is also visible across the

corpus: earlier blurbs rely more heavily on the inclusive *we*, while later texts shift decisively toward the singular “*you*”. This pattern reveals a diachronic shift from collective solidarity to individualized transformation, reflecting Wiest's evolving rhetorical authority over time.

4.2.3 Modality Markers

Modality emerges as one of the most significant interpersonal resources in the corpus because it regulates the degree of certainty attached to the promised transformation. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), modality allows writers to position propositions between absolute affirmation and denial, thereby shaping how readers interpret the likelihood and desirability of an outcome. In the Wiest blurbs, modality is employed not primarily to express probability but to construct emotional reassurance. The frequent use of high-value modal verbs such as *will* and *can* minimizes uncertainty and presents personal growth as both achievable and expected. Rather than inviting readers to consider whether change is possible, these modal choices presuppose its attainability. This finding supports Hassan et al. (2025), who report that *will* and *can* are dominant modal forms in self-help discourse because they communicate empowerment, possibility, and self-efficacy. By framing transformation as an accessible future reality, these modal forms encourage readers to envision positive outcomes and reduce psychological resistance to the book's claims.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, the persuasive effect of high-value modality can be explained through expectancy-based processing. Research has shown that language expressing certainty tends to be perceived as more credible and authoritative than language marked by hesitation or uncertainty (Hyland & Jiang, 2023). Readers often interpret confident assertions as indicators of expertise, particularly in contexts where they seek guidance or solutions. In self-improvement blurbs, certainty therefore functions not only as a linguistic choice but also as an affective cue that fosters trust and optimism. This aligns with studies on narrative persuasion demonstrating that emotionally reassuring language increases audience receptivity by reducing perceived risk and cognitive resistance (Hamby & Jones, 2022). The modal verbs *will* and *can* thus serve as emotional amplifiers that strengthen the persuasive appeal of the blurb.

Equally noteworthy is the strategic use of zero modalization, where propositions are presented without any modal qualification. Instead of stating that a reader *might* achieve a better life, the blurbs frequently describe transformation as an existing reality waiting to be realized. Such constructions erase linguistic uncertainty and create what appears to be an objective truth rather than a subjective prediction. Previous research suggests that the absence of hedging can increase perceptions of authority and inevitability because readers encounter fewer signals that a claim is negotiable or contingent (Hyland & Jiang, 2023). In promotional discourse, this rhetorical certainty is particularly effective because it transforms persuasive claims into seemingly self-evident observations. The present findings indicate that zero modalization intensifies emotional engagement by positioning personal transformation as a discovery rather than a possibility.

At the opposite end of the modal continuum, low-value modality and deontic expressions such as *should* perform a different interpersonal function. Rather than imposing action, these forms offer guidance while preserving the reader's autonomy. This finding is consistent with contemporary self-help discourse, which increasingly favours supportive and reader-centred communication over authoritative instruction (Hassan et al., 2025). By softening obligation, low-value modality reduces the threat to the reader's freedom of

choice and encourages voluntary identification with the proposed message. From an affective perspective, this balance between certainty and autonomy is particularly important. While high-value modality inspires confidence in the possibility of change, low-value modality protects the reader from feeling coerced. Together, these modal strategies create a persuasive environment in which transformation appears both attainable and self-directed, thereby maximizing emotional engagement with the blurb.

4.3 Psycholinguistic Trigger of Reader Engagement

After determining the forms of emotional language that are present (RQ1) and how they are used as interpersonal techniques (RQ2), this section discusses the psycholinguistic reasons why these strategies are successful in eliciting reader engagement. Forgas's (1995) Affect Infusion Model (AIM), which offers a cognitive explanation of how affectively loaded language enters and influences evaluative judgement, is the interpretive framework used.

The central argument is that the blurb genre creates the precise cognitive conditions under which affect infusion is most powerful, and that the emotional language identified in this study is structurally designed to exploit those conditions. As shown in Table 3, the specific linguistic features from RQ1 and RQ2 are mapped onto their corresponding AIM processing pathways.

Table 3.

Affect Infusion Pathways in Wiest's Blurbs: AIM-Based Analysis

No.	Linguistic Feature (from RQ1 & RQ2)	Blurb Excerpt	AIM Processing Type	Affect Infusion Mechanism	Psycholinguistic Engagement Effect
1	Inscribed negative Affect (declarative)	"we resist efforts to change, often until they feel completely futile"	Heuristic	Affect-as-information	The reader's negative feelings are triggered and used as direct evaluative input, the text feels appropriate before it is evaluated
2	Invoked positive Affect (spatial metaphor)	"we can step out of our own way and into our potential"	Heuristic	Affect-as-information	Positive affective state is primed as the promised resolution; reader uses anticipated emotional outcome as shortcut to positive book evaluation
3	Monoglossic declarative (unhedged assertion)	"Healing is not a one-time event."	Heuristic	Affect-as-information	Unhedged certainty requires no cognitive effort to verify; reader's existing emotional state validates the claim instantly, producing affect-congruent acceptance

No.	Linguistic Feature (from RQ1 & RQ2)	Blurb Excerpt	AIM Processing Type	Affect Infusion Mechanism	Psycholinguistic Engagement Effect
4	Typographic intensification (all-caps)	"THIS IS THE YEAR YOU CHANGE YOUR LIFE"	Heuristic	Affect-as-information	Elevated arousal from typographic force triggers simplified processing; reader's desire for change functions as direct evaluative information
5	Anaphoric second-person address	"The life that you are proud of. The life that you actually want."	Heuristic → Substantive	Affect-as-information + Affect-priming	Repetitive direct address recruits increasingly constructive processing; mood-congruent autobiographical memories are primed and woven into judgment
6	Inclusive first-person plural, solidarity	"This is why we resist efforts to change."	Heuristic	Affect-as-information	Shared emotional framing normalizes reader's negative affect; lowers cognitive resistance; accelerates heuristic acceptance through belonging
7	High-value modality, will	"each will leave you thinking: this idea changed my life"	Heuristic	Affect-as-information	Certainty-coded language activates positive anticipatory affect; reader uses expected emotional outcome as evaluative shortcut
8	Zero modalization (bare declarative reality)	"The life where you are not pushed by your fears but moved by your vision."	Heuristic → Substantive	Affect-as-information + Affect-priming	Absence of hedging removes cognitive friction; the promised life is processed as emotionally real, priming mood-congruent memories of desired but unrealized experience

No.	Linguistic Feature (from RQ1 & RQ2)	Blurb Excerpt	AIM Processing Type	Affect Infusion Mechanism	Psycholinguistic Engagement Effect
9	Somatic Appreciation metaphor	"Wiest's words are a balm for any soul"	Heuristic	Affect-as-information	Tactile metaphor activates reader's existing pain; current negative affect is used as direct confirmation that the book addresses their condition
10	Graduation (Force intensification)	"releasing past experiences at a cellular level"	Substantive	Affect-priming	Scientific-register amplifier recruits more elaborate processing; primes associations with depth, embodiment, and radical transformation
11	Contrastive Affect structure	"not pushed by your fears but moved by your vision"	Substantive	Affect-priming	Binary contrast triggers constructive elaboration; reader retrieves mood-congruent memories from both sides of the contrast, deepening affective investment
12	Intertextual attribution (prior bestseller)	"from the internationally bestselling author of 101 Essays..."	Direct access	Low affect infusion	Returning readers retrieve stored positive evaluations directly; blurb reinforces rather than generates engagement for pre-existing fans

Recent studies further support the psycholinguistic role of emotional language in shaping reader engagement and evaluative judgment. Research by Hamby and Jones (2022) demonstrates that emotional cues embedded in persuasive narratives function as affective triggers that strengthen emotional engagement and increase audience receptivity to persuasive messages. Their findings suggest that emotional responses often precede conscious evaluation, supporting the argument that readers rely on affective impressions when processing emotionally loaded texts. Similarly, Berger, Moe, and Schweidel (2023), through an analysis of more than 600,000 reading sessions, found that emotional language significantly sustains reader attention, particularly when it evokes uncertainty, hope, anxiety, or anticipation. Their findings reinforce the present study's observation that self-

improvement blurbs strategically mobilize emotional states before readers engage in deeper cognitive evaluation.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, Arfé, Delatorre, and Mason (2023) found that emotionally valenced language influences both reading behaviour and memory retention. Using eye-tracking data, they demonstrated that negative emotional content attracts greater cognitive attention and affects subsequent recall processes. This finding aligns with the first stage of affect infusion identified in the present analysis, where inscribed negative affect activates readers' pre-existing emotional concerns before redirecting them toward positive resolution. In a broader review of emotion and reading, Pekrun (2022) also argues that emotions generated during reading substantially influence comprehension, motivation, and learning outcomes, indicating that affective responses are not peripheral but integral to textual processing itself.

More recent work on emotional language processing likewise suggests that readers often interpret emotionally charged texts through rapid and experience-based mechanisms rather than through fully analytical reasoning. Konat, Gajewska, and Rossa (2024) describe emotional appeals as interactional persuasive processes in which linguistic cues evoke emotional reactions that shape audience judgment and engagement. Their model supports the present finding that emotional language in self-improvement blurbs operates not merely as description but as a strategic persuasive device designed to guide readers toward favourable evaluations.

4.3.1 Heuristic Processing as the Dominant Cognitive Pathway

When a book blurb is encountered, little cognitive effort is required. The blurb is immediately absorbed, without preparation, and without prior commitment to prolonged attention, regardless of whether it is read on a physical cover, a digital shopfront, or a social media suggestion. These circumstances are exactly what Forgas (1995) describes as favourable to heuristic processing: the encounter is governed by no particular previous motivation, the target is unfamiliar, and deliberation time is limited.

Under heuristic processing, rather than systematically evaluating the logical content or evidential basis of a text, the reader relies on the affect-as-information mechanism, using their current emotional state as a direct shortcut to form an evaluative response. Together, the emotional language techniques found in RQ1 and RQ2 serve as affect-loading mechanisms. Each technique is intended to activate, intensify, or reroute the reader's emotional state so that, when their cognitive system consults their feelings to form a judgement, those feelings are already orientated favourably toward the book.

This process unfolds in three stages that mirror the affective architecture identified in the RQ2 analysis. In the first stage, inscribed negative affect activates the reader's pre-existing emotional pain through language that names it accurately (Table 3, rows 1 and 9). Forgas (1995) argues that affect infusion is most potent when the text's emotional content is congruent with the reader's existing affective state, because this congruence makes the reader's affect feel contextually appropriate rather than externally imposed. The inclusive we construction (row 6) reinforces this by normalising the negative affect as a shared human condition, preventing the motivated resistance that would otherwise reduce infusion. In the second stage, this activated negative affect is redirected toward positive possibility through invoked affect, high-value modality, and zero modalization (rows 2, 7, and 8). The second-person address (rows 5 and 6) secures this redirection by making the resolution feel personally applicable. In the third and final stage, the evaluative judgment is completed

automatically and largely unconsciously. According to Forgas (1995), affect infusion is most persuasive when the reader is unable to discern between affect generated by the text and affect that is a part of their own pre-existing condition. At that point, the engagement feels self-generated rather than externally influenced.

Most linguistic features in this corpus operate through heuristic processing, with occasional substantive elaboration occurring when contrastive affect structures or scientific-register amplifiers are employed, as in Table 3 (rows 10 and 11). This psycholinguistic account explains a phenomenon widely observed in self-improvement reading culture but rarely theorised: self-improvement readers often report decisions framed in emotional recognition rather than rational evaluation, consistent with Forgas's (1995) predictions under heuristic processing conditions where affect-as-information is operating. They claim that the book resonates with them, that it seems right, or that they knew they needed it. This produces the perception that the book directly addresses the reader's personal experience.

5. Conclusion

This study examined emotional language as an affective strategy in self-improvement book blurbs and its role in reader engagement from a psycholinguistic perspective. Three interconnected findings emerged from analysis of six Brianna Wiest blurbs (2016–2025) and a theoretical triangulation of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), Halliday's Interpersonal Metafunction (2014), and Forgas' Affect Infusion Model (1995).

Regarding the first research question, emotional language in Wiest's blurbs is systematically constructed across three subsystems of Appraisal Theory: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Across blurbs, affect consistently follows a negative-to-positive arc, validating suffering before promising transformation. Through social proof, bodily metaphor, and aesthetic elevation, appreciation gives the text worth, whereas judgement anticipates and affirms the reader's potential for transformation. Engagement reinforces these resources through monoglossic bare assertions that enact dialogic contraction, positioning the author's voice as the sole authoritative reading of the reader's emotional reality. Graduation calibrates the intensity of all prior resources, ensuring that pain feels absolute and the promise of relief equally total.

In addressing the second research question, emotional language is employed through three interconnected interpersonal resources that guide the reader through a sequential affective progression. The declarative mood serves as emotional authority, expressing the reader's internal state as an indisputable truth, while typographic intensification exerts imperative force at the pragmatic level. Pronoun selection functions through two complementary configurations: the inclusive first-person plural normalizes the reader's pain as a shared human experience and dissolves the author-reader hierarchy, whereas sustained second-person address positions the reader as the sole protagonist within the textual world. Modality eliminates conditionality from the transformative promise, with high-value modality and zero modalization presenting the desired life as already accessible to the reader. The corpus further reveals a diachronic shift from collective solidarity to individualized transformation, reflecting Wiest's evolving rhetorical authority over time.

Regarding the third research question, the Affect Infusion Model explains why these strategies succeed. Because blurbs are processed under conditions of minimal cognitive investment, readers default to heuristic processing, using affect-as-information as a direct shortcut to evaluative judgment. The emotional language strategies identified in this study

collectively activate, amplify, and redirect the reader's affective state across three sequential stages: negative Affect and solidarity constructions first activate pre-existing pain and lower motivated resistance; invoked positive Affect, high-value modality, and second-person address then redirect affect toward anticipated transformation; and the evaluative judgment is finally completed automatically. Readers experience engagement as recognition rather than persuasion, consistent with heuristic processing under AIM. This produces the perception that the book directly addresses the reader's personal experience.

These findings make several contributions. In theory, this integration of Appraisal Theory, SFL, and AIM represents a novel triangulation not previously applied to blurb analysis, allowing for a simultaneous understanding of what kind of emotional language is used, how it is strategically employed, and why it is effective from a psycholinguistic perspective. Empirically, the study demonstrates that affective strategies in self-improvement blurbs operate at the level of coordinated lexical and grammatical choice rather than rhetorical structure alone. Methodologically, the single-author longitudinal corpus reveals both synchronic affective patterns and a diachronic rhetorical trajectory not previously documented in blurb research.

The single-author corpus limits generalizability; future research should expand to multiple authors, languages, and empirical reader-response studies. Despite these limitations, this study establishes that emotional language in self-improvement book blurbs is not incidental but constitutive. It is the primary mechanism through which the text anticipates and validates the reader's emotional reality before reading begins.

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A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF FRENCH MULTINATIONAL LIPSTICK ADVERTISEMENTS ON YOUTUBE (2024-2025)

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Abstract

This study examines the visual and auditory elements employed in French multinational lipstick advertisements to investigate how multimodal resources contribute to the construction of brand identity and representations of beauty. Although multimodal discourse analysis has been widely applied in advertising research, limited attention has been given to the ways French multinational cosmetic advertisements construct global beauty identities through the integration of visual and auditory semiotic resources on digital platforms such as YouTube. Drawing on the multimodal discourse framework developed by Kress and van Leeuwen, this study explores how different modes interact to produce meaning within digital advertising discourse. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the study analyzes French multinational lipstick advertisements published on YouTube between 2024 and 2025. Data were interpreted through inductive analysis and contextual examination of visual and auditory features. The findings reveal that visual elements, including color, background settings, camera techniques, and model representation, together with auditory elements such as music, function synergistically not only to communicate product attributes but also to construct ideals of femininity, elegance, inclusivity, and a globalized image of French beauty. These multimodal resources further enhance audience engagement and strengthen brand appeal, as demonstrated in the *New Dior Addict Lip Glow* advertisement. The study concludes that multimodal discourse plays a crucial role in shaping audience perceptions and reinforcing brand identity in contemporary beauty advertising. By focusing on French multinational lipstick advertisements, this research extends the application of multimodal discourse analysis to a context that remains relatively underexplored in existing scholarship.

Keywords: *beauty advertising; brand identity; femininity; French cosmetics; multimodal discourse analysis; YouTube advertising*

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of mass media and digital technologies has facilitated the emergence of diverse social media platforms, creating unprecedented opportunities for the global advertising industry to utilize these platforms as strategic marketing channels. However, media has evolved beyond its traditional function as a promotional tool for

reaching external audiences; it now plays a significant role in shaping social values, cultural norms, and lifestyle preferences. This transformation is particularly evident in the beauty industry, where media serves not only as a vehicle for product promotion but also as a powerful agent in constructing public perceptions of beauty standards, femininity, and identity.

Scholars have argued that media representations significantly influence how women perceive themselves and their social value. According to Banet-Weiser et al. (2020), contemporary media discourses continue a trend that has developed since the 1990s, portraying the female body as a key determinant of women's social worth while simultaneously encouraging women to engage in continuous self-improvement in order to become confident, radiant, and successful. Similarly, Harvey (2020) emphasizes that media plays a central role in constructing social meanings through the circulation of images, symbols, and language. From this perspective, media functions as a primary site for the dissemination of beauty ideologies, embedding particular values and meanings within everyday cultural practices. Such ideologies are frequently reflected in beauty advertisements, which commonly promote idealized representations of attractiveness characterized by features such as flawless skin, sensuality, elegance, and luxury.

Research on digital beauty advertising has grown substantially in recent years, highlighting the significant role of multimodal resources in enhancing advertising persuasion. Existing studies have demonstrated that the integration of visual, verbal, and auditory elements contributes to the effectiveness of promotional messages. However, much of the previous research has focused on local beauty products or celebrity endorsement strategies, while the representation of multinational beauty identities and global femininity in French cosmetic advertising remains relatively underexplored. Moreover, many studies have employed social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram as primary data sources because of their accessibility and prevalence among users. Despite this trend, YouTube continues to serve as a powerful audiovisual platform for brand promotion due to its capacity to integrate multiple communicative resources, including visual elements (e.g., color, lighting, facial expressions, and symbols) and auditory elements (e.g., music, narration, and sound effects). These elements interact to create coherent and persuasive meanings. Yahya et al. (2024) argue that visual aesthetics in advertising encompass creative and sensory features capable of generating positive consumer responses. Therefore, investigating the interaction of multimodal elements in global beauty advertising, particularly in advertisements for lip cosmetics, is essential for understanding how such advertisements construct representations of femininity, shape beauty standards, and reinforce brand identity. The novelty of the present study lies in its focus on French multinational lip cosmetic advertisements on YouTube and its examination of how multimodal resources are strategically employed to construct meaning. To date, studies adopting a multimodal perspective to analyze French lip cosmetic advertisements on YouTube remain limited.

To examine how meaning and representation are constructed in advertising discourse, this study employs a multimodal approach that analyzes both visual and auditory elements. Multimodality is founded on the premise that meaning is communicated not only through verbal language but also through a range of semiotic resources, including images, colors, sounds, movement, gestures, and spatial arrangements. Suherdi et al. (2021) define multimodality as the use of multiple modes—such as language, vocal features, spatial design, bodily gestures, and visual representations—to communicate meaning effectively.

This perspective is consistent with Kress's (2003, 2010, as cited in Suherdi et al., 2021) argument that diverse representational forms work synergistically to convey a unified message, with each mode contributing distinct yet complementary meanings. Consequently, multimodal analysis provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how advertisements construct representations of femininity and women through the interplay of visual and auditory resources.

This study specifically investigates the "New Dior Addict Lip Glow" advertisement published on YouTube by Christian Dior. As a prominent French multinational luxury brand, Christian Dior not only utilizes media to expand its global market reach but also contributes to shaping dominant representations and standards within the beauty industry. Alwi and Mokhtar (2026) observe that the French beauty ideal—characterized by healthy, radiant skin and an effortless appearance—has become highly influential and widely emulated across different cultural contexts. Furthermore, Fairclough (2023) argues that media practices are embedded within broader social structures that privilege certain meanings and ideologies over others. Through advertising on social media platforms, multinational luxury beauty brands play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of beauty, femininity, and identity.

Drawing on a multimodal analytical framework and the issues outlined above, this study addresses two research questions: (1) How do multimodal elements interact to construct meaning in cosmetic advertisements? and (2) What roles do individual semiotic resources, such as images, colors, sounds, and symbols, play in conveying advertising messages? Addressing these questions is important because the integration of visual and auditory modes creates complex and holistic meanings that influence how audiences interpret beauty-related messages in contemporary advertising.

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined the application of multimodal analysis in advertising across various contexts. One such study is that of Silalahi et al. (2024), entitled "*Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Song Joong Ki Version of the Scarlet Whitening Advertisement on YouTube.*" Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal framework, the study analyzed a Scarlet Whitening advertisement featuring the South Korean actor Song Joong Ki and demonstrated how celebrity endorsement contributes to the representation of Korean beauty values and standards while enhancing the advertisement's visual appeal. The findings indicate that visual, textual, and other multimodal resources play significant roles in attracting consumers, strengthening product image, and supporting marketing strategies. For example, the use of pink and white colors symbolically conveys femininity, gentleness, and skin purity. Although the study provides valuable insights into the persuasive functions of multimodal resources, its discussion of multimodality remains relatively limited, particularly regarding auditory elements, which received little analytical attention.

Another relevant study was conducted by Rianti et al. (2024) in "*A Multimodal Analysis of the L'Oréal Paris x Cinta Laura Kiehl Advertisement.*" Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the researchers investigated the use of multimodal resources in the L'Oréal Paris *Glowing Serum* advertisement featuring Cinta Laura Kiehl. The study found that selecting Cinta Laura Kiehl as the brand ambassador constituted a strategic marketing decision aimed at attracting a broader segment of beauty consumers in Indonesia. The analysis incorporated five multimodal dimensions: linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial. The findings demonstrate that the integration of these multimodal resources,

together with celebrity endorsement, effectively communicated brand messages and enhanced the persuasive impact of the advertisement.

Beyond multimodal discourse studies, several scholars have examined the broader relationship between media and beauty standards. Ameera Natasya Bt Mohd Termizi and Nureena Nabilah Binti Mohd Herwan (2022), in their study *"The Relationship Between Beauty Standards on Social Media and Body Dissatisfaction,"* employed qualitative methods to investigate how social media influences young women's perceptions of their bodies. Their findings reveal that social media plays a significant role in shaping contemporary beauty standards and idealized appearances, which in turn affect body image and contribute to body dissatisfaction among young women. Similarly, Xie (2024), in *"The Influence of Social Media on Young People's Perceptions of Body Image and Beauty Standards,"* examined how social media platforms influence young people's understandings of body image through the repeated presentation of idealized physical characteristics, such as slim bodies, smooth skin, and straight hair. The study found that the continuous circulation of these idealized representations reinforces dominant beauty standards and may contribute to negative psychological outcomes, including reduced self-confidence, body dissatisfaction, and anxiety regarding physical appearance.

Collectively, these studies highlight the importance of multimodal resources and media representations in shaping consumer perceptions, beauty standards, and advertising effectiveness. However, previous research has primarily focused on local beauty brands, celebrity endorsements, or the psychological effects of social media beauty standards. Limited attention has been devoted to how multinational French cosmetic brands employ multimodal resources to construct beauty identities and brand meanings within digital advertising environments. Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by examining the interaction of visual and auditory elements in French multinational lipstick advertisements on YouTube through a multimodal discourse analysis framework.

3. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), qualitative research aims to explore and understand how individuals interpret social and human issues through inductive analysis and contextual interpretation. Consistent with this perspective, the present study applies the multimodal discourse framework developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* to investigate how meaning is constructed through the interaction of visual and auditory elements in digital beauty advertising. Within this framework, visual communication is understood as a semiotic system that conveys meaning through resources such as color, gaze, composition, salience, facial expressions, and camera angles. Consequently, advertisements are viewed not merely as promotional tools but also as multimodal texts that communicate particular ideologies, identities, and cultural values. This framework was employed to examine how visual and auditory modalities in the *New Dior Addict Lip Glow* advertisement contribute to the construction of femininity, elegance, beauty ideals, and brand identity within contemporary digital advertising discourse.

This study adopts a qualitative case study design focusing on a single advertisement, namely *New Dior Addict Lip Glow*, a 10-second promotional video published on Christian Dior's official YouTube channel on January 7, 2025. The advertisement was selected because of its global visibility, representation of a multinational luxury brand, and rich integration of

multimodal resources. The unit of analysis consisted of individual scenes and their constituent visual and auditory elements. Data collection began with the retrieval of the advertisement from YouTube, followed by repeated viewing to identify significant multimodal features. The advertisement was then segmented into several scenes to facilitate a systematic examination of the semiotic resources employed throughout the video.

The analysis focused on both visual and auditory dimensions. Visual elements included gaze, imagery, color, facial expressions, body movement, lighting, composition, salience, and camera techniques, while the auditory analysis concentrated on background music and its contribution to meaning-making. These elements were analyzed individually and in relation to one another to identify how they interact in constructing messages about beauty, femininity, and luxury. Particular attention was given to the ways multimodal resources work collectively to reinforce brand identity and communicate the values associated with French beauty culture. The interpretation of findings was conducted within the broader context of cultural representation and advertising discourse, with emphasis on how a multinational cosmetics company constructs and disseminates a globalized image of beauty through digital media.

To ensure analytical rigor and consistency, the advertisement was reviewed repeatedly throughout the research process. Interpretations were continuously compared across scenes and modes to identify recurring patterns and relationships among semiotic resources. This iterative analytical process enabled a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is generated through the interaction of visual and auditory elements and enhanced the credibility and dependability of the study's findings.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of a multimodal analysis of the 10-second *New Dior Addict Lip Glow* advertisement and examines how meaning is constructed through the interaction of visual and auditory semiotic resources. Drawing on the multimodal framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen, the analysis investigates how elements such as color, composition, lighting, camera techniques, facial expressions, body movement, and music work together to produce meaning and convey advertising messages. Rather than functioning solely as promotional devices, these multimodal resources contribute to the construction of femininity, elegance, luxury, and contemporary beauty ideals while simultaneously reinforcing Dior's global brand identity. Through the strategic integration of visual and auditory modes, the advertisement creates a coherent and persuasive representation of beauty that appeals to audiences both emotionally and aesthetically.

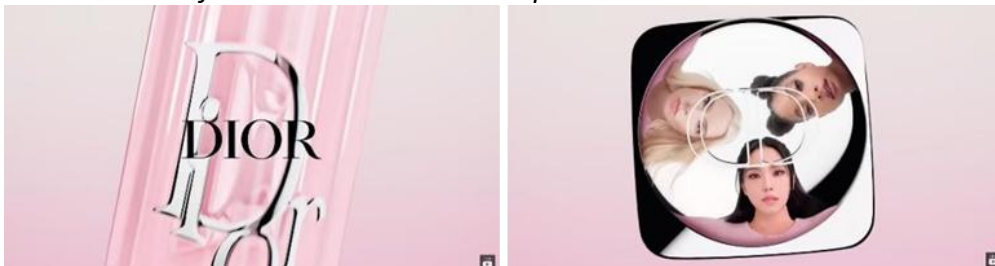
The discussion is organized around the two research questions that guide this study. First, it examines how multimodal elements interact to construct meaning within the advertisement. Second, it explores the specific roles played by individual semiotic resources—including images, colors, sounds, symbols, and camera techniques—in communicating advertising messages and shaping audience perceptions. By analyzing the relationship among these multimodal elements, this study seeks to demonstrate how meaning is collaboratively produced and how representations of beauty, femininity, and brand identity are communicated within the discourse of contemporary digital advertising. The findings further provide insights into the communicative strategies employed by multinational luxury cosmetic brands to establish a distinctive and globally recognizable image in an increasingly competitive digital marketplace.

4.1 Visual Elements

The visual analysis focuses on how semiotic resources are organized to communicate specific meanings within the *New Dior Addict Lip Glow* advertisement. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's framework, particular attention is given to color, gaze, composition, salience, camera distance, and symbolic representation as key elements in the construction of visual meaning. These resources function collectively to represent ideals of femininity, beauty, and luxury while positioning the Dior brand within a global and inclusive beauty discourse. The following sections analyze each scene to illustrate how visual elements contribute to the advertisement's overall persuasive strategy.

Figure 1.

Advertisement for the New Dior Addict Lip Glow



Source: Christian Dior YouTube channel

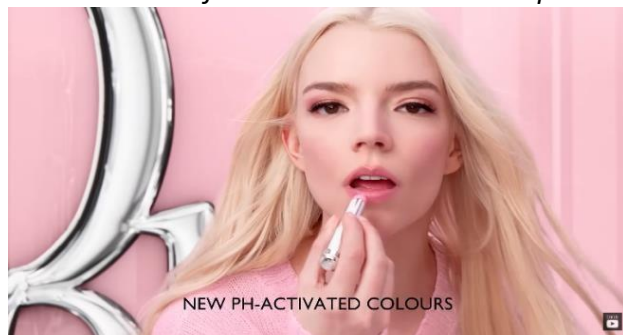
The opening sequence of the *New Dior Addict Lip Glow* advertisement (00:00–00:01) foregrounds the product through a visually striking presentation of its packaging. The advertisement is dominated by shades of pink and metallic gray, colors that correspond directly to the product's design and serve important semiotic functions. Pink is conventionally associated with femininity, softness, youthfulness, and emotional warmth, while also evoking a sense of beauty and delicacy. Its prominence throughout the advertisement reinforces culturally constructed ideals of femininity that are frequently employed in global beauty discourse. At the same time, the metallic gray accents contribute a sense of sophistication, elegance, and modern luxury, creating a visual balance that complements the softness conveyed by the pink tones. As noted by Romeh et al. (2024), metallic gray is often associated with simplicity, maturity, and calmness, qualities that enhance the premium image of the product.

In addition to color, camera movement plays a significant role in directing audience attention and constructing meaning. The advertisement begins with a rotating camera movement that presents the Dior Lip Glow container from multiple angles, emphasizing the product's design and aesthetic appeal. This dynamic movement encourages viewers to focus on the product as the central object of attention while simultaneously conveying a sense of exclusivity and refinement. The camera then transitions into an extreme close-up shot of the product's upper surface, where the reflections of three female models become visible. The use of an extreme close-up not only highlights the Dior logo and packaging details but also creates an intimate viewing experience that strengthens audience engagement with the brand. The reflected images of the models that represent diverse physical characteristics and backgrounds, symbolize inclusivity and global representation. Through this visual strategy, Dior positions the product as universally relevant and appealing to women across different cultures and identities. Consequently, the interaction of color, composition, and camera

techniques constructs a visual narrative that simultaneously communicates femininity, luxury, inclusivity, and the global identity of the Dior brand.

Figure 2.

Advertisement for the New Dior Addict Lip Glow



Source: Christian Dior YouTube channel

The subsequent scene (00:01–00:03) introduces the first model, Anya Taylor-Joy, whose appearance aligns with widely recognized Western beauty ideals. Through a combination of panning and zooming camera movements, the advertisement directs viewers' attention toward the model's lips, emphasizing the texture, shine, and color produced by the *Dior Addict Lip Glow*. The use of a close-up shot highlights the product's cosmetic effect, making the lips appear glossy, healthy, and visually appealing. This visual emphasis not only showcases the product's functional qualities but also reinforces its association with contemporary standards of beauty and attractiveness.

A significant feature of this scene is the model's direct gaze toward the camera. Within Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework, direct eye contact functions as a form of visual interaction that establishes an imaginary relationship between the represented participant and the viewer. Rather than positioning the audience as detached observers, the advertisement invites them into a more personal and emotional engagement with the model and, by extension, the product itself. This interactive meaning is further strengthened by the model's calm facial expression and confident demeanor, which project elegance, self-assurance, and sophistication—qualities commonly associated with luxury beauty brands.

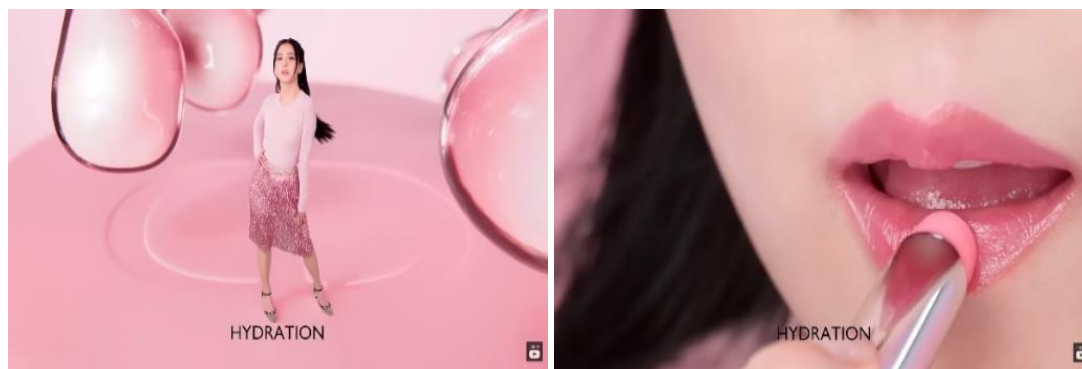
The visual composition also contributes to the advertisement's construction of femininity and aesthetic harmony. The model's natural-looking makeup and luminous skin complement the lip product, creating an image of effortless beauty and vitality. Her light-colored straight hair frames the face and draws additional attention to the lips, which serve as the focal point of the scene. Furthermore, the color coordination between the model's clothing, the background, and the product packaging creates a cohesive visual environment dominated by soft pink tones. This chromatic consistency reinforces the themes of femininity, delicacy, and refinement that characterize the Dior brand identity.

At the bottom of the frame, the textual element "*New PH-Activated Colours*" appears as an informational resource that complements the visual representation. This linguistic component provides viewers with information regarding the product's innovative features and expected results, thereby enhancing the persuasive appeal of the advertisement. From a multimodal perspective, meaning is generated not through visual or verbal elements alone but through their interaction. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argue, compositional structures and visual arrangements work together with textual elements to communicate specific messages. In this advertisement, the integration of imagery, color, gaze, and written

text creates a coherent representation of beauty that simultaneously highlights product effectiveness, femininity, and the premium identity of the Dior brand.

Figure 3.

Advertisement for the New Dior Addict Lip Glow



Source: Christian Dior YouTube channel

The scene from 00:04 to 00:06 introduces the second model, Kim Ji-soo, a South Korean singer and actress. The inclusion of a model from a different cultural background broadens the advertisement's representational scope and reinforces Dior's positioning as a global beauty brand. Through the strategic use of diverse models, the advertisement communicates inclusivity and appeals to an international audience, suggesting that the product transcends cultural and geographical boundaries. This representation aligns with contemporary advertising practices in which diversity serves not only as a marketing strategy but also as a means of constructing a globally recognizable brand identity.

The visual composition places the model at the center of the frame, making her the most salient element in the scene and directing viewers' attention toward her presence and appearance. The camera angle is slightly elevated and framed to capture both the model and the surrounding visual environment, thereby creating a balanced composition that highlights the relationship between the individual and the product's aesthetic context. The model's clothing harmonizes with the background through the use of soft and natural color tones, creating a cohesive visual atmosphere. These colors evoke authenticity, purity, and understated elegance, qualities that contribute to the representation of a clean and natural form of femininity. Such visual choices are consistent with the advertisement's broader emphasis on effortless beauty and refinement.

Another significant visual feature is the presence of water bubbles surrounding the model. From a multimodal perspective, these bubbles function as symbolic resources that communicate the moisturizing properties of the *Dior Addict Lip Glow* product. Rather than explicitly describing the product's benefits through verbal language, the advertisement employs visual symbolism to convey hydration and freshness in a more immediate and aesthetically appealing manner. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) suggest, visual signs can communicate meanings that complement and reinforce linguistic messages. In this scene, the water bubbles operate as semiotic markers of nourishment, moisture, and vitality, thereby strengthening the product's functional appeal.

The scene subsequently transitions to a close-up shot focusing on the model's lips, which become the primary visual focus of the advertisement. Unlike the previous scene, the model does not establish direct eye contact with the audience. Within Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar, the absence of a direct gaze positions the viewer as an

observer rather than an active participant in the interaction. Consequently, attention is redirected toward the represented object—in this case, the lips and the cosmetic effect produced by the product. The close-up framing emphasizes the texture, shine, and natural pink hue created by the lip gloss, visually communicating health, hydration, and radiance. This representation reflects the French beauty ideal frequently associated with natural-looking makeup, effortless elegance, and healthy skin. The message is further reinforced by the textual element “*hydration*” displayed below the center of the frame. Working together, the visual imagery and linguistic cue construct a coherent multimodal message that emphasizes both the functional benefits of the product and the beauty ideals associated with the Dior brand.

Figure 4.

Advertisement for the New Dior Addict Lip Glow



Source: Christian Dior YouTube channel

The scene from 00:06 to 00:08 introduces the third model, Willow Smith, an American singer and performer. Similar to the previous scenes, the inclusion of a model from a distinct cultural and ethnic background reinforces the advertisement’s commitment to diversity and strengthens Dior’s global brand identity. Through the representation of women with different appearances and cultural affiliations, the advertisement communicates inclusivity while positioning the *Dior Addict Lip Glow* as a product intended for a broad international audience. This diversity contributes to the construction of a contemporary beauty discourse that celebrates global representation while maintaining a coherent brand image.

The visual composition of this scene is carefully structured to establish the model as the primary focal point. The camera employs a pull-back shot that gradually reveals both the model and the surrounding environment, allowing viewers to observe the overall visual arrangement. Positioned centrally within the frame, the model is enclosed by a circular metallic structure featuring the Dior logo. This compositional element serves not only as a framing device but also as a symbolic representation of the brand’s luxury identity. By visually integrating the model with the Dior emblem, the advertisement creates a strong association between the individual and the brand, suggesting that the values embodied by the model—confidence, elegance, and modernity—are likewise embodied by the product itself.

Color also plays an important role in the meaning-making process. Unlike the softer pink tones featured in earlier scenes, the model’s outfit incorporates a fuchsia shade that conveys both femininity and empowerment. According to Abimbola (2025), fuchsia is often associated with confidence, individuality, and strength while retaining connections to

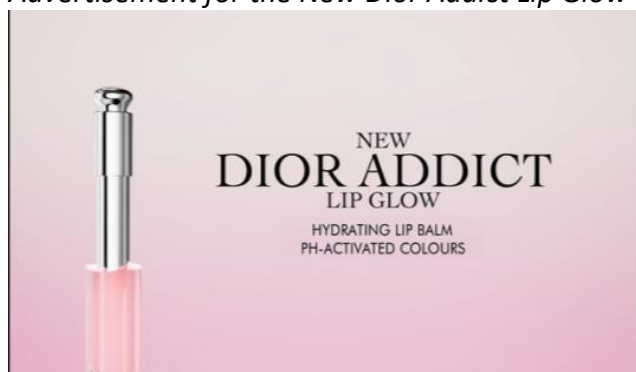
femininity. The use of this color therefore expands the representation of femininity beyond traditional notions of softness and delicacy, presenting it instead as dynamic, self-assured, and contemporary. This visual choice aligns with current advertising trends that seek to portray women as both elegant and empowered.

Another significant feature of this scene is the model's direct gaze toward the camera. Within Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) framework, direct eye contact establishes an interactive relationship between the represented participant and the viewer. This "demand" image invites audience engagement and creates a sense of personal connection, encouraging viewers to identify with the model and the beauty ideals she represents. The model's composed facial expression and confident posture further reinforce meanings of self-assurance and sophistication. Together, these elements contribute to the construction of interpersonal meaning by positioning the audience not merely as observers but as potential participants in the lifestyle and identity promoted by the advertisement.

The scene subsequently incorporates close-up shots that emphasize the model's face and lips, drawing attention to the texture, shine, and moisturizing effects of the lip gloss. The product itself is prominently displayed within the frame, creating a clear visual link between the cosmetic item and the desired aesthetic outcome. Through the interaction of camera techniques, facial representation, color, and product placement, the advertisement constructs a beauty ideal characterized by youthful vitality, natural attractiveness, and effortless elegance. At the same time, these representations subtly normalize particular beauty standards that, although presented as natural and attainable, are carefully curated through professional styling, makeup, lighting, and visual composition. Consequently, the advertisement not only promotes a cosmetic product but also communicates broader cultural values concerning femininity, beauty, and self-presentation within contemporary consumer culture.

Figure 5.

Advertisement for the New Dior Addict Lip Glow



Source: Christian Dior YouTube channel

The scene from 00:09 to 00:10 serves as the closing segment of the Lip Glow commercial, featuring the phrases "New Dior Addict Lip Glow" and "Hydrating Lip Balm with pH-Activated Colors." These phrases emphasize the product's functions and the intended results of using Lip Glow. The text is centered and neatly structured with bold, capitalized lettering, making the message the main and final highlight of this scene. The gradient background of soft pink and white reinforces the connection to femininity and natural softness as the primary goals of Lip Glow. Furthermore, the packaging design incorporates glossy metallic silver accents that evoke a sense of modernity, elegance, and exclusivity,

reinforcing the image of a premium luxury brand. The motion of closing the Lip Glow, combined with the minimalist visual composition, positions the product as the central focus of attention. This closing movement not only emphasizes the product's luxurious appeal but also functions as a visual cue signaling the end of the advertisement. Consequently, the message conveyed extends beyond the product's practical function as a lip moisturizer. The final scene strengthens Dior's brand identity by associating the Lip Glow with femininity, sophistication, and exclusivity.

4.2 Auditory Elements

In addition to its visual resources, the *New Dior Addict Lip Glow* advertisement employs auditory elements to enhance audience engagement and reinforce the meanings constructed through visual representation. Throughout the advertisement (00:00–00:10), the soundtrack "*I Like the Way You Kiss Me*" by Artemas accompanies the visual sequence. The lyrics, including the line "*I like the way you kiss me, I can tell you miss me,*" evoke themes of attraction, intimacy, and emotional connection. These themes complement the advertisement's broader communicative strategy by associating the product with feelings of closeness, desirability, and personal confidence. Rather than functioning merely as background music, the song contributes to the construction of an emotional atmosphere that supports the visual portrayal of beauty and femininity. The lyrical emphasis on affection and interpersonal attraction reinforces the advertisement's nonverbal messages, positioning the lip product as part of an appealing and emotionally meaningful lifestyle.

The emotional impact of the soundtrack is further strengthened by its musical characteristics. The soft vocal delivery combined with an upbeat rhythm creates a mood that is simultaneously sensual, youthful, and sophisticated. These auditory qualities align with the brand's representation of natural charm, elegance, and contemporary femininity. According to Najla (2020), music in advertising plays an important role in generating positive emotional responses and enhancing audience engagement. In this advertisement, the soundtrack contributes to a sense of vitality and optimism that complements the vibrant visual presentation of the product. The interaction between auditory and visual modes therefore produces a cohesive multimodal message that promotes not only the cosmetic product itself but also the emotions and lifestyle associated with it.

The selection of "*I Like the Way You Kiss Me*" is also significant from a cultural and marketing perspective. The song belongs to the alternative pop genre, a musical style that has gained considerable popularity among younger audiences worldwide. Herdiati and Saputra (2022) note that alternative pop music is widely appreciated because of its accessible and enjoyable listening experience, making it particularly effective in entertainment and promotional contexts. By incorporating a contemporary and recognizable song, Dior establishes a stronger connection with younger consumers and enhances the advertisement's cultural relevance. The familiarity of the music increases audience attention and memorability while simultaneously positioning the brand within the cultural preferences of a digitally connected generation. As a result, the soundtrack functions not only as an auditory accompaniment but also as a marker of youth culture and social identity.

From a multimodal perspective, the soundtrack works in synergy with visual elements to construct a unified brand narrative. While the visual mode communicates femininity, inclusivity, elegance, and luxury through color, imagery, and model representation, the auditory mode reinforces these meanings by creating an emotional environment characterized by intimacy, confidence, and youthful energy. Together, these

semiotic resources contribute to a persuasive advertising message that strengthens brand identity and enhances audience engagement. The use of contemporary music therefore plays a crucial role in ensuring that the advertisement resonates with its target audience and effectively communicates the values associated with the *Dior Addict Lip Glow* brand.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the *New Dior Addict Lip Glow* advertisement relies on the strategic integration of multiple semiotic resources to construct meaning and communicate brand identity. Through the interaction of visual and auditory elements, including color, camera techniques, model representation, symbolism, and music, the advertisement creates a coherent multimodal message that extends beyond product promotion. These elements work synergistically to communicate values associated with femininity, elegance, inclusivity, luxury, and natural beauty while simultaneously enhancing audience engagement and strengthening the global identity of the Dior brand.

The findings reveal that visual elements play a central role in shaping meaning. The dominant use of pink and metallic gray contributes to the representation of femininity, youthfulness, sophistication, and luxury, all of which align with Dior's brand aesthetics. The inclusion of three models from different cultural backgrounds further reinforces the brand's commitment to diversity and global representation. Through these visual choices, beauty is portrayed as both inclusive and multinational, while remaining connected to the French beauty ideal characterized by natural elegance, healthy appearance, and effortless attractiveness. Camera techniques, lighting, composition, and symbolic resources such as water bubbles further support the communication of product benefits and reinforce associations with hydration, vitality, and refinement.

The auditory dimension complements and strengthens these visual representations. The use of Artemas's "*I Like the Way You Kiss Me*" creates an emotional atmosphere centered on intimacy, confidence, and youthful energy. The song's contemporary appeal enhances the advertisement's relevance to younger audiences while increasing memorability and emotional resonance. Consequently, the soundtrack functions as more than a background element; it serves as a strategic semiotic resource that contributes to audience engagement and supports the overall brand narrative.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that each multimodal element contributes uniquely to the meaning-making process. Models function as representational links between the product and consumers, camera techniques guide audience attention and highlight product features, symbolic elements enrich interpretation, and music generates emotional engagement. The interaction of these resources produces a cohesive narrative that positions natural beauty, inclusivity, and elegance as central components of Dior's brand identity. In doing so, the advertisement illustrates how multinational cosmetic brands utilize multimodal discourse to construct persuasive representations of beauty within contemporary digital media environments.

Despite these contributions, this study is limited by its focus on a single advertisement. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the diversity of multimodal strategies employed across different French cosmetic brands or advertising campaigns. Future research could examine a broader corpus of advertisements, compare multiple luxury beauty brands, or investigate audience interpretations of multimodal advertising messages. Nevertheless, this study contributes to the growing body of multimodal advertising research

by demonstrating how visual and auditory semiotic resources collaboratively construct femininity, inclusivity, luxury, and brand identity in global cosmetic advertising.

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DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN EFL CLASSROOM: SPEAKING AND CREATIVE THINKING SKILLS

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Abstract

This study investigated EFL students' speaking and creative thinking skills through digital storytelling activities using Book Creator. The objectives were to assess changes in speaking performance, evaluate creative thinking levels, and explore the Book Creator's role in supporting both skills. This study employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design within a quantitative framework. Data were collected through pretest and posttest speaking scores, rubric-based creative thinking assessment, and field notes. The findings showed a marginal increase in mean speaking scores from 78.30 to 78.48. However, the paired-sample t-test indicated that the improvement was not statistically significant (Sig. = 0.831). In contrast, students demonstrated competence to excellent creative thinking, evident in their ability to generate and express ideas through visual, written, and audio elements. Field notes indicated increased comfort in independent recording, although speaking anxiety persisted. These findings suggest that digital storytelling facilitated idea expression and organization but did not significantly improve speaking performance. This study contributes by integrating multimodal digital storytelling into EFL contexts, highlighting its potential for fostering creativity despite its limited impact on speaking performance. Future research may further explore cognitive load, interactive speaking practices, and other 4C skills to provide a more holistic understanding of DST in EFL contexts.

Keywords: *book creator; creative thinking; digital storytelling; EFL students; higher education; speaking performance.*

1. Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in the 21st-century face the demands of a rapidly evolving and highly competitive global era. In response, contemporary education emphasizes soft skills, creativity, communication, and adaptability rather than mere knowledge transfer (Khan et al., 2022). The Partnership for 21st-Century Learning (P21) summarizes these essential competencies into the 4C, namely critical thinking, creative thinking, communication, and collaboration skills (Supena et al., 2021). To address these demands, many universities in Indonesia have implemented an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum, which emphasizes competency through innovative, interactive, and

effective learning processes that are relevant to the global competitive era (Harden, 2007; Muzakir & Susanto, 2023).

Within the 4C framework, communication and creative thinking skills are two main abilities in language learning to help students share their thoughts confidently and generate innovative solutions to problems (Abe & Birabil, 2022; Budiyanto et al., 2024). Although these two skills are already included in the 4C framework, in actual classroom practice, many EFL university students still find it difficult to develop them effectively. In the context of speaking skills, three major categories of challenges often faced by EFL university students, namely linguistic problems, psychological problems, and socio-environmental problems (Ali et al., 2025). Similar situation occurs in creative thinking, which remains underdeveloped and requires improvement to meet 21st-century expectations (Karunarathne & Calma, 2024). In the Indonesian context, studies similarly indicate that many university students exhibit a lack of creativity and perform poorly on tasks that require creative responses (Hidayati et al., 2024). This situation indicates that such challenges remain common among EFL university students and requires serious attention.

Preliminary observation revealed difficulties in vocabulary (100%), grammar (83.3%), and fluency (33.3%), often accompanied by fear of mistakes that reduced confidence. In addition, the interview responses revealed that students struggled with creative thinking, especially in generating and developing ideas, due to fear of being wrong, uncertainty about how to begin, and limited references to support idea development. These findings highlight the need for more engaging and student-centered approaches that can support speaking and creative thinking skills in an authentic classroom setting.

Therefore, digital learning tools and innovative pedagogical approaches have been introduced to address today's challenges (Chawla, 2024). One example is digital storytelling (DST), which enables students to communicate ideas through multimodal elements such as text, images, audio, and video (Nair & Yunus, 2021). In this context, Book Creator, as a digital storytelling platform, enables students to integrate audio, video, and visuals into interactive stories (Arjulayana et al., 2025)

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Book Creator in supporting reading and writing instruction. As a multimodal DST tool, Book Creator helps students improved engagement, creativity, and idea development during the learning process (Fadhil et al., 2025; Handayani et al., 2023; Tuminah et al., 2022; Widyastuti & Anwar, 2025). However, its use in supporting EFL students' speaking and creative thinking skills remains limited. In the broader context of DST, several studies have used platforms such as MovieMaker, KineMaster, and Prezi to support students' speaking and creative thinking skills (Arroba & Acosta, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). However, these studies did not specifically examine the use of Book Creator in the EFL higher education context. Although previous studies have explored digital storytelling in EFL contexts, limited attention has been given to how Book Creator specifically supports the integration of speaking performance and creative thinking among university-level EFL learners within Indonesian higher education settings.

Building on Arjulayana, et al. (2025), which developed and evaluated Book Creator-based digital storyboards for academic speaking within an R&D framework, the present study extends previous work by examining changes in EFL students' speaking performance, identifying their level of creative thinking, and exploring how Book Creator supports both skills through digital storytelling activities.

Specifically, this study focuses on two skills needed in the 21st-century, namely speaking and creative thinking, while the other 4C components, such as critical thinking and collaboration, are not examined in this research. Based on this focus, the research questions in this study are as follows: 1) how does students' speaking performance change after using Book Creator as a digital storytelling? 2) what level of creative thinking do students demonstrate in their digital storytelling projects? 3) how does Book Creator support students' speaking and creative thinking skills in digital storytelling activities? This study is expected to provide findings that can help educators create English learning experiences that are both engaging and meaningful for university students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speaking Skills

Speaking is recognized as a core component of communication and the most prevalent form of interaction, involving a two-way process of conveying and responding to information (Ansari et al., 2022; Hussain, 2017). Communication skills consist of receptive and productive skills; speaking belongs to the productive skills category, meaning that it involves the active production of speech (Harmer, 2015; Jasim & Yahya, 2021). Speaking is simply defined as the ability to say words to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings (Arjulayana & Martínez, 2022). Meanwhile, Brown (2004) highlights that speaking, as a productive skill is directly observable, though its assessment may be influenced by listening ability. He also points out six aspects of speaking performance, namely pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and task (Nurelviani & Prastyo, 2024).

In EFL learning, students often find speaking to be one of the most difficult skills to improve (Nguyen, 2024). As English is not their first language, EFL Students are required more effort to master speaking skills compared to native speakers. Speaking skills involve various linguistic components such as phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics. In addition, as English is a non-phonetic language, its spelling often differs from its pronunciation, which can create difficulties for learners in producing accurate spoken language (Ghafar & Raheem, 2023).

One of the categories of challenges often faced by EFL university students is psychological problems (Ali et al., 2025). Students often fear mistakes and negative judgment, leading to speaking anxiety (Jaya et al., 2025). This anxiety may reduce their confidence and discourage them from actively participating in speaking class, it can be concluded that speaking skills play a crucial role in shaping one's ability to communicate (Azkiah, 2024). Therefore, mastering communication skills cannot be separated from continuous speaking practice in a supportive and safe social environment, where students feel comfortable to express themselves, as speaking is the core of effective communication.

2.2 Creative Thinking Skills

Besides speaking, creative thinking is another essential skill that contributes to students' abilities in the 21st-century learning (Hapsari & Prasetyarini, 2025). As part of higher-order thinking skills (Hajaroh, 2022), creative thinking goes beyond idea generation and is closely related to critical thinking skills, including analyzing, evaluating, and reflecting, which can support students to assess and improve their ideas (Shaber et al., 2025). In academic contexts, creative and critical thinking function as complementary and equally

important processes (Lau, 2011), where creativity generates problem-solving ideas and critical thinking evaluates, articulate those ideas and support participation in learning (Gunawan et al., 2025b, 2025a)

Creative thinking is essential as it fosters problem-solving capacity and helps students become more adaptive and innovative in responding to the changing demands of the modern world (Ayasrah et al., 2023). Creative thinking involves a complex cognitive process that differs among individuals, as creativity should not be seen as an absolute ability that either exists or does not, but rather as a blend of cognitive and personal factors that can develop at varying levels (Dilekçi & Karatay, 2023). Karunarathne & Calma (2024) explain that creative thinking in higher education involves thinking flexibly, generating original ideas, and applying innovative solutions to real-world problems. As part of their academic and professional development, students are expected to continuously improve their creative thinking skills. They also propose a framework for assessing creative thinking that includes three dimensions and four domains (Karunarathne & Calma, 2024). These domains describe how students demonstrate creativity through various expressions, collaboration, and problem-solving in different learning contexts.

2.3 Relationship between Speaking and Creative Thinking Skills

Speaking and creative thinking are related in the learning process. Speaking is not only about producing grammatically correct sentences, but also requires students to generate, organize, and express ideas in a clear and effective way (Dewi, 2023). The connection is further supported by Wang et al. (2024), who found that creative thinking contributes to improving speaking accuracy and fluency, because students who think creatively are able to develop ideas more flexibly and originally, which enhances the quality of their spoken output.

Speaking instruction at the university level should be creative and innovative (Arjulayana et al., 2021). This highlights the importance of integrating creative thinking into speaking activities, as well as providing learning environment that encourages students to create meaningful outcomes. In terms of cognitive levels based on Bloom's Taxonomy, which includes remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Nafiati, 2021), students in higher education should also be guided toward the "higher" cognitive levels, particularly analyzing (C4), evaluating (C5), and creating (C6) (Ginting et al., 2021). To reach higher cognitive levels, educators need to carefully select appropriate teaching methods and learning media.

2.4 Digital Storytelling and Book Creator

DST may help bridge the needs of these two skills, as students can be guided to generate and organize their ideas creatively while expressing them through speaking activities. This approach enables students to learn by combining multimodal elements such as text, images, audio, and video (Nair & Yunus, 2021). In DST practices, various web-based applications can be utilized. Book Creator is one such web-based application that can be used in DST practices. It functions as a digital storytelling platform that helps students create and publish interactive stories. In practice, Book Creator allows students to combine audio, video, and visuals in a flexible and personalized display, so that each student can produce digital products based on their creativity (Arjulayana et al., 2025). The use of digital storytelling tools such as Book Creator for speaking activities has the potential to create

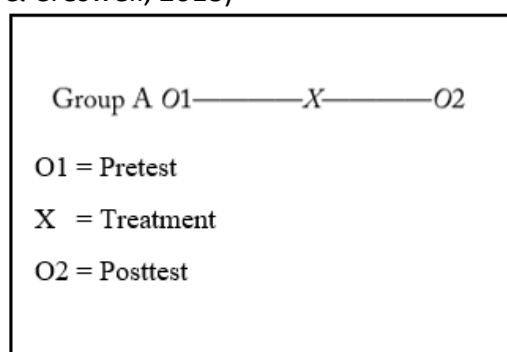
more valuable learning experiences by providing students with opportunities to express ideas, enhance creativity, and practice language authentically (Arroba & Acosta, 2021).

3. Research Method

This study employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design within a quantitative framework. One group was measured before treatment (pretest), received the intervention and was measured again afterward (posttest) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design of this study is illustrated with the following notation (Campbell & Stanley, 1963, p. 6; Creswell & Creswell, 2018):

Figure 1.

Notation of the One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963, p. 6; Creswell & Creswell, 2018)



Where O_1 refers to the pretest, X represents the treatment using Book Creator-based DST activities, and O_2 refers to the posttest. Although this design has limitations related to the absence of a control group due to academic constraints, it is considered appropriate for investigating the initial implementation of Book Creator in a real classroom setting.

The study involved 23 students from the third semester of the English Department at the University of Muhammadiyah Tangerang. This study was carried out from December 2025 to February 2026, within the 2025/2026 academic year, in the public speaking course. Prior to the data collection, ethical approval and informed consent were obtained to ensure research integrity. This study used two main instruments, namely a speaking assessment rubric and a creative thinking rubric. Field notes were also used to support the data by documenting the classroom observations.

Speaking data were obtained from lecturer-recorded performance scores during instruction, serving as pretest and posttest measures. The speaking rubric was adopted from Widiastuti (2025), which is based on the speaking assessment principles proposed by Brown & Abeywickrama (2020). In addition, the creative thinking assessment was adopted from Karunarathne & Calma (2024) which measures three dimensions of creative thinking through visual and written domains. Creative thinking scores were derived from students' digital storytelling projects and evaluated by the lecturer.

To measure improvements in students' speaking skills, pretest and posttest scores were analyzed using a paired-sample t-test with the assistance of IBM SPSS Statistics. Prior to the analysis, sata normality was tested using the Shapiro–Wilk test to ensure the assumptions for parametric analysis were met (Fatih et al., 2026). Meanwhile, creative thinking scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean, median, and

mode to describe students' level of creative thinking. Field notes were analyzed qualitatively to identify patterns in student engagement and anxiety.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

To provide an overview of students' speaking performance after the implementation of DST using Book Creator, the results were analyzed using a speaking rubric adopted from Widiastuti (2025), which is based on the speaking assessment principles proposed by Brown & Abeywickrama (2020). The results of students' speaking performance based on assessment criteria are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Speaking performance scores

Criteria	Number of Students
Excellent	9
Good	14
Fair	0
Needs Improvement	0
Total	23

As presented in Table 1, most students were categorized as good (14 students), followed by excellent (9 students). None of the students fell into the 'fair' or 'need improvement' categories. This suggests that, in general, students had already reached a relatively good level of speaking performance.

To further examine students' speaking performance after the implementation of DST using Book Creator, the pretest and posttest scores were analyzed statistically. Prior to conducting the paired-sample t-test, the data normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Tests of Normality

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre test	.938	23	.159
Post test	.970	23	.683
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction			

As shown in Table 2, the significance value of the pretest was 0.159, while the posttest obtained a significance value of 0.683. Since both significance values were higher than 0.05, the data were considered normally distributed.

After confirming the normality of the data, descriptive statistics were analyzed to compare students' speaking performance before and after the implementation. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.*Paired Samples Statistics*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre test	78.30	23	4.269	.890
	Post test	78.48	23	3.132	.653

The descriptive statistics showed that the mean scores slightly increased from 78.30 in the pretest to 78.48 in the posttest. In addition, the standard deviation of the posttest (3.132) was lower than pretest (4.269) scores, indicating that students' posttest scores were slightly more consistent. However, Score changes were minimal, and overall improvement remained limited.

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.*Paired Samples Test*

		Paired Differences							Sig. (2-tailed)
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					t	df	
		Std. Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error					
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-.174	3.857	.804	-1.842	1.494	-.216	22	.831

The paired-sample t-test result showed that the significance value (sig. 2-tailed) was 0.831, which was higher than 0.05, there was no statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. This finding indicates that the implementation of Book Creator-based digital storytelling did not significantly improve students' speaking performance.

Meanwhile, students' creative thinking level in DST projects was assessed using a rubric with three main dimensions: generating diverse ideas, generating creative ideas, and evaluating and improving ideas (Karunarathne & Calma, 2024). These dimensions were examined through both visual and written domains in students' digital storytelling products. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5.*Students' creative thinking level*

Statistic	Score
Mean	78.217
Median	78
Mode	82

The scores obtained from the rubric were converted into 0-100 scale to facilitate interpretation. The result showed the mean score of students' creative thinking was 78.21, with a median of 78 and a mode of 82. These results suggest that students' creative thinking scores show some variation within similar range.

Referring to the scoring criteria, these scores indicate mostly students demonstrated a competent level, with some approaching an excellent level of creative thinking in DST projects, meaning that they were generally able to develop ideas clearly and creatively.

The use of Book Creator in DST activities was observed through field notes to examine how it supported students' speaking and creative thinking skills. Prior to the implementation, students were able to participate in speaking activities, but they often showed hesitation and signs of speaking anxiety. Their responses were generally short and not very fluent, and only some students were actively involved while others remained passive. In terms of creative thinking, students' ideas were still limited and mostly depended on the lecturer's examples.

During the implementation, students became more engaged, especially when working on their DST projects. They started to explore multimodal elements such as images, text, and audio to present their ideas. The results of their project also varied, which shows that students were able to develop their own ideas. Many of them included their personal preferences, for example, by choosing certain colors or design styles that reflected their interests.

Figure 3.
Differences in Color Selection in Book Creator



In both visual and written domains, students were able to match their content with themes they selected, showing that they could organize their ideas in a clear and meaningful way.

Figure 4.
Content Alignment with Themes



However, it was also observed that students tended to focus more on designing and completing their projects. Because of this, speaking practice was not always fully developed during the process. A clear difference could be seen between speaking in class and speaking through independent recording. In class, students often hesitated and used fillers such as 'hmm' and 'uh,' indicating reduced fluency. In contrast, when they recorded their speaking and independently, they appeared more comfortable and confident.

During this process, Students typically recorded, reviewed, and re-recorded their speech, making adjustments before uploading. This process allowed them to practice speaking in a more flexible way and helped them produce more fluent and controlled speech. Overall, the use of Book Creator created a more flexible and supportive learning environment. It helped students express their ideas more freely and gave them opportunities to practice speaking through repetition and self-review, although this practice was not always reflected in real-time classroom interaction.

4.2 Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the research, particularly in students' speaking performance, creative thinking, and the use of Book Creator in DST activities.

4.2.1 Changes in Students' Speaking Performance

Although the mean score showed a slight increase, the paired-sample t-test indicated that the improvement in students' speaking performance was not statistically significant. The implementation of Book Creator-based digital storytelling did not substantially improve students' speaking performance within the duration of the study. Based on the field notes, students appeared to focus more on completing and designing their DST projects during the implementation process. One possible explanation may be related to the cognitive load

experienced by students during the activities (Evans et al., 2024), as they were required to manage multiple aspects simultaneously, including idea development, multimodal design, editing, and speaking performance.

In addition, the asynchronous nature of the speaking activities may have contributed to the limited improvement in speaking performance. Since students recorded their speaking independently, they had opportunities to repeat, edit, and review their recordings before uploading them. Although this condition may help reduce speaking anxiety, it may also limit opportunities for spontaneous interaction and real-time communication practice, which are important components of speaking development in EFL learning (sitasi). This finding was also reflected in the classroom observations, where signs of speaking anxiety seemed less noticeable during the recording process, as students seemed more comfortable speaking independently. However, this observation is only based on what was visible during the projects and would need further exploration to better understand students' perspectives.

Field note observations also suggested that some students appeared to pay greater attention to the visual and aesthetic aspects of their projects than to oral production. Students were often more engaged in selecting images, arranging layouts, and editing multimodal elements during the project. As a result, the focus on digital product creation may have reduced students' attention to improving their speaking performance itself.

In the context of 21st-century skills, the 4C framework, speaking is essentially a two-way process. It is not only about expressing ideas but also about responding to and interacting with others (Ansari et al., 2022; Hussain, 2017). Therefore, students may require more opportunities for interactive speaking practice in authentic communication settings beyond asynchronous storytelling production. These findings suggest that DST platforms such as Book Creator may support students' engagement and idea expression without automatically leading to significant improvement in speaking performance. Thus, the effectiveness of DST for speaking development may depend on how interactive speaking activities are integrated into the learning process.

4.2.2 Students' Creative Thinking Level in Digital Storytelling Projects

In contrast to the limited improvement in speaking performance, a different pattern was found in students' creative thinking. The findings show that most students demonstrate a competent level and some students showed an excellent level in their DST project with Book Creator. This was reflected in the variation in their work, where students presented different ideas based on their own interest and preferences.

Students were able to express their ideas through both visual and written elements. They combined images, text, video, audio and other features in ways that matched their themes. This shows that DST gave them space to explore and express their ideas more freely, which is an important part of developing creative thinking (Hapsari & Prasetyarini, 2025). The variation in their projects also indicates that students were able to generate different ideas, not just follow one example. This aligns with the view that creative thinking involves flexibility and the ability to approach ideas from different perspectives (Karunarathne & Calma, 2024). In addition, many students incorporated personal elements into their work, such as preferred colors and visual styles showing that creativity can develop differently depending on each individual (Dilekçi & Karatay, 2023).

However, while students were able to generate and express their ideas, the process of evaluating and improving those ideas was less clearly seen. Most of the revisions they made were related to visual design rather than deeper changes in content. This suggests that the critical side of creative thinking, such as evaluating and refining ideas, was not as visible during the process (Lau, 2011; Shaber et al., 2025). Overall, these findings show that digital storytelling using Book Creator supports students in generating and expressing ideas, but students need further support to evaluate and refine their ideas.

4.2.3 Book Creator as DST tool in Supporting Students' Speaking and Creative Thinking Skills

The findings of this study show that the use of Book Creator in digital storytelling leads to different outcomes in students' speaking and creative thinking. While students were able to develop and express their ideas creatively through their projects, improvement in speaking performance remained limited and was not statistically significant. This finding supports the idea that speaking and creative thinking are related processes, as speaking involves not only producing language but also generating and organizing ideas (Dewi, 2023). In this study, students demonstrated this relationship through their ability to present ideas creatively in their digital storytelling projects. However, the findings also suggest that the ability to generate and organize ideas creatively may not always be directly reflected in speaking performance, particularly when speaking practice is conducted through asynchronous recording rather than interactive communication.

The use of digital storytelling provided a space where students could combine elements such as text, images, audio, and video. This is in line with previous studies that show the digital storytelling can help students organize and express ideas in more meaningful ways (Nair & Yunus, 2021). In addition, Book Creator allowed students to present their work in a more flexible and personal way, which seemed to encourage them to explore their ideas further (Arjulayana et al., 2025). However, although students were able to generate and express ideas, this did not always lead into improvement in speaking performance. This suggests that while creative thinking is related to speaking, as noted by Wang et al. (2024), the relationship between the two may not always be directly reflected in speaking outcomes, especially depending on how speaking practice is carried out. In this study, speaking practice tended to occur through independent recording rather than real-time interaction, which may explain the limited improvement.

From a cognitive perspective, this also relates to the need for students develop higher-order thinking, including analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Ginting et al., 2021). Although students were able to demonstrate the level of creating through their projects, the evaluating aspect was less clearly observed, particularly in refining the content of their ideas. These findings show that Book Creator can support students in developing and expressing ideas, particularly in the context of digital storytelling. While creative thinking was evident in students' work, speaking performance remained stagnant, suggesting that DST supports idea generation but requires complementary interactive speaking practice. However, to support speaking as a form of real-time communication, it may need to be combined with more interactive activities that allow students to respond and communicate directly with others. These findings contribute to the

expanding discussion on digital storytelling in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction by demonstrating that multimodal platforms such as Book Creator can support students' creative expression and engagement differently from the development of speaking skills.

5. Conclusion

This study found that the use of Book Creator in digital storytelling produced contrasting outcomes in speaking and creative thinking skills. Students demonstrated competent to excellent creative thinking, evident in their ability to generate and express ideas through multimodal elements. In contrast, speaking performance did not show statistically significant improvement after the implementation of Book Creator-based digital storytelling activities. These findings suggest that although digital storytelling provides space for students to express and organize their ideas, speaking skills did not show significant improvement, suggesting that project-based activities alone are insufficient for speaking development. In practice, speaking skills still need to be continuously trained, particularly through more interactive activities that involve real-time interaction and spontaneous communication.

Pedagogically, DST may be integrated with interactive speaking practices such as peer dialogue, role-play, or collaborative projects to provide students with greater opportunity for real-time communication. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes by extending digital storytelling research to Book Creator in EFL classrooms, highlighting its potential for fostering creativity while revealing limitations in speaking improvement. The findings highlight that Book Creator may effectively support students' creative and multimodal expression, while improvement in speaking performance may depend on the extent of interactive communication practice integrated into the learning process.

This study also has several limitations. The small sample size, short intervention period, and absence of a control group may have limited the measurable improvement in students' speaking performance and reduced the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future studies are recommended to employ experimental or mixed-method approaches with larger samples and longer implementation periods. In addition, future research may also investigate students' experiences related to cognitive load during DST activities, particularly in managing speaking task and multimodal design demands during the project. may explore how digital storytelling activities can be combined with more interactive speaking practices to better support students' speaking development. In addition, further research should also examine other 4C skills, critical thinking and collaboration, in DST contexts to provide a more holistic understanding of 21st-century competencies.

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OBJECTIFICATION AND COMMODITY FEMINISM IN PANTENE INDONESIA ADVERTISEMENTS: A MULTIMODAL CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Advertising plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of gender and beauty, often reinforcing dominant social ideologies through verbal and visual representations. This study investigates how women are objectified in Indonesian hair-care advertising by analyzing two Pantene commercials, *The Raline Look Super Straight Hair!* (2015) and *For Hair, No More Half-Hearted!* (2022). The study aims to examine the discursive strategies through which these advertisements construct female identity and reproduce gendered power relations within neoliberal consumer culture. This research employs Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), integrating Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, van Leeuwen's theory of visual representation, and Nussbaum's theory of objectification. The analysis focuses on spoken utterances, on-screen text, visual representations, and character interactions to explore the relationship between textual features, discursive practices, and broader social structures. The findings reveal that both advertisements construct women as deficient subjects whose social value depends on achieving an idealized hairstyle through product consumption. The 2015 commercial associates flawless hair with personal identity, attractiveness, and self-worth, thereby positioning women as objects of visual evaluation. Meanwhile, the 2022 commercial employs performative shaming, in which a male character attributes a woman's romantic failure to inadequate hair care, reinforcing male authority in defining female value. Across both advertisements, objectification is normalized through narratives framed as humorous, aspirational, and empowering, obscuring the patriarchal assumptions embedded within the promotional discourse. The study concludes that Pantene's advertising discourse reproduces and adapts patriarchal ideologies by linking female worth to physical appearance and consumer practices.

Keywords: *advertising; consumer culture; critical discourse analysis; gender; Indonesia; multimodality; objectification; visual semiotics.*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the global advertising industry has undergone a significant shift in its portrayal of gender roles and power dynamics. Historically, advertising relied heavily on sexist tropes and imagery, particularly in the 20th-century consumerist context. However, there has been a notable transition towards narratives that prioritize women's empowerment, inclusivity, and autonomy. This shift is characterized by a move away from the traditional, stereotypical portrayals of women as objects of desire or submissive figures, towards more authentic and empowering depictions that reflect contemporary societal values and aspirations. This novel industry phenomenon has been designated "femvertising" (Priyadharshini, 2025). From the perspective of critical media studies, this ostensibly progressive shift is more a stylistic adjustment than an ideological renewal. The "commodified feminism" proposed by Goldman et al. (1991). This phenomenon provides a precise illustration of its fundamental nature. In the neoliberal capitalist context, it has been observed that brands have engaged in the appropriation of feminist language for commercial purposes, effectively distorting and depoliticizing the original essence of feminist principles. Furthermore, an analysis of these brands reveals a strategic reframing of women's empowerment as an aestheticized, individual achievement that can be attained through the act of consumption.

The tension between progressives in messaging but regressive at the level of underlying ideologies is especially evident in the Global South. The rapid digitization of the media landscape in Indonesia meets deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and cultures of religious modesty (Labiste & Sykes, 2025). Indonesian advertising increasingly employs diverse casting, humor, cosmopolitan aesthetics, and appeals to modern consumer and appeals to the more cultured modern consumer but with a baseline imperative of female social value anchored squarely in bodily perfection or male gaze. Modern Indonesian women are paradoxically positioned as active subjects pursuing self-actualization, yet simultaneously subjected to strict surveillance of their femininity (Beta & Rakhmani, 2026).

The personal care and beauty field is a major site for the negotiation of these gendered discourses. In particular, hair care advertising often employs the female body as a blank canvas onto which ideals of femininity, health and social achievement are inscribed. This study explores the diachronic development of these forms of discursive strategies through a close textual analysis of two flagship television commercials (TVCs) for Pantene Indonesia, although released seven years apart; the aspirational 'The Raline Look: Super Straight Hair!' (2015) and the funny 'For Hair, No More Half-Hearted' (2022). These two campaigns signal a clear pivot in tone of marketing. This 2015 advertisement features the serious, perfectionist voice of a female brand ambassador (Raline Shah) while the 2022 campaign employs comedic realism and performative humiliation, led by male influencer Keanu Agl. Even though there is such apparent diversity in tone, genre, and spokesperson gender, this paper asks whether the ideological treatment of women has actually changed. Textual analysis alone is insufficient to capture the ideological dimensions of advertising.

Ads convince because of not only what they say but how the subjects are arranged visually and spatially. Based on this, an approach of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) is adopted in the current study to account for both linguistic and non-linguistic CDA drawing from Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse (2013), and van Leeuwen's framework of visual grammar (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021). In addition, Nussbaum's philosophical theory (1995) of objectification – the characteristic of instrumentality and the

denial of subjectivity — is engaged to address ways in which women are visually fragmented and evaluated.

This paper examines the discourse of women as static and oppressive, through the analysis of vocal scripts, on-screen text, camera techniques (close-ups), body positions and character interaction across both campaigns (O'Halloran, 2008). The results show how through their advertisements, both campaigns portray women as socially inadequate, whose worth depends on achieving idealized bodily perfection through brand consumption. This study contributes to critical scholarship on the discursive persistence of objectifying ideologies in the face of modernizing techniques for deploying Euro-centric advertising practices throughout the Global South.

This study investigates the following research questions: 1. How do Pantene Indonesia advertisements construct female identity through verbal and visual discourse? 2. How are objectification strategies represented across the 2015 and 2022 campaigns? And, 3. How do these advertisements reproduce neoliberal and patriarchal gender ideologies? Although previous studies have examined femvertising and gender representation in Indonesian media, limited research has comparatively analyzed how multimodal advertising strategies reproduce objectification across different advertising eras within Indonesian beauty campaigns.

2. Literature Review

Over the last decade, global advertising appears to have shifted from overt sexism toward narratives of female empowerment, often termed 'femvertising'—a portmanteau of "feminism" and "advertising"—refers to marketing campaigns that employ pro-female messages, challenge gender stereotypes, and promote women's empowerment (Gill, 2016; Sheehan & O'Donnell, 2023). Emerging prominently in the 2010s, femvertising represents a strategic shift by brands to align with contemporary social movements such as #MeToo and UN Women's HeForShe campaign, responding to growing consumer demand for authenticity and social responsibility (Kahlenberg & Rojas, 2021).

Scholars note that while femvertising can foster positive brand perceptions and strengthen emotional connections with female consumers (Jhally, 2020), it also risks accusations of "fem-washing"—the superficial co-optation of feminist rhetoric for profit without substantive commitment to gender equity (Banet-Weiser, 2018). For instance, campaigns like Dove's "Real Beauty" or Pantene's "Strong Is Beautiful" have been praised for challenging narrow beauty standards but critiqued for simultaneously selling products premised on physical appearance (Gill, 2020).

The intersection of femvertising and commodity feminism captures one of the most consequential cultural shifts of the 21st century: the marketplace's absorption of feminist rhetoric. Femvertising refers to marketing campaigns that explicitly champion female empowerment, gender equality, or body positivity, often leveraging feminist language to target socially conscious consumers (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2007). Commodity feminism, a concept rooted in cultural and feminist theory, describes the process by which those same ideals are stripped of their political and structural critiques, repackaged as consumer goods, and sold back to the public (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). Together, they illustrate how capitalism adapts to social movements, transforming collective liberation into individualized lifestyle branding (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

However, as critical scholarship argues, such changes frequently indicate a stylistic shift more than they do an ideological one; especially in the context of the Global South's

neoliberal consumer culture (Davis et al., 2025). This third space is awkwardly reconciling a new image of women with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. In Indonesia, for example, we see brands channelling themes such as agency, humour and diverse beauty to appeal to the millennial consumer, whilst at the same time are still using discursive practices that link female value tightly to aesthetic perfection and male validation (Gomez-Borquez et al., 2024).

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) has emerged as a vital methodological framework for examining how power, ideology, and social identities are constructed and contested not only through language but also through the integration of multiple semiotic modes—such as image, colour, layout, gesture, sound, and typography—in communicative texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Building on the foundations of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which traditionally focused on linguistic structures as sites of ideological reproduction (Fairclough, 1989), MCDA expands this scope to account for the increasingly visual and multimodal nature of contemporary media, advertising, digital platforms, and public discourse.

Central to MCDA is the recognition that meaning is inherently multimodal; no mode operates in isolation. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) *Visual Grammar* provides a foundational toolkit for analysing how visual elements function grammatically—through representational, interactive, and compositional meanings—to position viewers ideologically. For instance, camera angles, gaze direction, and framing can construct relations of power or solidarity between depicted subjects and audiences (van Leeuwen, 2008).

The concept of objectification is rooted in Kant's (1784/1963) moral philosophy, which posits that treating individuals merely as means to an end—rather than as ends in themselves—constitutes a fundamental violation of human dignity (Langton, 2009; Morris & Goldenberg, 2015; Pasha, 2022). Building upon this framework, Nussbaum (1995) advanced a feminist conceptualization of objectification, delineating seven distinct forms wherein human beings are reduced to mere entities devoid of intrinsic dignity or subjectivity (Kaur, 2019). Women are disproportionately subjected to this phenomenon; they are frequently evaluated solely by their physical attributes, relational status, or traditional social roles, effectively stripping them of their agency and autonomy (Szymanski et al., 2010; Wardani & Suherman, 2023). Consequently, the female body is heavily commodified as an object of desire, precipitating systemic objectification across contemporary media contexts.

The purpose of this literature review is to bring together existing research on commodity feminism, representation in Indonesian culture, and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) to expound a possible theory about this phenomenon. Tracing gendered representation from the aspirational 'Super Raline' campaign to the performative humiliation of the 'Half-Hearted' campaign reveals continuity in objectification strategies. It is evident that, although advertising language has adopted new strategies of objectification, it continues to embed patriarchal surveillance within narratives that are framed as progressive or comedic (Edouihri, 2024).

The findings of gender studies have shown that Indonesia is not spared from these entrenched dominant paradigms of visual culture even amidst accelerated digitization of media in the country (Azizah, 2023). Digital platforms have broken away from the original mature framework of media relations. In theory, the progress narrative could have flourished in this new context. Some scholars have pointed out that male privilege can shift into the new digital context to replicate patriarchy. Against the backdrop of the deeply entrenched state of traditional gender roles, we define the concept of "commodified feminism". This

study introduces this perspective to analyze the Pantene brand case. Since digital platforms lie outside established media relations, progressive narratives theoretically can prosper. However, recent studies demonstrate that masculine prerogative transfers to new contexts capable of re-enacting a patriarchy (Allen, 2025). In this regard, women remain overrepresented in non-public spaces and are often framed as emotional rather than rational consumers. Adiprasetyo (2023) demonstrates this in a sociological study of Indonesian cinema, where women are depicted as passive vessels while men are granted agency. This entrenched cultural context makes Pantene's strategies in the 2022 'Half-Hearted' campaign appears as allegorical comic devices.

While traditional gender roles remain deeply entrenched, a more recent phenomenon has emerged in the form of "commodity feminism," whereby feminist ideology is appropriated and commodified as a strategy for marketing and product promotion. In the context of the global literature, sensibility market consumption was put in its place. However, more recent work in Indonesia offers up a more complicated picture (Banet-Weiser, 2018). 'Femvertising' in Indonesia typically deploys the language of empowerment and agency. Words have traditionally come to signify freedoms for women (Nahumury, 2025) as though they are stamps of approval for what is ultimately a fashioning of consumerism around beauty. It supports the paradox of "empowerment" that is based on purchasing power. This theoretical framework provides a useful lens for analysing the 2015 Pantene advertisement 'Super Raline'. Although the advertisement appears to emphasise Raline's strength and social status, her identity and success are ultimately tied to the texture and appearance of her hair. Consequently, the advertisement functions not as a liberatory technology, but as an instrument of neoliberal governmentality. It reinforces the notion that women's value is largely determined by their physical appearance.

We needed this epistemological lens for Pantene in part because it demonstrates how objectifying mechanisms continue to operate despite progressive branding strategies. By triangulating Norman Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model with the visual grammar framework developed by and Leeuwen (2010), researchers can demonstrate how specific production choices construct gendered meanings. For instance, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) claims that high-angle shots may symbolically reduce female characters' authority, while the use of a male voice-over, such as Keanu's, positions men as dominant speaking subjects and marginalises women's subjectivity. As argued by Machin (2010), sound, camera angle, and body positioning should not be viewed as merely aesthetic elements, but as communicative resources that reproduce social relations and power structures.

This study integrates three cross-disciplinary perspectives—cultural, theoretical, and methodological—to argue that contemporary Indonesian advertising relies on deceptive adaptive operations. Operating under the guise of ostensible creative innovation, it in fact continues to package and promote deeply rooted social norms including traditional gender roles, patriarchal authority, and collectivist conformity. Digital platforms had already freed themselves from many constraints of traditional legacy media, and should have become fertile ground for the development of progressive narratives. Drawing on Indonesia's deeply rooted traditional gender context, we put forward the concept of "commodity feminism"—a framework where feminism is instrumentalized to market consumer goods. This perspective can unpack the essence of brands like Pantene, which appear progressive on the surface but actually engage in commercial objectification.

3. Research Method

This study employs Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how women's objectification works in Pantene Indonesia advertisements. Fairclough (2013) three-dimensional model and van Leeuwen's (2021) visual grammar were used to analyze the data.

3.1 Data Collection

The data consist of two television commercials released by Pantene Indonesia:

1. The "Raline Look: Super Straight Hair" (2015): a 30-second spot featuring brand ambassador Raline Shah.
2. 'For Hair, No More Half-Hearted!' (2022): a 60-second spot featuring influencer Keanu Agl. These commercials were purposively selected to illustrate a tonal shift in advertising, from aspirational (2015) to comedic/relatable (2022).

Both videos were accessed on May 24, 2025 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UXZayvz_bs&list=LL&index=61&pp=gAQBiAQB8AUB, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15hwtRrMhfANub05pell6ns-VELg_xhX1?usp=drive_link)

The purposive selection of the two Pantene Indonesia television is grounded in established principles of critical discourse and advertising scholarship, particularly in relation to evolving brand communication strategies in response to sociocultural and media landscape shifts. This selection enables a comparative multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) that captures a documented industry-wide transition from traditional aspirational advertising toward postfeminist, relatable, and comedic messaging.

The dataset comprises two interrelated categories of materials: textual (including spoken dialogue, voice-over narration, on-screen captions and taglines) and visual (camera work, character portrayal, colour palette, lighting, framing, gaze, body posture,). To ensure methodological transparency and analytical consistency, we adopted a systematic, iterative coding protocol grounded in the principles of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). This protocol involved multiple rounds of close reading and annotation, during which we extracted recurring semantic patterns (e.g., lexical choices that frame hair as a site of personal failure or triumph), representational strategy patterns (e.g., the use of transformation narratives versus comedic realism to depict hair care), and underlying ideological structures (e.g., neoliberal individualism, feminist empowerment, or traditional beauty norms).

Our approach is explicitly grounded in Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which treats discourse as a form of social practice embedded within—and constitutive of—relations of power (Fairclough, 2013). Accordingly, we move dialectically between text (close description of linguistic and visual features), discursive practice (interpretation of production, distribution, and consumption processes), and social practice (analysis of how the text reflects and reproduces broader ideological structures in Indonesian consumer culture).

This framework necessitates reflexivity about our researcher positionality. As critical scholars positioned outside corporate media institutions yet deeply engaged with feminist and postcolonial critiques of beauty norms, we foreground questions of agency, representation, and commodification. Thus, our reading is deliberately ideological—not in

the sense of bias, but in Fairclough's (1989) methodological sense. It seeks to uncover how dominant ideologies are naturalized through semiotic choices, while remaining attentive to potential counter-hegemonic elements. We do not claim objective neutrality; rather, we embrace CDA's emancipatory aim of making power visible in everyday discourse.

3.2 Analytical Framework

Verbal and audio scripts were analyzed using Fairclough's model to uncover power relations embedded in lexical choices and discursive practices. Lexical contrasts such as *"Super"* versus *"Half-hearted"* were examined to reveal the ideological construction of female value and to situate the advertisements within broader patriarchal ideologies in the Indonesian sociocultural context. Simultaneously, the visual dimension was deconstructed through Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar framework, focusing on:

1. Representational meaning: identifying active observers versus passive subjects.
2. Interactive meaning: analyzing gaze and camera angles (e.g., high angles signaling vulnerability).
3. Compositional meaning: examining salience, particularly the isolation of body parts (e.g., hair) over personality, reflecting Nussbaum's concept of instrumentality.

To ensure analytical rigor, coding was cross-checked and interpretation triangulated across verbal and visual dimensions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The 2015 'Super Raline': Idealized Objectification

The 2015 advertisement constructs an idealized paradigm of desire situated at the critical intersection of bodily objectification and commodity feminism. Drawing on O'Halloran's (2008) theory that visual structures shape constrained meanings, and Macken-Horarik's (2004) research on compositional frameworks, this study argues that the advertisement constructs a desire paradigm at the intersection of bodily objectification and commodity feminism. The female empowerment symbols in the advertisement's dubbing, such as "Super" and "Excellence", are completely undermined by close-up shots that fragment lead actor Raline Shah's body and reinforce the "Raline Look", ultimately narrowing the lead character to an objectified aesthetic commodity that only serves to embody hair-related aesthetics.

The 2015 Pantene Indonesia advertisement constructs an idealized paradigm of desire that operates precisely at the critical intersection of bodily objectification and commodity feminism. Drawing on O'Halloran's (2008) assertion that visual structures do not merely illustrate meaning but actively constrain and shape ideological interpretation, and Macken-Horarik's (2004) insights into how compositional frameworks guide viewer attention and assign value, this study contends that the ad orchestrates a semiotic regime in which empowerment is superficially invoked yet systematically evacuated of political or agentic substance.

On the surface, the advertisement deploys lexical markers of excellence and superiority—phrases like *"Super"* and *"Excellence"* in its voice-over and on-screen text—that echo the rhetoric of female achievement and self-mastery common in early femvertising campaigns. However, these verbal affirmations are starkly contradicted by the visual grammar of the commercial. The camera lingers in extreme close-ups on Raline Shah's hair—smooth, glossy, and perfectly straight—while other parts of her body are cropped or

decontextualized. Her face is often shown in profile or with eyes averted, denying direct eye contact (what Kress & van Leeuwen [2021] term an “offer” rather than a “demand”, thereby positioning her not as an active subject engaging the viewer but as a passive spectacle to be consumed. This fragmentation of the female body aligns with feminist critiques of objectification, wherein women are reduced to a collection of aesthetic parts rather than whole persons with agency (Szymanski et al., 2010).

Crucially, the phrase “Raline Look” functions as a branding mechanism that commodifies not only the hairstyle but also Raline Shah’s identity itself. Her name becomes synonymous with a standardized beauty ideal—one that is unattainable without the product—thereby transforming her from a public figure into a proprietary aesthetic template. This exemplifies what Banet-Weiser (2018) describes as “commodity feminism”: the process by which feminist language (“confidence,” “excellence”) is co-opted to sell products, while the structural conditions that limit women’s autonomy remain unchallenged. The advertisement thus produces a paradoxical subject: she appears empowered through perfection, yet her “power” is entirely contingent on conforming to a narrow, market-driven standard of beauty.

In Fairclough’s (1992) CDA terms, this constitutes a discursive strategy of incorporation, where progressive discourse is absorbed into hegemonic consumer logic. The ad’s textual layer gestures toward female distinction (“Super”), but its discursive practice—evident in the visual framing and editing—reinscribes patriarchal norms of passive femininity. At the level of social practice, it reinforces a neoliberal ideology in which women’s worth is tied to their ability to self-optimize through consumption. Ultimately, the “desire paradigm” constructed is not for liberation or self-determination, but for a flawless, commodified image—an objectified ideal that masquerades as empowerment while serving the primary function of driving product sales.

The ad suggests that Pantene not only repairs hair but also enhances personal identity, epitomized in the figure of ‘Super Raline.’ Her role in this new identity is that of a place to look up how effective Pantene is. However, the reason her standing is high. The third and final tagline, “Strong is beautiful,” grounds the entire narrative in ideology by connecting a particular quality—strong hair—to an unspecified value of femininity. This echoes Nussbaum’s ideas of “reduction to appearance,” which is judging a person mostly by how they look (Nussbaum, 1995). Raline’s value concerns how well she can replicate and maintain the “super straight” / “super soft” hair/shake that shapes Raline out to be. We can only do this with the product. The interplay of the visual semiotics of the advertisement with the spoken narration makes the message that reduces women to their objects more potent. The pictures show swooping black hair, the prime of Raline Shah as those radiant flowing strands. The ad promotes an unattainable ideal of perfection encompassing hair, skin, body type, demeanor, and fashion accessories. The images of her broken locks are showing the issue with dull and fine strands that made a crisis emerging as an organic state.

Photos showing how the conditioner penetrates the hair shaft lend some reality to the promise of deep healing. Now her hair becomes unusually long, straight, glossy and silky. It is a very hopeful portrayal of the archetype of what it means to be a lady in relation to product. The two images extracted from the commercial in which these of Raline Shah appeared on the advertisement in 2015 are important visual data that illustrate how objectification operates inside the pictures. Raline Shah stands and poses in front of camera. She directs her calm, confident smile straight at the camera while running a hand through her hair. This image shows a high-fashion and beauty advertisement pose. There is no

narrative representation of emotion; rather, the image functions solely as a visual display to be observed.

The light is soft, and her skin looks even better, so does her hair. Both are really smooth. There is a blurry, almost empty background behind her making her the centre of focus. This image represents her as an object of contemplation, functioning more as a static tableau than as an individual engaged in action. She goes beyond any beautiful appearance and so gets completely taken over by her attitude as it has gone passive, and also, she cares only for what appears to really be. It does have a counterpart, however, which is the second picture, and this one has life in it. A swath of her hair dominates the screen, suggesting some fracas. It is a very common subject in advertising about hair care that wants to make an advertisement with the fullest, shiniest, bounciest hair.

According to Kress and Leeuwen (2021), the use of a low shot emphasizes facial elements; therefore, the hair becomes the primary focus of the image. The image cuts Raline off from her humanity, focusing solely on her hair. The instrumental function of this graphic style is highly pronounced, as the female figure is positioned as an object through which the effectiveness of the product in producing silky and smooth hair is demonstrated. This paper conducts a semiotic cultural critique of two Pantene advertisements. It first anchors model Raline Shah's hair as the core sign — it serves both as a marker of female identity and a carrier of social value; it then unpacks how the advertisements first frame this sign as a flawless, commodified aesthetic object, naturalize mainstream beauty ideals and tie them to mass consumption, before packaging the lead character's ideal physical traits as a standard that the general public can attain through purchase. Finally, the paper extracts the hidden logic underlying the ads: to uphold ideal femininity, one must consume Pantene, and an individual's acquisition of social capital must be mediated by this commodity.

4.2 The 2022 "Half-Hearted": Performative Humiliation

The 2022 advertisement marks a tonal shift to comedy but retains the core objectifying ideology. The introduction of Keanu, a male figure, transforms the dynamic from self-reflection to external assessment. The narrative employs "performative humiliation," where the female character's romantic failure is explicitly linked to her "half-hearted" hair care. By framing romantic rejection as a consequence of consumer negligence, the ad reinforces neoliberal self-governance (Aspinall, 2013). The use of humour serves to mask the patriarchal nature of the critique. However, the visual positioning of the woman—often shown looking up at the male critic or reacting to his judgment—relegates her to a passive role. The following presents a multimodal analysis grounded in selected shots from the advertisement.

Table 1.
Stella and Keanu's shot

Frame	Visual Data	Textual Data
1		(S1) Stella: Hey, Keanu, I'm confused about what I did wrong. (S2) Stella: That guy left me on our first date, even though my effort was already at its maximum. (S3) Stella: I have checked his zodiac sign, searched for the best date spot, picked the most 'wow' outfit, ehh, no results.

Frame 1 shows Stella and Keanu seated opposite each other at a cafe table, medium shot with warm lighting, Stella (left) speaking with confused/disappointed expression, Keanu (right) listening attentively, two glasses of orange juice on table. This image functions as a critical narrative foundation for the verbal exchange. The visual composition establishes a seemingly equal interpersonal dynamic that masks underlying power asymmetries. The warm lighting and cafe setting create a sense of everyday authenticity, positioning the interaction as relatable and normal rather than staged or artificial. The two glasses of orange juice serve as visual signifiers of social ritual, yet Stella's glass remains untouched, visually reinforcing her emotional disruption.

The statement (S1) establishes Stella as the subject seeking explanation, positioning her as vulnerable and in need of guidance. The phrase "I'm confused" signals cognitive dissonance between her perceived effort and the negative outcome, setting up the narrative tension. The use of "Hey" creates an informal, conversational tone that aligns with the visual's casual setting. The visual framing of Stella's confused expression directly reinforces the textual claim of confusion. Stella's furrowed brow and slightly parted lips visually manifest the verbal "confused" state, creating a multimodal reinforcement of her emotional vulnerability. This synergy makes the narrative feel experientially real rather than abstractly stated, positioning Stella as a relatable figure experiencing genuine social rejection.

The utterance (S2) employs the language of neoliberal self-governance (Aspinall, 2013), where personal outcomes are framed as direct results of individual effort. The phrase "effort was already at its maximum" presents her as having exhausted all possible actions within the system—implying the system itself (dating) should reward such effort. This visual element establishes what Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) term a "demand" relationship between the characters, positioning Stella as actively engaging with Keanu. However, this visual "demand" is undermined by her emotional vulnerability, suggesting an unequal power dynamic where she seeks validation but receives judgment. Keanu's steady gaze constructs him as the rational authority figure who possesses the solution.

This statement (S3) details Stella's extensive self-monitoring and optimization, reflecting what Gill (2020) identifies as "confidence culture" where women must constantly manage their appearance and behaviour to achieve social success. The list format emphasizes the comprehensiveness of her efforts while the hesitant "ehh" signals her frustration with the lack of results. The visual contrast between Stella's animated gestures and Keanu's composed posture reinforces the gendered dynamic where women are emotional and men are rational. This visual element creates what Fairclough (1992) would call a "discursive practice" where power is exercised through non-verbal cues as much as through speech.

Tabel 2
Keanu's shot

Frame	Visual Data	Textual Data
2		(S4) Keanu: No matter how maximum your effort is, it won't matter if your effort on your hair is only half-hearted.

Frame 2 shows Keanu seated at cafe table, medium close-up, confident expression with slight smile, direct eye contact with camera, holding glass of orange juice, warm lighting, blurred background. This image functions as the ideological climax of the commercial's narrative. The visual composition strategically positions Keanu as the authoritative figure delivering the commercial's core message. The medium close-up creates an intimate social distance that invites viewer engagement with his pronouncement, while his confident expression visually embodies epistemic authority. The warm lighting and café setting maintain the relatable, everyday authenticity established in previous frames, masking the underlying disciplinary nature of his statement. His glass of orange juice—held but not consumed—serves as a visual motif that signifies his role as the detached observer rather than the emotionally invested participant.

The statement (S4) delivers the commercial's ideological punchline with strategic linguistic precision. The phrase "*No matter how*" establishes hair care as the absolute prerequisite for social success, positioning it above all other forms of effort. The binary construction of "*maximum*" versus "*half-hearted*" creates a moral framework where anything less than total commitment to hair care is inherently flawed. Crucially, the term "*half-hearted*" performs a linguistic sleight of hand—it conflates emotional commitment with consumer behaviour, making the product demand feel personally relevant while reinforcing the commercial's product focus.

Keanu's steady gaze and composed demeanour visually manifest the certainty of his pronouncement, creating a multimodal reinforcement that makes the ideological message feel objectively true rather than ideologically constructed. The direct eye contact with the camera positions *him* as the speaker addressing the audience directly, bypassing Stella as an intermediary. This visual strategy transforms Keanu from a conversational participant into the brand's authoritative voice. The strategic repetition positions "*effort*" as the key concept in the narrative, while the binary of "*maximum*" versus "*half-hearted*" constructs a moral imperative where hair care becomes the non-negotiable foundation of social value. This linguistic choice elevates the product from functional item to ethical necessity. By positioning hair care as the absolute determinant of social success, the ad transforms complex interpersonal dynamics into a simple consumer problem. This exemplifies Aspinall's (2013) "*neoliberal self-governance*," where individuals are held solely responsible for social outcomes through consumer choices. Keanu's authoritative delivery masks this as objective truth rather than ideological construction.

This moment represents the ideological core of the commercial, where visual and textual elements converge to deliver a message that positions consumption as the pathway to social value. Keanu's statement functions as what Fairclough (1992) identifies as a "*discursive practice*" where power is exercised through seemingly neutral language choices. His confident delivery transforms the commercial's product claim into an objective social law: "*No matter how maximum your effort is...*" creates a false binary that positions hair care as the sole determinant of social worth.

Critically, the visual framing of Keanu as the *confident authority* (not Stella as the distressed subject) reveals the commercial's strategic masking mechanism. By positioning the judgment within a relatable, humorous context (Keanu's slight smile, casual setting), the ad avoids direct accusations of sexism while still delivering a message that women's social value depends on appearance. This represents a sophisticated evolution of commodity feminism: the language of individual responsibility ("*maximum effort*") is retained but redirected toward consumer compliance rather than genuine agency (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

The multimodal construction—where Keanu's authoritative visual presence reinforces the textual claim—demonstrates how power operates through seemingly neutral choices. His direct gaze and composed demeanour construct him as the rational arbiter of social value, while the warm café setting naturalizes patriarchal judgment as everyday wisdom. This analysis reveals that the commercial does not challenge patriarchal assumptions; it repackages them in the language of self-improvement, making the ideological message feel both modern and empowering while sustaining the system of gendered objectification.

Keanu's hiring as the ambassador for Pantene Indonesia in 2022 signifies a change in strategy for the brand. Keanu's persona, framed as humorous and non-threatening, masks patriarchal critique through comedic realism. He does not look like a traditional male model. Some people think his amusing; non-threatening nature is a sign of variety. From the perspective of Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework (2013), however, he is represented as part of the "For Hair, No More Half-Hearted!" campaign.

The commercial for the "campaign" does not seek to dispute the brand's patriarchal messaging; instead, it wants to support and strengthen it. Keanu is the actor in the ad who makes others seem bad. He uses his platform to spread and reinforce the idea that the commercial is trying to sell. His presence enables the corporation to disseminate the ideological message that women's value is primarily determined by their physical appearance, while framing this representation within a contemporary and socially acceptable discourse that simultaneously mitigates potential criticism. The verbal scripts ("Super," "Half-hearted") and visual framing techniques, such as close-ups and gaze, work together to reinforce neoliberal self-governance and patriarchal surveillance.

This study first unpacks the narrative positioning of the character Keanu in this commercial, pointing out that rather than serving as the friendly, helpful male partner common in similar advertisements, Keanu is a special character that fulfils the function of a clown-like critic. His core role is to undermine the female protagonist Stella's self-perception, and forcefully shift her emotional attention to appearance anxiety. From the perspective of behavioural logic, Keanu uses scornful teasing to downplay the social context anxiety that Stella originally experienced, employs language packaged as humour to reinforce male discursive dominance, and blames all conflicts in her complex social circumstances entirely on Stella's hairstyle. While simplifying these conflicts, he firmly holds onto both the interpretive power over the event and control over its associated emotions. To substantiate the instrumentalized nature of this character, this study introduces the theory of instrumentality proposed by Nussbaum (1995), pointing out that Keanu never treats Stella as an independent individual in need of comfort. Instead, he reduces her to a marketing vehicle used to demonstrate that hair care products are essential for social success. This study further argues that the narrative repeatedly reinforces the misleading assumption that the success of a romantic encounter is determined primarily by women's physical appearance, particularly the condition of their hair. Cross-referencing this with Keanu's lines in the advertisement confirms that this is a typical gendered objectifying discourse that singularly ties women's worth to their physical attributes.

Men often impose their own objectifying narratives on women and refuse to engage with women's authentic lived experiences, placing themselves in a privileged position that supersedes women's subjectivity. The core vehicle for this set of power-manipulation tactics is humour: the core of gender discrimination is wrapped in smiles and jokes, turning acts of objectification into content for casual entertainment. The current virally spreading extreme entertainment-driven marketing is concrete evidence of this type of rhetoric. This marketing

blurs the underlying foundation of gender discrimination, further uses the cognitive dissonance triggered by its comedic elements to weaken audiences' critical awareness, and ultimately conceals the harmful effects embedded within the discourse. The two-way dialogue between Keanu and Stella features a clear power hierarchy at the level of reification: Keanu actively initiates quarrels, defines problems, makes decisions, and puts forward solutions, while Stella is unable to refute his arguments or come up with any alternative plans.

4.3 Continuity in Ideology: A Comparative Examination of Verbal and Visual Strategies

While the faces and narrative foundations of 2015's "Super Straight Hair" and 2022's "Half-Hearted" are indeed strikingly more different than they might first seem, a critical discourse analysis indicates that ideological frameworks keeping women objectified have not shifted almost at all. The same message lies at the heart of both ads, though they use different verbiage and images to get there. So, one ad uses aspirational branding, the other confrontational shaming.

The central premise is that a woman's value, especially her prospects in social and romantic spheres, is fundamentally dictated by the quality and presentation of her hair. The brand's essential ideals do not alter when Raline Shah is replaced by Keanu. Instead, the brand's communication style changes, making the continuous issue of objectification seem new and important to today's viewers. The most significant thing that stays the same is how vital hair is. In both ads, hair is more than simply a feature. It is also the key way to tell who you are, how much you are worth, and what your social status is. "The Raline look," which is a key element of her celebrity image, is all about Raline Shah's "straight hair." This style is what makes her a terrific brand ambassador. Stella believes that her frizzy, "tired" hair is the only thing that makes her less desirable to guys.

In these two cases, hair is elevated to the level of a full identity label representative, thus complying with Nussbaum's reduction to appearance. The language in two pieces speaks to that void. Raline's hair is described as "dry," implying that it requires treatment because it lacks something essential. While this framing still positions hair as a problem in need of correction, it appears comparatively neutral. In contrast, Stella's hair is portrayed as "half-hearted" and "tired," descriptions that extend beyond physical appearance and suggest deficiencies in her personality or demeanor. It is used to construct a sense of defect and urgency, as though a catastrophic outcome is imminent unless the Pantene product is used to repair the physical damage in exchange for achieving beauty.

Pantene products are framed as transformative, altering women's appearance and voice to align with idealized femininity. Raline transforms into "Super Raline." It embodies what is portrayed as the ultimate feminine ideal: perfectly straight, glossy hair. She appears confident and self-assured, implying that the product is effective in enabling this transformation. In the current context of commercial media, the ubiquitous before-and-after narrative is commonly used to validate product efficacy. Yet this narrative erodes the structural value of the subject: the changes it portrays stay strictly at the surface level, and it fails entirely to support the subject's internal agency, resilience, and personal growth.

5. Conclusion

This study positions the target commercial advertisement as its central object of critique, revealing how it functions not as a site of empowerment but as a vehicle for the reproduction of patriarchal ideology under the guise of progressive messaging. The

advertisement frames positive male attention as the ultimate validation of women's worth, thereby positioning men as rational arbiters who evaluate women's aesthetic eligibility and romantic desirability. In doing so, it constructs a narrative in which female subjectivity remains incomplete without male approval or the successful completion of a market-mediated transformation. Women are cast as perpetual subjects of scrutiny, their social legitimacy tethered to externally imposed beauty standards that reinforce entrenched gender hierarchies. Consumption is then packaged as the primary—indeed, the only—pathway through which women may attain attractiveness, self-confidence, and social acceptance, effectively commodifying their insecurities. Crucially, the advertisement does not interrogate or disrupt these underlying patriarchal assumptions; rather, it appropriates the language of female empowerment to obscure its disciplinary function. This case exemplifies a broader trend in contemporary advertising: the strategic co-optation of feminist rhetoric to sustain, rather than subvert, the systemic objectification of women. As such, it underscores the urgent need for critical media literacy that can discern between performative inclusivity and genuine structural change.

This research contributes to the growing body of critical scholarship on gender, consumer culture, and media representation in Southeast Asia by offering a fine-grained multimodal analysis of how global beauty brands like Pantene adapt feminist discourse to local advertising contexts. By applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis in conjunction with multimodal frameworks, the study demonstrates that shifts in advertising tone—from aspirational glamour to comedic relatability. The findings have significant implications for media literacy education, feminist activism, and ethical marketing regulation in Indonesia and beyond. They reveal how "empowerment" can be depoliticized and repackaged as individualized consumer choice, thereby neutralizing feminism's transformative potential. Ultimately, this work advances methodological rigor in visual cultural studies and provides a replicable analytical model for interrogating the subtle yet pervasive ways in which commodity feminism operates across diverse media landscapes.

This study has achieved its core research objectives, having clarified the communication logic underlying the excessive objectification of female images on social platforms. It nonetheless has two limitations. Future academic research may supplement cross-regional sample pools and data from lower-tier markets, and conduct analyses of gender narratives in live streaming scenarios. Industry stakeholders must advance rectification efforts from the dimensions of traffic allocation and content moderation.

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TRANSITIONING MATHEMATICS INSTRUCTION TO XITSONGA HOME LANGUAGE IN GRADE 4 CLASSROOMS: A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

In South Africa, the Language in Education Policy encourages the use of learners' home languages in the foundation phase while also promoting multilingualism. However, many learners experience a transition in Grade 4 where the language of learning and teaching changes, often from an African home language to English. This shift has significant implications for mathematics learning because mathematical understanding depends heavily on communication, reasoning, interpretation of concepts, and classroom interaction. This qualitative study examined the policy mandating Xitsonga as the LoLT for Grade 4 Mathematics in Limpopo Province. The study was grounded in sociocultural theory and ubuntu principles. The sample comprised two Grade 4 Mathematics and ten Grade 4 learners. Data were collected through semi-structured teacher interviews and textual analysis of Grade 4 Mathematics examination papers. The findings suggest that transitioning mathematics instruction to Xitsonga in Grade 4 classrooms supports meaningful learning, participation, and conceptual understanding when viewed through a sociocultural lens. The study has implications for learners, Department of Basic Education and future research. For learners, this supports confidence, critical thinking, and collaborative learning, which are central principles of sociocultural learning theory. For teachers, the Department of Basic Education may need to invest in teacher training, translation of mathematics resources, and monitoring of multilingual education practices to ensure successful implementation. Future research, more research is needed on the development of mathematics terminology and teaching materials in African languages to strengthen the implementation of multilingual education policies in South Africa.

Keywords: *mathematics instruction; scaffolding; sociocultural theory; translanguaging; ubuntu; Xitsonga home language.*

1. Introduction

The Department of Basic Education's gradual implementation of home language as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in Grade 4 Mathematics reflects a broader transformation agenda within South African education. Grounded in the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 and operationalised through the Incremental Introduction of

African Languages (IIAL) framework, the policy seeks to reposition African languages from marginalised communicative tools to legitimate mediums for academic knowledge production (Department of Education, 1997; Department of Basic Education, 2013). Central to this reform is the assumption that learners construct foundational mathematical understanding more effectively when instruction occurs in a familiar linguistic and cultural context. In this regard, the Department of Basic Education (2011) argues that mother-tongue instruction enhances conceptual reasoning, participation, and critical engagement, particularly during the intermediate phase where mathematical abstraction becomes increasingly complex.

Yet, despite its emancipatory intent, the transition from policy formulation to classroom implementation reveals significant tensions between ideological aspirations and pedagogical realities. While the policy foregrounds linguistic equity and epistemic inclusion, schools continue to grapple with structural and instructional constraints that complicate its enactment. In the context of Xitsonga as LoLT, challenges such as the scarcity of standardised mathematical terminology, inadequate teaching and learning resources, and insufficient teacher preparation expose the uneven capacity of the education system to support multilingual mathematics instruction. Furthermore, persistent stakeholder anxieties regarding learners' eventual transition to English-medium learning reflect wider societal perceptions that associate English with academic mobility and socioeconomic advancement. As Makalela (2018) observes, these contradictions risk reproducing the very inequalities the policy intends to dismantle, thereby creating a disjuncture between policy discourse and classroom experience.

This study therefore interrogates the complex relationship between language, pedagogy, and mathematical meaning-making in Grade 4 classrooms implementing Xitsonga as LoLT. Drawing on sociocultural theory and the African philosophy of ubuntu, the study conceptualises language not merely as a vehicle for communication, but as a sociocultural mediator through which mathematical knowledge is constructed, negotiated, and shared. From this perspective, learning Mathematics becomes a collaborative and culturally situated process shaped by learners' linguistic repertoires and social interactions. The study further examines how translanguaging and scaffolding practices function as pedagogical resources that enable learners to navigate mathematical discourse across languages. By critically exploring both the transformative possibilities and the practical limitations of home-language mathematics instruction, the study seeks to determine whether the adoption of Xitsonga as LoLT promotes deeper mathematical literacy or inadvertently introduces new barriers to learning. Therefore, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the transition to Xitsonga as LoLT influence learners' conceptual understanding of Mathematics?
2. What challenges do teachers experience when teaching Mathematics in Xitsonga?
3. How do translanguaging and scaffolding practices support mathematical learning?

2. Literature review

The literature on the shift to mother-tongue instruction in Mathematics focuses on language as a Mathematical cognitive mediator, mother-tongue education policy implementation difficulties and international scholarship multilingual mathematics education.

2.1 Language as a Mathematical Cognitive Mediator

Contemporary scholarship on multilingual Mathematics education increasingly rejects the assumption that language merely “delivers” mathematical knowledge; instead, it positions language as constitutive of mathematical reasoning itself. Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, researchers argue that mathematical understanding develops through culturally mediated interaction in which language functions as a cognitive tool for abstraction, reasoning, and meaning-making (King & Purpura, 2021; Sihlangu et al., 2025). Vygotsky's assertion that higher-order thinking is mediated through language and cultural artefacts therefore provides a critical foundation for understanding how learners negotiate mathematical concepts in multilingual classrooms. Building on this perspective, Halliday (1978) and Peng et al. (2020) conceptualise Mathematics as a specialised “mathematical register” with its own vocabulary, syntax, and discourse structures, suggesting that success in Mathematics depends not only on procedural competence but also on learners' access to the linguistic forms through which mathematical meaning is constructed.

Within this theoretical framing, multilingual scholars challenge deficit views of African languages in Mathematics education. Barwell (2020) and Swanson et al. (2022) advance the notion of “language-positive” classrooms, arguing that linguistic diversity should be treated as an epistemic resource that expands opportunities for conceptual inquiry. Rather than positioning multilingualism as an obstacle to mathematical achievement, Barwell foregrounds the productive interaction between language practices and mathematical cognition. Similarly, Kazima (2024) contends that effective Mathematics teaching in multilingual contexts requires educators to recognise language as central to conceptual mediation, not simply classroom communication. While Barwell (2020) emphasises the ideological shift toward valuing linguistic diversity, Kazima (2024) extends this argument pedagogically by insisting that teachers deliberately mobilise learners' linguistic repertoires during mathematical engagement. Together, these scholars reposition multilingualism from a compensatory practice to a legitimate intellectual resource in Mathematics learning.

This reconceptualisation is further strengthened through translanguaging theory. Mbatha et al. (2025), Chihobo and Makalela (2025) and Makalela (2018) reject separations between languages and instead argue that bilingual learners draw dynamically from their full linguistic repertoires to construct understanding. Makalela (2018) situates translanguaging within African multilingual realities, demonstrating that learners move fluidly between languages to negotiate mathematical meaning. This perspective sharply contrasts with traditional monolingual approaches that privilege English as the sole legitimate language of Mathematics. The findings of Robertson and Graven (2020), reinforce this argument by showing that bilingual learners strategically use English for formal mathematical representation while relying on their home languages for conceptual exploration and explanation. Their work illustrates that conceptual understanding often deepens when learners can reason through culturally and linguistically familiar expressions before translating ideas into the formal mathematical register. This demonstrates that mathematical difficulty is not always conceptual in isolation, but often linguistic and discursive in nature. Such findings support King and Purpura's (2021) argument that mother-tongue-based instruction enhances conceptual comprehension because it enables learners to access abstract ideas through familiar linguistic and cultural frameworks. However, moves beyond cognitive accessibility to emphasise the structural conditions necessary for successful implementation, including carefully designed materials and pedagogical support. Consequently, the literature collectively suggests that the effectiveness of multilingual

Mathematics instruction depends not merely on translating terminology, but on creating pedagogical spaces where learners can meaningfully negotiate mathematical concepts through their linguistic repertoires.

2.2 Mother-Tongue Education Policy Implementation Difficulties

A dominant theme across international and South African scholarship is the persistent disjuncture between progressive multilingual education policies and the realities of classroom implementation. Although many post-colonial states officially endorse mother-tongue instruction, policy aspirations are frequently undermined by structural inequalities, inadequate teacher preparation, and enduring societal preferences for colonial languages. Scholars therefore argue that the “policy-to-practice” gap reflects not only administrative failure, but also deeper ideological tensions concerning language, power, and socioeconomic mobility. Internationally, King and Purpura’s (2021) and Regmi (2021) maintain that mother-tongue education can improve cognitive development, literacy acquisition, and long-term academic achievement when supported by appropriate resources and sustained institutional commitment. However, King and Purpura (2021) simultaneously caution that the benefits of mother-tongue instruction are often gradual rather than immediate, making implementation politically and socially vulnerable. This concern is echoed by Turner and Schools (2019), and Andrino and Arsenal (2022) who argue that transitional phases in multilingual education frequently generate anxiety among teachers, parents, and learners because short-term assessment outcomes may appear weaker before long-term conceptual gains emerge. Their analysis reveals a contradiction at the heart of multilingual policy reform: while research consistently demonstrates the cognitive value of mother-tongue instruction, communities often continue to associate English with economic advancement and global mobility.

In the South African context, this contradiction is intensified by the historical legacy of apartheid education and the hegemonic status of English. Although the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 promotes additive multilingualism, implementation has remained uneven and inconsistent. Probyn (2019) and Khanyile and Awung (2023) argue that many teachers lack both the linguistic confidence and pedagogical preparation necessary to teach effectively through African languages, particularly in cognitively demanding subjects such as Mathematics. Probyn’s critique is significant because it shifts attention from policy rhetoric to classroom realities, demonstrating that multilingual education cannot succeed without sustained teacher development. Extending this argument, Essien (2018) and Barruga (2025) contend that teacher education programmes continue to prepare educators for monolingual classrooms despite the multilingual realities of South African schools. Consequently, teachers often default to English-dominant pedagogies even when policy encourages the use of learners’ home languages.

Recent local studies further demonstrate that these implementation challenges are especially acute in rural and under-resourced contexts. Mbhiza et al. (2024) and Ngwenya and Ngubane (2024) found that teachers responsible for teaching Mathematics in Xitsonga consistently struggled with mathematical terminology, language proficiency, and appropriate pedagogical strategies. Their findings reveal that the challenge is not simply the absence of translation equivalents, but the broader lack of institutional support for developing African languages as languages of learning and teaching in Mathematics. Similarly, Lorenz et al. (2021) emphasise that positive teacher attitudes and sustained professional development are crucial for multilingual policy implementation. This perspective introduces an important analytical nuance: policy implementation is shaped not only by material resources, but also

by teachers' beliefs about language legitimacy, learner capability, and mathematical competence.

Taken together, the literature reveals that multilingual Mathematics education in South Africa is characterised by a complex tension between transformative policy ideals and entrenched structural realities. While international and local scholarship strongly supports the cognitive and pedagogical value of mother-tongue instruction, implementation remains constrained by inadequate teacher preparation, limited terminology development, insufficient learning materials, and the persistent social prestige of English. The current study's findings regarding teachers' lack of training and the shortage of suitable Xitsonga Mathematics resources therefore align closely with broader national and international debates. More importantly, the literature suggests that meaningful implementation of multilingual Mathematics education requires more than policy endorsement; it demands systemic investment in teacher education, terminology development, culturally responsive pedagogies, and the intellectual legitimisation of African languages within mathematical discourse.

2.3 International scholarship multilingual mathematics education

International scholarship on multilingual mathematics education increasingly recognises language not as a barrier to mathematical learning, but as a central resource for meaning-making, participation, and cognitive development. Scholars such as Cummins, García, Setati, Moschkovich, and Gutiérrez collectively argue that multilingual learners develop mathematical understanding most effectively when their full linguistic repertoires are legitimised within classroom discourse. Cummins' theories of bilingual cognition and linguistic interdependence demonstrate that conceptual knowledge acquired in the home language can transfer across languages, supporting deeper mathematical reasoning and cognitive flexibility (Cummins, 2024; Le Pichon et al, 2024). García (2020) extends this perspective through translanguaging theory, emphasising that multilingual learners fluidly draw from multiple languages to negotiate meaning, solve problems, and participate in academic discourse. Within the African context, Setati's work in South African mathematics classrooms highlights how learners strategically switch between home languages and English to mediate mathematical understanding, challenge exclusionary language practices, and increase learner participation (Setati, 2008). Similarly, Moschkovich (2021) foregrounds mathematical discourse as a socially situated practice, arguing that multilingual learners should be viewed as competent sense-makers whose everyday linguistic practices are valuable resources for mathematical communication rather than deficits to be corrected. Gutiérrez (2013) further broadens the discussion by linking mathematics education to issues of identity, equity, power, and cultural justice, advocating for pedagogies that affirm learners' linguistic and cultural identities while disrupting dominant monolingual norms in schooling. Together, these scholars provide a strong theoretical foundation for indigenous language pedagogy in mathematics education, demonstrating that linguistic mediation through learners' home languages enhances conceptual access, participation, identity affirmation, and equitable learning opportunities in multilingual classrooms.

Despite its good intentions, the policy requiring the use of Xitsonga Home language to teach Mathematics in Grade 4 faces significant operational issues. These include a critical lack of suitable teaching resources, inadequate training for teachers in subject-specific Xitsonga vocabulary and concerns from teachers over learners' eventual transition to English. The initiative's objectives of enhancing conceptual comprehension and equity in

mathematics education run the risk of being undermined by this disconnect between policy design and classroom practice. A concerning pattern has emerged from preliminary observations, learners who previously demonstrated strong performance in English-medium Mathematics instruction are showing marked underperformance following the transition to Xitsonga Home Language as LoLT, while learners who struggled with English are exhibiting improved conceptual understanding and performance in Xitsonga Home Language. This contradictory outcome raises fundamental questions about the nature of Mathematical competence, the relationship between language proficiency and conceptual understanding, and the hidden cognitive costs of linguistic transition. The study intends to address this gap by examining learner assessment scripts as diagnostic artefacts that reveal how the transition to Xitsonga LoLT shapes Mathematical thinking across different learner profiles.

This study draws on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, translanguaging, and Ubuntu as complementary frameworks to understand how the use of Xitsonga in Grade 4 mathematics classrooms mediates learning, supports multilingual meaning-making, and affirms learners' cultural identities through collaborative and socially situated pedagogical practices. Sociocultural theory justifies the use of learners' home language because cognition develops through culturally meaningful communication. In the context of transitioning mathematics instruction to Xitsonga, the teacher scaffolds learning within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) using Xitsonga explanations, examples, and classroom dialogue. The concept of *translanguaging* is also central within Grade 4 mathematics classrooms, because learners naturally move between Xitsonga and English to negotiate meaning and teachers may explain mathematical concepts in Xitsonga while introducing formal mathematical terminology in English (Makalela, 2018). Using Xitsonga aligns with Ubuntu because it affirms learners' identities, cultural dignity, and lived experiences because Ubuntu emphasises that education should serve the community and preserve cultural heritage, making home-language instruction both educationally and socially meaningful. This integrated framework supports the argument that Grade 4 mathematics teaching should move beyond monolingual English instruction toward culturally responsive and linguistically inclusive pedagogies that improve learner comprehension, participation, and achievement.

Grounded in Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the transition of mathematics instruction to Xitsonga home language in Grade 4 classrooms can be understood as a socially mediated process in which learners construct mathematical knowledge through interaction, dialogue, and culturally meaningful practices. Translanguaging strengthens this process by enabling learners and teachers to flexibly draw on both Xitsonga and English linguistic resources to negotiate meaning, explain mathematical concepts, and participate confidently in mathematical discourse. Within the African philosophy of Ubuntu, learning is further positioned as a collective and relational activity that values cooperation, mutual support, and shared understanding, thereby fostering inclusive classroom participation and learner identity affirmation. Mathematical discourse becomes central in this context, as learners use familiar language practices to reason, justify solutions, ask questions, and communicate mathematical thinking more effectively. Consequently, assessment analysis should move beyond measuring procedural correctness alone and instead evaluate how language, interaction, collaboration, and culturally grounded communication support conceptual understanding and learner participation in mathematics. Together, sociocultural theory, translanguaging, Ubuntu, mathematical discourse, and assessment analysis provide an integrated framework for understanding how Xitsonga home-language instruction can

enhance meaningful mathematical learning and equitable participation in Grade 4 classrooms.

3. Research Method

This study is conducted at the selected primary school in rural Mafarana Circuit, Mopani West District under the Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The community uses Xitsonga as their home language. In fact, schools within the Mafarana Circuit offer and assess Xitsonga Home Language as part of their curriculum. In the Mafarana Circuit, as with many rural school circuits in South Africa's Mopani West District, the English proficiency of learners varies significantly. Because many learners speak Xitsonga, English is officially taught and assessed as an English First Additional Language (EFAL). Therefore, many learners operate with a restricted English vocabulary, which can lead to a hesitant attitude toward speaking the language in class due to a fear of peers mocking their mistakes. The researchers obtained permission to conduct the study from the University of Limpopo's Research and Ethics Committee (TREC) (Ethical Clearance Certificate, project number: TREC/194/2025: PG) on the 19th of May 2025. Informed consent forms were issued and signed on 10 June 2025 by teachers who were taking part in the study to allow them to take part in the study willingly and understand the procedure that will take place during the investigation. This study ensured that the name of the school was anonymous and the participants' information was kept confidential. Participants' identities were protected through anonymisation, and confidentiality was maintained to encourage free participation.

The study employed qualitative design with a focused textual analysis approach, a methodological stance well-supported by Creswell and Poth (2016) who emphasise understanding meaning in context. The sample comprised two Grade 4 Mathematics teachers who participated in semi-structured interviews, and ten Grade 4 learners whose Mathematics examination scripts were analysed. A total of ten examination scripts were analysed at the selected school's Grade 4 class implementing Xitsonga as LoLT. Data was collected through document analysis of learner Mathematics assessment scripts, and semi-structured interviews of teachers (DeMarrais et al., 2024). The primary data sources were Mathematics examination papers from Grade 4 learners, selected through non-probability purposive sampling from the primary school implementing the Xitsonga LoLT policy in Intermediate Phase at Mafarana Circuit, Mopani West District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to create a dialogic space where participants share their experiences and co-construct insights about the transition to Xitsonga as LoLT in Mathematics. These documents were selected because they represent authentic, naturally occurring evidence of how learners comprehend and apply mathematical concepts under assessment conditions, aligning with the use of documents as stable, context-rich sources for analysis (Kutsyuruba, 2023). The collected documentary data were analysed using qualitative content analysis with an inductive approach, a method recognised for generating insights directly from textual data (Ravindran, 2019).

The coding and theme generation process for examination scripts in this study followed a qualitative thematic analysis approach informed by Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, translanguaging pedagogy, and Ubuntu philosophy. The purpose was to identify patterns in learners' mathematical understanding, language use, participation, and meaning-making when mathematics instruction transitions to Xitsonga as the home language. The researchers familiarized themselves with data by repeatedly reading the scripts to

understand learners' mathematical reasoning, language patterns, conceptual understanding, translanguaging practices, misconceptions, cultural references and learner participation through written expression. Thus, the coding and theme generation process enabled the researchers to systematically analyse Grade 4 examination scripts and uncover how transitioning mathematics instruction to Xitsonga influences learners' understanding, participation, and achievement. The researchers repeatedly read the transcripts while listening to the recordings to ensure transcription accuracy and to become familiar with the data. Field notes taken during interviews were integrated into the transcripts to capture non-verbal cues, classroom experiences, and contextual observations. During this stage, preliminary ideas, recurring concepts, and noteworthy statements were noted in the margins of the transcripts. The researchers carefully examined each transcript line by line to identify meaningful units of information related to teachers' experiences of transitioning mathematics instruction into Xitsonga.

Codes were generated directly from participants' words and experiences rather than from predetermined categories. Similar phrases, concepts, and explanations were grouped under descriptive labels. After generating the initial codes, the researchers compared codes across all interview transcripts to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns. Related codes were clustered into broader categories representing shared meanings. Themes were developed by examining relationships among the categories and identifying broader patterns that addressed the research questions and the sociocultural framework underpinning the study. Themes represented recurring meanings regarding how teachers experienced and understood the transition of mathematics instruction into Xitsonga. During this stage, categories were refined, combined, or reorganised until coherent themes emerged. The qualitative data generated from the semi-structured interviews with Grade 4 mathematics teachers were analysed using thematic analysis. The process followed an inductive and interpretive approach guided by sociocultural theory, particularly the principles of language mediation, social interaction, and culturally responsive learning. The coding procedures involved several systematic stages to ensure credibility, consistency, and meaningful interpretation of participants' experiences.

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, the researchers employed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of interviews and document analysis, as well as member checking with participating teachers. Transferability was ensured through thick descriptions of the Grade 4 classroom contexts and purposive sampling of Xitsonga-speaking participants. Dependability was maintained by keeping a detailed audit trail and clearly documenting the research procedures and analytical processes. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling, triangulation, and the use of verbatim participant quotations to ensure that findings reflected participants' perspectives rather than researcher bias. To ensure ethical integrity, participants' identities were anonymized, data were stored securely on password-protected devices, and participation was voluntary.

4. Results and Discussion

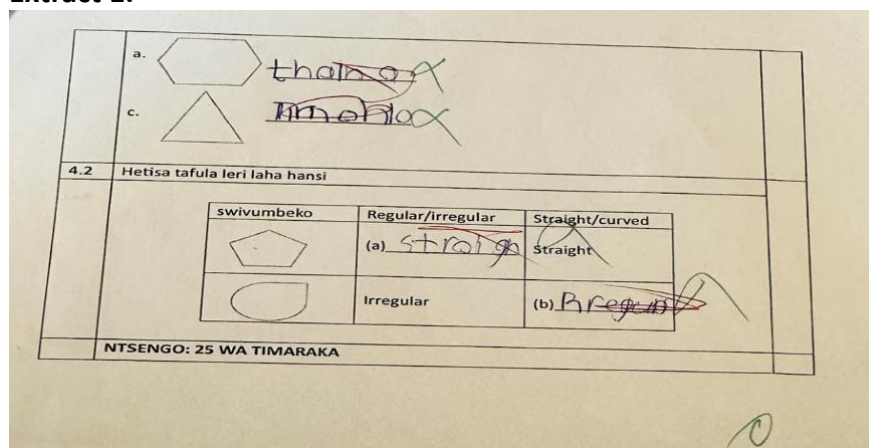
The researchers analysed Grade 4 learners' Mathematics examination scripts to understand their cognitive processing and conceptual understanding when solving problems presented in Xitsonga Home Language. The analysis was based on learners' responses to various question types including multiple choice questions on fractions (Xivutiso 1), fraction

operations and word problems (Xivutiso 2), time and measurement conversions (Xivutiso 3), and properties of 2D shapes (Xivutiso 4) examining how language, terminology, and cultural context influenced mathematical comprehension. The analysis of learners' responses is presented according to emerging themes from the textual review and interview findings.

4.1 Inadequate teaching and learning resources

This theme seeks to determine how the shortage of culturally relevant Xitsonga Mathematics resources impacts learners' ability to understand and solve Mathematical problems. This theme also seeks to analyse learners' responses to word problems that use either direct translations from English or culturally familiar contexts. The analysis in this section is based on learners' performance on problems testing shapes concepts and word problems with varying cultural contexts, as illustrated by the following examples from the examination.

Extract 1.



Question 4.2 from the examination paper required learners to complete a table classifying shapes according to whether they are regular/irregular and straight/curved:

Table 1.

Classification of Shapes According to Whether They are Regular/Irregular and Straight/Curved

Swivumbeko	Regular/irregular	Straight/curved
	(a)	Straight
	Irregular	(b)

The analysis demonstrates strong engagement with learner responses and links effectively to multilingual mathematics education literature. One important issue emerging from the data is the semantic complexity of the terms “regular” and “irregular.” In everyday language, “irregular” is often associated with something that is “wrong,” “untidy,” or “unusual,” whereas in mathematics it has a precise geometric meaning related to equal sides and equal angles. The learner who questioned “xana i regular?” illustrates not simply a vocabulary gap, but uncertainty about the mathematical register itself. This suggests that learners may rely on everyday linguistic meanings when formal mathematical meanings have not yet been fully internalised. The finding aligns with Maluleke’s (2019) argument that

learners in multilingual settings must constantly negotiate between informal home-language meanings and specialised academic discourse. The responses also indicate that translation alone may not support conceptual understanding. Although mathematical terminology was presented in Xitsonga, learners still experienced difficulty interpreting the concept. This supports Benson's (2021) view that effective mother-tongue-based multilingual education requires culturally and conceptually meaningful resources rather than direct linguistic substitution from English. If terminology is translated without sufficient contextualisation, learners may memorise words without understanding the underlying properties of shapes.

In addition, the learners' classification errors may reflect limited exposure to explicit visual and conceptual teaching of geometric attributes. A square being identified as "irregular" suggests that some learners may focus on superficial appearance rather than the defining properties of regular polygons. This points to the need for instructional strategies that combine language explanation with concrete visual examples, hands-on manipulation of shapes, and repeated discussion of mathematical vocabulary in context. The evidence further highlights the broader relationship between language proficiency and mathematical reasoning. Learners who are uncertain about terminology may struggle to demonstrate conceptual knowledge even when they can visually recognise shapes. Consequently, assessment performance may underestimate actual mathematical understanding because language becomes a barrier to expressing knowledge. The findings suggest that the challenge was not merely one of incorrect classification, but of access to mathematical meaning itself. The learners' responses reveal how gaps between everyday language, translated terminology, and formal mathematical discourse can hinder conceptual understanding in geometry.

Extract 2.

5. Tsala swibasa swithela swivonaka.

XIVUTISO 1: SEKELE NHLAMULO LEYI FANELEKE (MCQ)		(5)
1.1	Hiyini furakixini leyi ringanaka na 1 eka letinga laha hansi A. $\frac{1}{3}$ B. $\frac{1}{3}$ C. $\frac{6}{6}$ D. $\frac{3}{6}$	1
1.2	Paka tifurakixini leti laha hansi kusuka ka leyi ntsongo kuya fika ka leyi kulu $\frac{1}{4}; \frac{1}{3}; \frac{1}{8}$ A. $\frac{1}{4}; \frac{1}{3}; \frac{1}{8}$ B. $\frac{1}{8}; \frac{1}{3}; \frac{1}{4}$ C. $\frac{1}{9}; \frac{1}{4}; \frac{1}{3}$ D. $\frac{1}{4}; \frac{1}{9}; \frac{1}{3}$	1
1.3	Xana eka ti awara timbirhi kuna tminetse tingani A. 60 minutes B. 90 minutes C. 120 minutes D. 180 minutes	1
1.4	Rhiboni yilehe 2m. Xana 2m yiringana na ti cm tingani? A. 20 cm B. 200 cm C. 2000 cm D. 2 cm	1
1.5	Hixihi xivumbeko lexinga-hava tikhona na mathelo? A. Thiraylengele B. Rhekithengele C. Sekele D. Phentagoni	1

The responses to Question 1.5 reveal an important relationship between language, conceptual understanding, and mathematical performance among learners. Although many learners correctly identified *sekele* (circle) as the shape without corners and sides, the explanatory comments written in Xitsonga provide deeper evidence that learners were not merely guessing the answer, but were actively reasoning about the geometric properties of shapes. Statements such as "*sekele a yi na tikhona*" [a circle has no corners] indicate that learners were able to articulate mathematical concepts more confidently and meaningfully in

their home language. This suggests that the use of familiar linguistic structures supports cognitive processing and allows learners to demonstrate understanding beyond simple recall.

The learner responses also highlight the importance of conceptual language in mathematics education. By expressing explanations in Xitsonga, learners connected classroom knowledge with their everyday linguistic experiences. This supports sociocultural perspectives of learning, which argue that knowledge construction is strengthened when learners engage with content through culturally and linguistically familiar mediums. The ability of learners to explain why a circle has no corners reflects higher-order understanding because they were identifying defining geometric attributes rather than simply naming the shape. Such responses demonstrate that home language functions not only as a communication tool but also as a cognitive resource that enhances mathematical reasoning and comprehension. At the same time, the responses from learners who selected incorrect answers and later wrote "*ndzi koxisile*" [I made a mistake] suggest that the challenge may not have been the mathematical concept itself, but rather the interpretation of terminology or instructions. This indicates that learners may have possessed partial conceptual understanding but struggled with the formal mathematical vocabulary used in the assessment. The confusion highlights how linguistic complexity can interfere with mathematical performance, particularly in multilingual classrooms where learners transition between home language and formal school language. In such cases, errors may reflect language barriers rather than a lack of conceptual knowledge.

These findings strongly support Benson's (2021) argument that direct translations from dominant languages are often insufficient for achieving meaningful conceptual understanding. Simply translating mathematical terms into local languages does not automatically guarantee comprehension if learners are unfamiliar with the translated terminology or if the translation lacks contextual relevance. Instead, conceptual understanding develops when learners are able to discuss, explain, and internalize mathematical ideas in ways that connect with their linguistic and cultural realities. Similarly, the findings reinforce Maluleke's (2019) view that language and culture play a central role in mathematics teaching and learning. Learners' use of Xitsonga explanations demonstrates how culturally grounded language practices can facilitate engagement, confidence, and understanding in mathematics classrooms.

4.2 Teacher Preparedness and Professional Development

This theme reveals a significant gap between language policy expectations and the actual pedagogical preparation of teachers in multilingual mathematics classrooms. The findings suggest that teachers' limited confidence in teaching Mathematics in Xitsonga is not merely a matter of language preference, but a structural issue linked to inadequate teacher preparation, insufficient professional development, and the absence of standardised mathematical terminology in African languages. Teachers' struggles with explaining concepts such as fractions and multiplication in Xitsonga indicate that they are expected to implement mother-tongue instruction without being adequately equipped with the linguistic and pedagogical tools required to do so effectively.

The teachers' experiences highlight how language and mathematical meaning are deeply interconnected. Mathematics relies heavily on precise terminology, conceptual explanation, and symbolic representation. When teachers are uncertain about how to translate or explain mathematical concepts in Xitsonga, classroom communication becomes constrained, which may limit learners' conceptual understanding and participation. The

concern that mathematical terms are not commonly used in everyday Xitsonga further reflects the historical marginalisation of African languages in formal scientific and mathematical discourse. This reinforces the dominance of English as the perceived legitimate language of mathematics, despite policies promoting home-language instruction in the foundation phase.

The findings align with Probyn (2019), who argues that many South African teachers lack adequate linguistic and pedagogical preparation for multilingual classrooms. As a result, teachers often rely on code-switching, rote teaching, or English-dominant practices that may unintentionally exclude learners who are more proficient in their home language. In this study, the teachers' uncertainty regarding mathematical vocabulary in Xitsonga suggests that their instructional practices may become restricted to procedural teaching rather than deeper conceptual engagement. This can negatively affect learners' mathematical reasoning and confidence. Similarly, the findings corroborate the work of Mbhiza et al. (2024), who found that teachers in rural Acornhoek experienced challenges related to both language proficiency and pedagogical strategies when teaching Mathematics in Xitsonga. The similarity between the current findings and those of Mbhiza et al. suggests that these challenges are systemic rather than isolated. Rural schools, in particular, may experience greater difficulty due to limited access to teaching resources, professional development opportunities, and standardised terminology guides in African languages.

The theme also reflects broader concerns raised by Essien regarding teacher education in multilingual contexts. Essien's argument that teacher education programmes should intentionally prepare teachers for multilingual mathematics instruction is highly relevant to these findings. The absence of specialised preparation means that teachers are left to navigate language-related challenges independently, often without curriculum support, glossaries, or pedagogical models for integrating learners' home languages into mathematics teaching. Consequently, teachers may revert to English or avoid complex explanations in Xitsonga, thereby undermining the goals of inclusive and equitable education. From a sociocultural perspective, the findings demonstrate how language functions as a mediating tool for learning. When teachers are unable to use learners' home language effectively in mathematics instruction, opportunities for meaningful interaction, scaffolding, and conceptual development may be reduced. Learners may struggle to connect abstract mathematical ideas with familiar linguistic and cultural experiences. This weakens the pedagogical value of mother-tongue instruction, even when the policy framework supports it.

Extract 3.

XIVUTISO 2 (KHOMONI FURAKIXINI)		
2.1	Khatara swiphemu swinharhu (3) eka xivumbeko lexi laha hansi	(9)
2.2	Xena hiny vito na furakixini leyinga laha henha	1
2.3	Pimanyisa ti furakixini leti landzelaka hikutirhisa >, < or = A. $\frac{3}{4} > \frac{1}{2}$ B. $\frac{3}{4} < \frac{1}{2}$	2
2.4	Tsala leswinga fanela eka furakixini leyi landzelaka $\frac{4}{8} = \frac{1}{2}$	1
2.5	Hlanganisa tifarakixini leti landzelaka.	
2.5.1	$\frac{5}{8} + \frac{1}{8}$	1
2.5.2	$\frac{3}{6} + \frac{2}{6}$	1
2.6	Sarah udyo swiphemu swimbirhi swa khekhe na mpundzu, atihela adya xiphemu xinwe namadyambu. Xena hinyi furakixini leyi angayidya?	2
XIVUTISO 3 (NKARHI NA KULEHA)		
3.1	Hetisa tafula leti landzelaka	(6)
	12-hour format	2

The extract reveals a complex relationship between language, conceptual understanding, and mathematical communication in multilingual classrooms. At a deeper analytical level, the findings suggest that inconsistency in mathematical terminology should not automatically be interpreted as conceptual weakness. Instead, the variation in learner explanations demonstrates how learners negotiate meaning through multiple linguistic and cultural resources while constructing mathematical understanding. A key issue emerging from the extract is the tension between standardised mathematical language and culturally grounded meaning-making practices. Learners used different expressions such as “ku ava” (sharing), “ku hambanyisa” (separating), and English-derived terms like “compare” or “divide” to explain the same mathematical concepts. On the surface, this inconsistency may appear problematic because it reduces terminological precision and creates challenges for formal mathematical communication. Learners who used standardised terminology often produced clearer and more academically recognisable justifications, indicating that mastery of formal mathematical discourse remains important for assessment and participation in school mathematics.

However, the extract also demonstrates that conceptual understanding cannot be measured solely with formal terminology. The learner who explained that $\frac{2}{5}$ is larger than $\frac{1}{4}$ because “when sharing equally, the pieces of $\frac{2}{5}$ are larger” displayed strong relational understanding of fractions through a culturally meaningful explanation rooted in everyday practices of equal sharing. This suggests that learners’ home-language expressions function as cognitive tools that support sense-making rather than as barriers to mathematical reasoning. The use of “ku ava hi ku ringana” (sharing equally) reflects conceptual reasoning connected to lived experiences, allowing learners to internalise abstract fraction concepts through familiar social practices. The findings therefore challenge deficit perspectives that position translanguageing or code-switching as evidence of linguistic inadequacy. Instead, the extract supports sociocultural theories of learning, particularly the idea that knowledge is mediated through language and cultural experience. Learners moved flexibly between indigenous language expressions and English mathematical vocabulary to construct meaning, demonstrating that multilingual practices can enhance conceptual access to mathematics. In this context, translanguageing becomes a pedagogical resource rather than a linguistic problem.

At the same time, the extract highlights an important pedagogical dilemma. While culturally grounded explanations promoted deeper conceptual understanding, inconsistent terminology sometimes limited learners’ ability to communicate mathematically with precision. This indicates that effective Mathematics teaching in multilingual classrooms should not aim to replace home-language explanations with English terminology, but rather to bridge the two. Teachers need to support learners in connecting culturally meaningful concepts such as sharing equally with formal mathematical language such as equivalent fractions, comparison, and simplification. Such an approach would strengthen both conceptual understanding and academic mathematical communication. The variation in explanations of equivalent fractions further reinforces this point. Some learners focused on procedural simplification, while others relied on sharing-based interpretations. This suggests that learners approached equivalent fractions from different conceptual pathways. Procedural explanations may indicate familiarity with algorithmic processes, whereas sharing-based explanations demonstrate contextual reasoning. The coexistence of these

approaches illustrates the multidimensional nature of mathematical understanding in multilingual settings. The findings strongly support Makalela's (2018) argument that translanguaging enables learners to engage more meaningfully with mathematical content. By drawing on both home-language resources and formal school discourse, learners can negotiate understanding in ways that are cognitively and culturally relevant. Consequently, multilingual Mathematics pedagogy should value linguistic flexibility while gradually developing standardised mathematical terminology to support both conceptual depth and formal academic participation.

4.3 Sociolinguistic Anxieties and Transition to English

Teachers voiced concerns that early Mathematics instruction in Xitsonga might delay learners' acquisition of English, potentially disadvantaging them in later grades and national assessments. This anxiety reflects a persistent tension between mother-tongue education and the perceived dominance of English in academic and economic mobility. Sibanda and Tshehla (2025) documented similar tensions in their analysis of language of instruction in South African primary schools, noting the complex trade-offs between mother-tongue instruction and English proficiency development.

Extract 4.

XIVUTISO 2 (KHOMONI FURAKIXINI)		
2.1	Khalara swiphemu swinharhu (3) eka xivumbeko lexi laha hansi	(9) 1
2.2	Xana iyini vito ra furakixini leyinga laha hephla <i>hanshi</i>	1
2.3	Pimanyisa ti furakixini leti landzelaka hikutirhisa >, < or = A. $\frac{5}{8} > \frac{1}{4}$ B. $\frac{4}{8} > \frac{3}{6}$	2
2.4	Tsala leswinga fanela eka furakixini leyi landzelaka $\frac{4}{8} = \frac{2}{2}$	1
2.5	Hlanganisa tifurakixini leti landzelaka.	
2.5.1	$\frac{5}{8} + \frac{1}{8}$	1
2.5.2	$\frac{3}{6} + \frac{2}{6}$	1
2.6	Sarah udye swiphemu swimbirhi swa khekhe na mpundzu, atihela adya xiphemu xinwe namadyambu. Xana hiyihi furakixini leyi angayidya? <i>12 ka uformu</i>	2
XIVUTISO 3 (NKARHI NA KULEHA)		(6)
3.1	Hetisa tafula leti landzelaka	2
	12-hour format 24-hour format	

The extract demonstrates a nuanced and analytically rich contradiction in learner achievement, exposing the complex relationship between language proficiency and mathematical understanding. At surface level, learners previously regarded as successful under English-medium Mathematics instruction unexpectedly underperformed on the fraction word problem, while those who had struggled in English showed notable improvement when allowed to engage conceptually through Xitsonga. This paradox challenges assumptions that performance in English-medium classrooms necessarily reflects deep mathematical competence. Instead, it suggests that apparent success in English may often mask superficial procedural fluency rather than genuine conceptual understanding. The responses of the previously high-performing learners reveal an overreliance on memorised procedures detached from contextual meaning. Their calculation of $\frac{2}{8} + \frac{1}{8} = \frac{3}{8}$ demonstrates mechanical competence in fraction addition, yet their failure to recognise the need to specify the total number of cake pieces indicates incomplete conceptual processing.

of the problem situation. The learner who added a note reflecting uncertainty further highlights the role of language as a mediating barrier. Although mathematically capable, the learner appeared unable to fully interpret or communicate the meaning embedded in the word problem due to linguistic constraints. This finding supports sociocultural perspectives of learning, which argue that language is not merely a vehicle for communication but a cognitive tool through which meaning is constructed.

Conversely, the improvement shown by learners who previously struggled in English-medium instruction suggests that mother-tongue use enabled deeper conceptual engagement with the mathematical task. The learner who explained in Xitsonga that the pieces eaten should be added while referencing the total of eight cake pieces demonstrated both procedural accuracy and relational understanding. Importantly, the learner's explanation reflected reasoning rather than rote application of rules, indicating that conceptual understanding became more accessible once linguistic barriers were reduced. The extract therefore reveals that learners previously categorised as "weak" in Mathematics may in fact possess latent mathematical competence obscured by the demands of operating in a second language. The extract also aligns strongly with the findings of Turner and Schools, who argue that mother-tongue instruction yields long-term cognitive and academic advantages, even if transitional phases may initially create inconsistent performance patterns. The "transition period" referenced in the study is evident here: learners accustomed to English instruction experienced disruption when confronted with conceptually demanding language tasks, whereas learners using their home language displayed stronger reasoning and interpretive skills. This suggests that mother-tongue instruction facilitates cognitive transfer by enabling learners to connect mathematical ideas with familiar linguistic structures and lived experiences. It challenges deficit interpretations of multilingual learners and calls into question assessment systems that equate English proficiency with intellectual competence. The findings imply that improving mathematical outcomes may depend not only on teaching procedures effectively but also on ensuring that learners can access conceptual meaning through linguistically familiar forms of instruction. Consequently, the extract strengthens arguments for multilingual pedagogies and sustained mother-tongue support in Mathematics education, particularly in early and intermediate phases where conceptual foundations are formed.

Extract 5.

12 am	(a)	
(b)	17:36	
3.2	Tsala nkarhi lowu kombisiweke eka wachi leyinga laha hansi	1
3.3	Sipho usungule ntirho-kaya wayena hi 4: 15 PM. Aheta hi 5: 05 PM. Xanautirhise nkarhi woleha kufika kwini ku endla ntirho-kaya wayena?	1
3.4	Xana Pensele leyi yilehe $1\frac{1}{2}$ m-tingani?	1
3.4	Hetisa lowu landzelaka 1 km = 1000 m	1
4.1	XIVUTISO 4 (SWIVUMBeko-SWA 2D) Iyini Pholigoni?	(5)
4.1	Nyika mavito ya swivumbeko leswi landzelaka	2

The extract demonstrates a significant tension between procedural mathematical performance and conceptual understanding expressed through language. At surface level, learners educated successfully through English-medium instruction appeared academically stronger because they arrived at the correct answer of 50 minutes. However, their inability to articulate the reasoning process in Xitsonga reveals that their understanding may have been procedural rather than deeply internalised. Many learners either provided only the answer or explicitly stated that they could not explain their thinking, suggesting dependence on memorised routines and linguistic limitations in expressing mathematical reasoning across languages. In contrast, learners with strong Xitsonga oral proficiency demonstrated metacognitive and analytical competence by explaining the calculation step by step. Their reasoning process—identifying the 45 minutes from 4:15 PM to 5:00 PM and then adding the remaining 5 minutes to reach 5:05 PM—shows not only computational accuracy but also conceptual decomposition of time intervals. This indicates that these learners were engaging cognitively with the problem rather than merely recalling a learned procedure. The ability to verbalise reasoning in the mother tongue reflects deeper comprehension because learners could organise, justify, and communicate their thought processes effectively. This distinction aligns with the argument by Turner and Schools (2019) that mother-tongue instruction nurtures long-term cognitive development, critical thinking, and meaningful understanding, even if immediate performance during language transition phases may appear weaker.

Furthermore, the finding highlights the close relationship between language and cognition in mathematics learning. Mathematical understanding is not limited to obtaining correct answers; it also involves reasoning, explanation, and the ability to communicate logic coherently. Learners who can explain concepts in their home language are often better positioned to construct meaning because they draw from familiar linguistic and cultural frameworks. The excerpt therefore suggests that mother-tongue proficiency supports higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, justification, and problem-solving. The evidence also has pedagogical implications. It suggests that assessing learners solely on final answers may conceal important differences in conceptual understanding. Teachers should therefore encourage multilingual mathematical discourse, allowing learners to explain reasoning in both the home language and the language of learning and teaching. Such practices may bridge the gap between procedural performance and conceptual mastery while supporting cognitive development during educational transitions.

4.4 The Role of Translanguaging and Scaffolding

The teachers' use of translanguaging strategies demonstrates how multilingual practices can bridge the gap between learners' everyday linguistic experiences and the abstract language of mathematics. In contexts where English functions as the language of learning and teaching, many learners struggle because mathematical concepts are introduced through a language in which they are not yet fully proficient. By moving flexibly between Xitsonga, English, and other familiar languages, teachers reduce linguistic barriers and create opportunities for deeper conceptual engagement. The finding that learner engagement and understanding improved through translanguaging reflects sociocultural theories of learning, particularly the idea that knowledge construction occurs through social interaction and culturally meaningful communication. When learners are permitted to first discuss mathematical problems in their home language, they are able to process ideas within a familiar cognitive and cultural framework. This allows them to focus on understanding the

mathematical logic itself rather than simultaneously struggling with unfamiliar English terminology. The gradual introduction of English mathematical vocabulary afterwards serves as a scaffold, enabling learners to connect conceptual understanding with formal academic language. The teachers' use of scaffolding techniques, such as peer collaboration and culturally familiar examples, further strengthens this process. Familiar cultural references contextualize mathematical ideas within learners' lived realities, making abstract concepts more accessible and relevant. Peer discussions also create collaborative spaces where learners can negotiate meaning, explain procedures to one another, and build confidence before presenting answers in English. Such interaction aligns with learner-centred pedagogies that emphasize participation, dialogue, and co-construction of knowledge. Thus, this demonstrates that translanguaging and scaffolding are not remedial practices but powerful pedagogical approaches that support conceptual development, learner participation, and inclusive mathematics education in multilingual classrooms.

Extract 6

5. Tsala swibasa swithela swivonaka.

XIVUTISO 1: SEKELE NHLAMULO LEYI FANELEKE (MCQ)		(5)
1.1	Hiyini furakixini leyi ringanaka na 1 eka letinga laha hansi A. $\frac{2}{3}$ B. $\frac{1}{3}$ C. $\frac{6}{6}$ D. $\frac{3}{6}$	1
1.2	Paka tifurakixini leti laha hansi kusuka ka leyi ntsongo kuya fika ka leyi kulu $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{3}$ $\frac{1}{8}$ A. $\frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{8}$ B. $\frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8}$ C. $\frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{3}$ D. $\frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{3}$	1
1.3	Xana eka ti awara timbirhi kuna timinetse tingani A. 60 minutes B. 90 minutes C. 120 minutes D. 180 minutes	1
1.4	Rhiboni yilehe 2m. Xana 2m yiringana na ti cm tingani? A. 20 cm B. 200 cm C. 2000 cm D. 2 cm	1
1.5	Hixihi xivumbeko lexanga hava tikhona na mathelo? A. Thirayengele B. Rhekithengele C. Sekele D. Phentagoni	1

The learners' responses to the fraction-identification task reveal more than procedural knowledge of fractions; they demonstrate how translanguaging practices can deepen conceptual understanding and mathematical reasoning. In identifying $\frac{6}{66/66/6}$ as equal to one, learners did not simply select the correct option mechanically. Instead, they articulated mathematical meaning through flexible movement between Xitsonga and English, showing that understanding was constructed through access to their full linguistic repertoires rather than through a single language of instruction. The first learner's explanation illustrates layered conceptual reasoning. By stating in Xitsonga that "all six pieces are present," the learner used a concrete and visual interpretation of fractions, connecting the symbolic notation $\frac{6}{66/66/6}$ to the idea of a complete whole. This indicates conceptual understanding of fractions as part-whole relationships rather than rote memorisation of rules. The learner then shifted into English to explain that "the denominator and numerator are the same," introducing formal mathematical vocabulary and symbolic reasoning. This movement between languages demonstrates cognitive flexibility and suggests that translanguaging enabled the learner to bridge informal conceptual knowledge with formal mathematical terminology. Rather than causing confusion, the alternation between languages supported meaning-making at multiple levels.

Similarly, the second learner's explanation in Xitsonga that "when they are equal, it means 1" reflects abstraction and generalisation. The learner moved beyond the specific example of $6/66/6/6$ to articulate a broader mathematical principle: any fraction with equal numerator and denominator equals one. This response indicates emerging algebraic reasoning and conceptual transfer, showing that the learner was not only solving the immediate problem but also recognising an underlying mathematical pattern. These findings strongly support the translanguaging perspective advanced by Makalela (2018), which challenges rigid separations between languages in classroom learning. According to translanguaging theory, bilingual learners do not compartmentalise languages cognitively; instead, they draw fluidly and strategically from their entire linguistic repertoires to process information, negotiate meaning, and express understanding. The learners' responses in this activity exemplify this process. Xitsonga functioned as a resource for conceptual explanation and sense-making, while English provided access to formal mathematical terminology and school-based discourse. The interaction between the two languages created a richer meaning-making environment than either language could provide independently. Furthermore, the learners' explanations suggest that translanguaging supports learner agency and confidence in mathematics classrooms. By allowing learners to reason in familiar linguistic forms, the classroom reduced linguistic barriers that often prevent multilingual learners from demonstrating mathematical understanding. The learners were able to participate more fully, explain their reasoning in detail, and connect everyday language with academic concepts. This indicates that translanguaging does not merely assist communication; it enhances higher-order thinking, conceptual clarity, and mathematical discourse. The learners' ability to explain why $6/6=16/6=16/6=1$ through both Xitsonga and English demonstrates that translanguaging can facilitate deeper mathematical understanding, conceptual generalisation, and meaningful participation. Their responses provide evidence that multilingual learners benefit when classrooms legitimise flexible language practices, supporting Makalela's argument that bilingual cognition operates holistically rather than through separated language systems.

Extract 7.

XIVUTISO 2 (KHOMONI FURAKIXINI)		(9)
2.1	Khalara swiphemu swinharhu (3) eka xivumbeko lexi laha hansi	1
2.2	Xana iyini yito ya furakixini leyinga laha henhla <i>Bhetthenpole</i>	1
2.3	Pimanyisa ti furakixini leti landzelaka hikutirhisa $>$, $<$ or $=$ A. $\frac{5}{8} \leq \frac{1}{4}$ B. $\frac{1}{8} \geq \frac{3}{6}$	2
2.4	Tsala leswinga faneta eka furakixini leyi landzelaka $\frac{4}{8} = \frac{5}{2}$	1
2.5	Hlanganisa tifurakixini leti landzelaka.	
2.5.1	$\frac{5}{8} + \frac{1}{8} = \frac{6}{8}$	1
2.5.2	$\frac{3}{6} + \frac{2}{6} = \frac{5}{6}$	1
2.6	Sarah udyo swiphemu swimbirhi swa khieke na mpundzu, athela adya xiphemu xinwe namadyagbu. Xana hiyihi furakixini leyi angayidya?	2
XIVUTISO 3 (NKARHI NA KULEHA)		(6)
3.1	Hetisa tafula lexi landzelaka	2
	12-hour format	24-hour format

The extract demonstrates a high level of analytical depth because it moves beyond describing learner responses to interpreting the linguistic and cognitive significance of those responses within bilingual mathematics learning. Rather than merely stating that learners used both Xitsonga and English, the analysis explains how each language functioned differently in the mathematical process. Xitsonga was used for conceptual reasoning and

procedural explanation, while English was employed for formal mathematical terminology and technical observations about simplification. This distinction shows that translanguaging was purposeful and strategic rather than random code-switching. In addition, the analysis demonstrates depth through its engagement with theory and literature. By linking the findings to the work of Robertson and Graven (2020), the discussion situates the classroom observations within broader research on bilingual mathematical practices in South African classrooms. This strengthens the credibility of the interpretation and shows that the observed learner behaviour reflects an established pattern among proficient bilingual learners. The extract is also analytically nuanced because it interprets language choice as evidence of cognitive flexibility and mathematical identity development. The learners are not simply translating between languages; they are selecting linguistic resources according to the demands of the task. This suggests growing metalinguistic awareness, where learners recognise which language is most effective for explaining concepts versus expressing formal mathematical conventions.

4.5 Ubuntu Principles and Collaborative Learning

This theme is drawing a connection between collaborative learning in mathematics education and the ubuntu philosophical framework, positioning ubuntu not as a cultural add-on but as a pedagogical foundation that reshapes how mathematical knowledge is constructed in classrooms. At the conceptual level, the argument hinges on the alignment between collaborative learning theory and ubuntu's core values of *interdependence, relationality, and shared responsibility*. Collaborative learning in education research (e.g., socio-constructivist traditions) assumes that knowledge is co-constructed through interaction rather than individually acquired. Ubuntu intensifies this assumption by making relationality not just a strategy but an ethical orientation: learners are understood as existing through and because of others. Ngubane and Makua's (2021) position therefore frames ubuntu as more than cultural relevance—it becomes a theoretical justification for group-based cognition, especially in contexts where Western individualistic pedagogies may feel socially and culturally misaligned. Waghid's (2020) contribution deepens this by shifting the focus from *efficiency of group work* to the moral and ontological nature of learning communities. In his framing, ubuntu is not simply "working together," but an ethic of *mutual becoming*—where learners' intellectual development is inseparable from their responsibility toward others. This challenges traditional classroom hierarchies where mathematical success is often individualised, ranked, and competitive. Instead, knowledge construction becomes a shared moral project.

From a mathematics education perspective, the most significant implication is the reframing of mathematical understanding itself. Mathematics is often treated as abstract, decontextualised, and individually mastered. However, through an ubuntu-informed collaborative lens, mathematical reasoning becomes dialogic: learners justify, negotiate, and refine ideas collectively. This can support deeper conceptual understanding, particularly in problem-solving contexts where multiple strategies are compared and evaluated socially. The argument is strongest when viewed as a transformative pedagogy proposal: ubuntu-informed collaborative learning can potentially enhance mathematical understanding by fostering dialogue, shared reasoning, and collective responsibility. Its limitations, however, lie not in the philosophy itself but in the institutional and classroom constraints that may prevent its full enactment.

Extract 8.

3.2	Tsala nkarhi lowu kombisiweke eka wachi leyinga laha hansi	1
3.3	Sipho usungule ntrho-kaya wayena hi 4: 15 PM. Aheta hi 5: 05 PM. Xanautirhise nkarhi woleha kufika kwini ku endla ntrho-kaya wayena? <i>1:20 am timete</i>	1
3.4	Xana Pensele leyi yilehe ti cm tingani?	1
3.4	Hetisa leswi landzelaka 1 km = 1000m XIVUTISO 4 (SWIVUMBeko SWA 2D)	1
4.1	Iyini Pholigoni? <i>pentagon</i>	(5)
4.1	Nyika mavito ya swivumbeko leswi landzelaka	2

This extract is illustrating two things at once: describing learner discourse and interpreting it through a sociocultural lens (ubuntu-informed pedagogy). To deepen the analysis, it helps to separate *what the data clearly shows* from *what is being inferred*, and then test the strength of that inference. First, at the descriptive level, the linguistic evidence is fairly consistent: learners are not framing knowledge as individually owned. The shift from “I” to “we” (“hi”) is not just a grammatical choice but a discourse marker of distributed cognition. It suggests that learners are positioning understanding as something formed through interaction rather than isolated reasoning. Similarly, references to “we discussed” or “our group concluded” in the clock-reading task indicate that epistemic authority is being negotiated socially. In other words, correctness is not only tied to what *one learner sees*, but what *the group arrived at*, even when that group conclusion is later revised against the physical artifact (the clock).

Second, the polygon example is particularly interesting because it shows *concept stabilization through analogy and exclusion*. Learners use prototypical shapes (“triangle or rectangle”) to construct the category “polygon,” and then correctly exclude circles based on the property of straight sides. The key analytical point here is that the concept is not emerging from formal definition-first instruction but from *collective categorization practices*. This is a classic feature of socially mediated concept formation: learners anchor abstract definitions in shared exemplars and peer-mediated clarification. Where the interpretation becomes more complex is in the invocation of ubuntu (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). The claim that these linguistic patterns “support ubuntu principles of interdependence and collective responsibility” is plausible, but it risks being slightly over-determined unless carefully bounded. The strongest version of the argument is not that ubuntu explains the data, but that the data illustrates a form of learning that is compatible with ubuntu-informed interpretations of knowledge as relational, dialogic, and socially validated—while still being structurally shaped by classroom interaction patterns that may operate independently of cultural ideology.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the transition to Xitsonga as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in Grade 4 Mathematics generates complex and uneven outcomes that are closely shaped by learners’ prior linguistic and educational experiences. Learners who possess strong oral proficiency in Xitsonga generally display

deeper conceptual understanding and more sophisticated mathematical reasoning. Their responses often reveal greater confidence in explaining procedures, interpreting problems contextually, and articulating mathematical ideas through familiar linguistic structures rooted in their home language. In contrast, learners who had previously benefited from English-medium instruction appear to encounter new challenges during the transition, suggesting that while the policy creates opportunities for some learners, it may simultaneously disrupt the learning trajectories of others.

The learners' examination scripts further function as important diagnostic artefacts of cognition, illustrating how language access fundamentally mediates mathematical understanding rather than merely accompanying it. The findings therefore challenge the assumption that mathematical competence is language-neutral. Instead, they reveal that learners' mathematical performance is deeply intertwined with the linguistic and cultural resources available within their learning environments. This supports broader scholarship on multilingual mathematics education, which positions language not as an obstacle to overcome, but as a critical cognitive and pedagogical resource for meaning-making in the classroom.

In light of these findings, several implications emerge for policy and practice. First, there is a pressing need to develop culturally relevant Xitsonga mathematics materials that resonate with learners' lived experiences. The Department of Basic Education should work collaboratively with linguists, mathematics educators, and cultural practitioners to design resources grounded in familiar contexts such as local markets, agricultural practices, and indigenous measurement systems. These materials should also incorporate bilingual glossaries and strong visual representations to support conceptual understanding while reducing excessive dependence on language proficiency alone. Second, teacher preparation and professional development programmes must place greater emphasis on multilingual mathematics pedagogy. Continuous professional development initiatives should equip teachers with appropriate Xitsonga mathematical terminology, translanguaging strategies, and sociocultural teaching approaches that enable more inclusive and effective classroom practices. Such programmes should also provide practical opportunities for resource development, mentorship, and critical reflection on teacher attitudes toward Xitsonga-medium instruction. Third, translanguaging should be recognised and promoted as a legitimate and productive classroom practice. Learners should be encouraged to draw on their full linguistic repertoires when engaging with mathematical concepts. Allowing learners to discuss ideas in Xitsonga before expressing them formally in mathematical language can strengthen conceptual understanding and reduce cognitive barriers. Equally important is the explicit bridging of Xitsonga and English mathematical terminology to support long-term bilingual academic development. The study also highlights the importance of differentiated instructional support across diverse language proficiency profiles. Both English-proficient and Xitsonga-proficient learners require targeted scaffolding to navigate the linguistic demands of mathematics learning. Strategies such as peer collaboration, mixed-ability grouping, terminology bridging, and learner-led explanations can foster more equitable participation and understanding within multilingual classrooms. Furthermore, meaningful parental and community engagement remains essential in strengthening mother-tongue mathematics education. Schools and educational stakeholders should implement awareness programmes that communicate the academic value of mother-tongue instruction while also clarifying pathways for the gradual transition to English. Encouraging positive community

attitudes toward Xitsonga as a language of intellectual and academic reasoning is crucial for sustaining learner confidence and educational success.

Finally, assessment practices and bilingual transition pathways require careful reconsideration. Mathematics assessments should move beyond narrow linguistic dependence by prioritising conceptual understanding through varied, contextually grounded tasks that allow for multilingual expression where appropriate. At the same time, structured progression models should be implemented to systematically introduce English mathematical terminology while continuously monitoring learner development throughout the transition process.

Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of viewing language not simply as a medium of instruction, but as a powerful epistemic resource through which mathematical knowledge is constructed, negotiated, and understood. In multilingual educational contexts, equitable mathematics learning depends not only on what learners are taught, but also on the languages through which they are given opportunities to think, reason, and make meaning.

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A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF GIBRAN'S RESPONSE TO PANDJI'S *POLITICAL SATIRE*

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Abstract

This study explores stand-up comedy as a medium for expressing socio-political issues and examines how political figures respond to such satire in digital media. This study scopes the discourse and power relations in Gibran Rakabuming's response to Pandji Pragiwaksono's satire in his *Mens Rea* show, which was recorded and published on Netflix and Tretan Universe YouTube channel. Previous studies of political satire have focused mainly on the construction of humour. This study fills the gap by examining the strategic responses of targeted politicians. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study analyzes micro-level linguistic features through Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) metafunctions, ideational, interpersonal, and textual and examines how language constructs meaning and sociocultural practices through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing on Fairclough's framework of representation, relations, and identity. Gibran's composed demeanor functions discursively as a strategy of political deflection. His serenity, laughter, and simple language transform political criticism into harmless biological humor framed as natural and innocent. This strategy exemplifies 'soft hegemony,' whereby politicians employ humor and self-deprecation to diffuse critique and maintain authority. This study greatly advances the field of political discourse by broadening the scope of application of SFL and CDA frameworks to informal digital multimodal interactions, which are usually dismissed as trivial entertainment but are in fact highly complex and sophisticated sites for ideological negotiation and power reproduction.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis; Gibran Rakabuming; metafunctions; Pandji Pragiwaksono; political satire; stand-up comedy*

1. Introduction

The tension between citizens and authorities during the periods of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka represents a notable phenomenon in political communication warranting further investigation. As digital democratic spaces grow, people are no longer limited to traditional institutions when it comes to dealing with problems like leadership succession, dynasty politics, and changes in the rules of governance (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010). These dynamics now extend into popular culture, particularly through stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedy has evolved from mere entertainment into a significant medium

for social critique and political discourse to being a key way to criticize society and a key place to talk about politics (Saleem et al., 2022). Comedians use political satire in a very planned way. They use delivery techniques like comedians employ techniques such as set-up and punchline, hyperbole, and contrast to expose contradictions in political actions and rhetoric in politicians' policies or actions. By making a situation seem worse than it is (hyperbole) or comparing politicians' unfulfilled campaign pledges to the harsh reality on the ground (Nizar & Aesthetika, 2024). spreadAudience laughter signifies agreement and recognition of political and social problems, reinforcing satire as a discourse of resistance; it's laughter of agreement that shows that something is wrong with the current political and social situation (Surahmat et al., 2024; Tesnohlikova, 2021; Windisch & Simi, 2022). Thus, resistance discourse circulates widely in the public sphere, amplified by social media, especially when social media amplifies these satirical exchange between Pandji and Gibran and they are seen by millions of people (Kwong, 2024).

This use of sharp political satire is very connected to Pandji Pragiwaksono's past work, especially his stand-up comedy special "Mens Rea." There is a reason why this title was chosen. Mens rea is a Latin term that means "criminal intent" or the "guilty mental state" behind an act in criminal law (Abrar et al., 2025). Pandji's title establishes the central premise of his comedy performance. According to Romandona and Yasin (2025), *Mens Rea* emphasises not only observable actions (*actus reus*) but also the hidden intentions and motives (*mens rea*) that underlie them, thereby exposing political hypocrisy and strategies of power preservation. From the perspective of political satire, uncovering the rulers' *mens rea* constitutes a form of resistance, as it reveals the concealed ambitions and self-serving interests often disguised through populist rhetoric and public displays of concern. Within this framework, Gibran Rakabuming, as a young political figure, becomes one of the primary targets of Pandji's satire. Through the performance, Pandji attempts to expose the underlying "intentions" behind Gibran's political image and positioning. Political discourse in the digital age extends beyond comedians' jokes, as responses from targeted figures often reveal strategic communication that the comedian tells (Sari & Triyono, 2023). Pandji made fun of the youthful political persona Gibran Rakabuming in a way that was very specific. But the way people talk about politics in the digital age goes beyond the jokes the comedian makes (Rahman et al., 2021). It is much more interesting and important to look at what happens when the subject of the satire is in the public place, as shown in a vlog on the Tretan Universe YouTube channel. Responses from the criticized political figure are often not just random reactions; they often include hidden communication strategies that are meant to keep their image of power in the public eye.

One part of his comedy routine clearly shows how he is trying to break down political reality. Pragiwaksono (2025, [00:43:30]) gives a harsh criticism of how shallow Indonesian voters are by saying, "*Ada yang milih presiden berdasarkan tampang. Ganjar, ganteng ya, Anis, manis ya, Prabowo, gemoy ya atau atau wakil presidennya, Gibran, ngantuk ya?*". This punchline not only contrasts candidates' appealing traits with Gibran's perceived passivity but also metaphorically critiques his political image as disengaged or lacking initiative. This joke uses a very clear contrast technique in its structure. While other candidates have physical traits that are seen as good or at least cute as political gimmicks (handsome, sweet, cute), Pandji puts Gibran at the end of the sentence with the word "sleepy" as the punchline. This word choice is not just a physical observation; it is also a satire that cleverly breaks down Gibran's public image. The word "sleepy" is a metaphor that makes fun of how people

often think he is not very interested in politics, doesn't have many ideas, or is too passive. Pandji uses a single short sentence to show how leadership contests are often only about looks, while also making the person he is targeting look less competent. Previous studies on political satire in Indonesia have focused on the linguistic construction of humour by comedians and the reception of this humour by the general audience (Kulkarni, 2017; Song et al., 2021; Sunarso et al., 2022). However, the opposite dynamic of this phenomenon, which includes how targeted political figures strategically react to such scathing satire through discursive negotiation in digital media, has received less attention. The present study addresses this crucial gap by moving the analytical gaze from a monologic critique to a dialogic interaction, exploring the defensive linguistic strategies used by a political figure. This research contributes novelty in the context of capturing the present political climate in 2026, which is the much-talked about incident between comedian Pandji Pragiwaksono and Vice President Gibran Rakabuming. In this particular context, we see a modern strategy of "discursive hegemony," where modern-day politicians use casualness, deflections, and digital vlogs to defuse incisive political criticism, as opposed to the traditional authoritarian censorship. This study proposes a new integrated framework in theory and method by combining Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). This methodological approach, through the multimodal transcription of different digital platforms (Netflix and YouTube) permits a granular, micro-level analysis of metafunctional language choices accompanied by non-verbal cues, which are then elevated to a macro-level critique of sociocultural power relations, representation and political identity construction.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Political Satire and Digital Political Communication

Satirical humor has become increasingly significant in political communication studies, especially in today's polarized environment. Satirical humor in political communication is different from pure entertainment-oriented comedy that intends to amuse audiences with, for example, humor based on physical comedy or everyday observations to create humorous sense (Enarsson, 2025; Nita et al., 2021). Satirical or critical humor, as used in political satire, is a purposeful use of irony, sarcasm, repetition, and hyperbole intended to expose weaknesses, hypocrisy, and abuse of power in various segments of society, particularly the political arena (Möller & Boukes, 2022). In a rigid, bureaucratic, and obscure environment of formal politics, satire can function as a "bridge" to the broader and more open society that has developed expectations about greater political transparency and accountability (Kaur & Puyok, 2021). Many comedians are employing their star power as part of the emerging role of the non-formal political actor. Comedians strategically deploy satire as a rhetorical weapon to challenge authority and erode public trust in political figures (Abdullah, 2012; Rahman et al., 2021). That a comedian's choosing a politician as the subject of his or her jokes can serve to effectively erode that satire erodes politicians' cultural immunity, challenging the perception that they are beyond criticism (Sari & Triyono, 2023).

2.2 Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Language grammar systems are often described in a number of ways. The traditional description outlines the structural rules for English clause-wording, including information about subject, predicate, object, objects of object, indirect objects, gerunds, clause juncture and so on (Nabiyeva, 2025). Sometimes grammar is treated as if it were a simple truth/falsity matter: correct or incorrect. An alternative, more detailed, perspective on language grammar provides a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) description, viewing language as a social semiotic system whether words, phrases, sounds, written forms, or gestures, all exist as potential options with social purpose (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Words and words together are never chosen randomly or mistakenly for effective language use. According to Lola & Emilia (2025) in their research, every instance of language is used for three metafunctions simultaneously: the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions can be examined within multimodality. This study draws on the three SFL metafunctions, ideational, interpersonal, and textual, as tools for micro-linguistic analysis within Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Using SFL as a semantic resource, the study moves beyond surface features to reveal how lexical choices encode ideology and negotiating power (Farhanita & Kurniawan, 2024).

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) transcends conventional linguistic confines and investigates the intricate web of power dynamics and ideologies inherent in discourse (Salih, 2021). Within the expansive framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, notable scholars present divergent viewpoints: Van Dijk (2008) examines the socio-cognitive dimensions of discourse's impact on mental models and the reinforcement of ideological polarisation, whereas Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach emphasises the importance of historical and institutional contexts in shaping political language (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This study acknowledges these fundamental perspectives and establishes the primary framework utilising Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model. Fairclough (1995) asserts that a comprehensive examination of the broader social context of the text is essential for a meaningful understanding of a communicative event.

The first dimension is the text, where language or semiosis is analysed. This study examines the textual dimension through Halliday's metafunctions. In addition, this digital political interaction is beyond the spoken words, therefore this study adopts Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) proposed by Ledin & Machin (2020) to carefully analyse the non-verbal semiotic resources, including gestures and relaxed facial expressions, in addition to the linguistic text (Situmorang et al., 2025). The integration of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a robust analytical framework for examining political discourse (Adegbenro & Olayemi, 2025). CDA provides a comprehensive macro-level framework for understanding the discursive reproduction of power, ideology, and hegemony (Hariyanti & Yustitia, 2020). Nonetheless, it is occasionally criticised for its absence of a textual foundation. This empirical necessity is effectively met through the micro-level analytical framework of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. It suggests how social realities are methodically formed through the selection of lexicogrammar, structured around the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions (Alameda-Hernández & Jiménez-Briones, 2025). This methodological unification eliminates the dialectical separation between text and context. It offers social scientists the opportunity

to examine how nuanced linguistic and multimodal elements of informal political discourse are strategically utilised to negotiate power dynamics, build ideologies, and legitimise political identities (Zeb et al., 2025).

3. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the meaning behind political satire (Creswell, 2009). The primary subjects were Pandji Pragiwaksono, the comedian who critiques political figures, and Gibran Rakabuming, the politician who responded to the satire. The primary data sources were drawn from two different digital media platforms: the stand-up comedy special "Mens Rea" on Netflix and a reaction vlog video on the Tretan Universe YouTube channel. To ensure data accuracy, the researcher employed a purposive sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling was used to select video clips focusing on segments related to the 'sleepy' satire.

The data gathering approach in this study involved meticulous observation, systematic note-taking, and targeted sampling. The encounter between Pandji and Gibran was intentionally chosen as a representative dyadic conversation showcasing incisive political satire met with immediate political reactions on prominent digital platforms. This selected discourse is analytically important as it offers a unique, clear microcosm of current ideological negotiation, effectively demonstrating the contemporary political transition toward "soft hegemony," wherein political leaders mitigate criticism through deliberate nonchalance instead of conventional authoritarian suppression. The analysis focused on the multimodal communicative act, integrating both verbal and non-verbal elements, such as facial expressions and gestures, which were documented through a comprehensive multimodal transcription. The data analysis progressed in two phases: the first employed Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) metafunctions to dissect language use within the discourse, while the second utilized Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the socio-cultural dimensions of representation, relation, and identity in political satire (Cheng, 2024; Purwaningrum & Harmoko, 2025; Sumari, 2024). By integrating these frameworks, the study aims to clarify the dynamics of ideology and power in comic interactions within digital public spheres.

3.1 Analytical Procedure Table

Table 1.
Analytical Procedure Table

Stage	Research Procedure	Action Taken
Data Collection	Multimodal Transcription	Transcribing both verbal utterances and non-verbal cues (laughter, gestures, tone) from Netflix and YouTube platforms.
Data Condensation	Purposive Sampling	Extracting segments related specifically to the "sleepy" (<i>ngantuk</i>) political satire and applying the alphanumeric coding framework.

Micro-Analysis	SFL Metafunctions Analysis	Dissecting the coded clauses using Halliday's framework to identify Ideational (transitivity), Interpersonal (mood), and Textual (theme/rheme) meanings.
Macro-Analysis	CDA 3-Dimensional Analysis	Elevating the linguistic findings into sociocultural practices to examine how they construct Representation, Social Relations, and Political Identity based on Fairclough's model.
Data Synthesis	Conclusion Drawing	Synthesizing the micro and macro findings to formulate a comprehensive conclusion regarding the "strategic pacification" tactics used in digital political discourse.

3.2 Coding Framework

Upon compiling the multimodal transcription, a systematic coding methodology was employed to classify the utterances and non-verbal cues prior to the primary analysis. Each data segment was encoded utilising a distinct alphanumeric format: [Speaker/Platform/Datum Number]. [PAN/NF/1] denotes a particular speech by Pandji (PAN) on the Netflix platform (NF), identified as datum number 01. Likewise, [GIB/YT/2] denotes Gibran's (GIB) comment on YouTube (YT) as data point number 02. Subsequent to this preliminary identification, the data were classified according to their linguistic orientation into the three metafunctions of SFL (Ideational, Interpersonal, Textual) and thereafter aligned with Fairclough's dimensions of CDA (Representation, Relation, Identity). This approach guarantees that the data reduction process is both traceable and methodically structured for micro and macro-level analysis.

3.3 Validity Strategy

The rigorous strategies used in the study enhanced the trustworthiness and validity of the qualitative findings. It uses Theory Triangulation, which combines Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyse text at the micro-level and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to critique the macro-level social context, thereby reducing the bias of a single theoretical approach. Integrates multimodal elements like facial expressions and tone to accurately and contextually represent communicative events. A systematic validation process is adopted that includes iterative use of peer debriefing and expert validation, which allows for a thorough examination and reconciliation of analytical discrepancies. Researcher reflexivity reveals the interpretive subjectivity inherent in Critical Discourse Analysis such that claims are based on verifiable lexicogrammatical and multimodal evidence, thus transforming subjective insights into systematically validated academic research.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Ideational Metafunction Analysis

In SFL, clauses are split into three parts: who is involved (Participant), what is done or happens (Process), and what the situation is (Circumstance). Omitting verbs (ellipsis) is

common in spoken language, like stand-up comedy, but the reason for doing it is not always clear (Parasian et al., 2025; Putra et al., 2024).

Table 2.

Transitivity Analysis of Pandji's Discourse

Clause / discourse	Partisipants	Process	Circumstance
[PAN/NF/1] "Ada yang milih pemimpin berdasarkan tampang" (Some choose leaders based on looks)	Actor: <i>Ada yang</i> some) Goal: <i>pemimpin</i> (leader)	Existential process: <i>Ada</i> (some) Material process: <i>milih</i> (choose)	Manner: <i>berdasarkan tampang</i> (based on appearance)
[PAN/NF/2] "Ganjar ganteng, ya?" (Ganjar looks handsome, doesn't He?)	Carrier: Ganjar	Attributive relational: is [implicit]	Manner: <i>ganteng</i> (handsome)
[PAN/NF/3] "Anis manis, ya?" (Anis looks sweet, doesn't He?)	Carrier: Anis	Attributive relational: is [implicit]	Manner: <i>manis</i> (sweet)
[PAN/NF/4] "Prabowo gemoy, ya?" (Prabowo looks cute, doesn't He?)	Carrier: Prabowo	Attributive relational: is [implicit]	Manner: <i>gemoy</i> (cute)
[PAN/NF/5] "Atau Wakil Presidennya, Gibran ngantuk, ya?" (or The Vice President, Gibran looks sleepy, doesn't He?)	Carrier: <i>Wakil Presiden</i> , Gibran (The Vice President, Gibran)	Attributive relational: is [implicit]	Manner: <i>ngantuk</i> (sleepy)
[PAN/NF/6] "Salah nada maaf." (wrong tone, sorry)	Carrier: <i>nada saya</i> (my tone) [implicit]	Verbal process: Pandji as sayer [implicit]	Contingency: <i>salah</i> (wrong)
[PAN/NF/7] "Gibran ngantuk, ya?" [Nada heran] (Gibran looks sleepy, doesn't He?) [surprised tone]	Carrier: Gibran	Attributive relational: is [implicit]	Manner: <i>ngantuk</i> (sleepy)
[PAN/NF/8] "Yakan dia kayak orang ngantuk kan, ya?" (Right, he looks like a somnolent expression, doesn't he, yeah?)	Carrier: <i>dia</i> (He) [Gibran]	Mental process: <i>kayak</i> (looks like)	Manner: <i>orang ngantuk</i> (a somnolent expression)

Source: Mens Rea – Netflix (Pragiwaksono, 2025) [00:43:30]

Through Halliday's ideational metafunction lens, the reality construct by Pandji Pragiwaksono in the "Mens Rea" segment is highly structured and linguistically manipulative. Transitivity analysis shows that the discourse opens with a Material Process in clause 1 "Some choose leaders based on looks". The use of the action verb "to choose" [to choose] paired with

the circumstance "*based on looks*" serves as the foundation for the premise. Pandji straightforwardly represents the sociopolitical reality of voters in Indonesia as superficial entities, where crucial actions like choosing a leader are reduced to mere aesthetic or visual assessments. In SFL, transitivity structures represent experiential meaning through Participants, Processes, and Circumstances, which together encode how reality is construed.

After this premise is established, Pandji's sentence construction predominantly shifts to using Attributive Relational Processes repeatedly (parallel repetition). Clauses 2, 3, and 4 attribute attributes to senior political figures (Ganjar, Anis, Prabowo). The attributes attached (handsome, sweet, cute) are adjectives representing political gimmicks with positive, entertaining, or visually appealing connotations. This sequential selection of relational processes builds an audience expectation regarding contemporary political campaign patterns that rely on superficial charm.

The satirical climax (or punchline) occurs in clauses 5 and 7, when Pandji positions Gibran in the exact same syntactic structure as the previous three candidates. However, there is a sharp semantic anomaly in the attributes assigned. While other figures receive aesthetic attributes, Gibran is represented with the attribute "sleepy." Lexically, "sleepy" is not an aesthetic quality that can be used as a campaign gimmick, but rather a physiological condition indicating a lack of vitality, lethargy, or intellectual/physical unpreparedness. Through this relational process, Pandji deconstructs the authority of the position of "Vice President"; he does not attack Gibran's policies, but rather his outward appearance, which does not reflect the energy of a leader.

Furthermore, this analysis is reinforced by multimodal elements (tone of voice and gesture). In clause 6 "*Salah nada maap*", Pandji theatrically breaks this pattern. The shift from a "gentle tone" (symbolizing the public's blind admiration for political gimmicks) to a "surprised and questioning tone" when repeating the phrase "*Gibran looks sleepy, huh?*" is a form of ideological affirmation. Pandji uses language to highlight the absurdity. The closing phrase "*He looks like he's about to fall asleep, doesn't he?*" seals the representation. Pandji constructs a premise that leads the audience (including Gibran as an object) to acknowledge the reality that despite all his political maneuvers, the most prominent identity or attribute attached to Gibran in the eyes of the critical public is lethargy (sleepiness). This discursive attack then becomes a powerful stimulus and appears to Gibran to engage in defensive maneuvers when responding on the Tretan Universe YouTube channel.

Table 3.

Transitivity Analysis of Gibran's Response

Clause / discourse	Partisipants	Process	Circumstance
[GIB/YT/1] "Ya kita ucapkan selamat lah ke Bang Pandji ya." (Well, let's just congratulate Bang Pandji)	Actor: <i>kita</i> (us) Goal: <i>Selamat</i> (congratulate)	Verbal process: <i>ucapkan</i> (saying)	Recipient: <i>ke Bang Pandji</i> (to Pandji)
[GIB/YT/2] "...ngalahin Jujutsu Kaishen, ngalahin apa, Stranger Things. Ikut bangga." (...beating Jujutsu Kaisen, beating... what was it, Stranger Things. I'm proud too.)	Sensor: <i>saya / kita</i> (I / us) [implicit]	Mental affection: <i>(merasa) bangga</i> (feels proud) [Implicit]	Contingency: <i>ikut</i> (feels proud)

[GIB/YT/3] "Oh, iya sih. Ya gapapa, dibuat lucu-lucuan aja. Santai." (Oh, yeah. It's fine, it's just for laughs. Take it easy)	Goal: that critique [implicit]	Material process: <i>dibuat</i> (make it)	Cause: <i>lucu-lucuan aja</i> (just for fun)
[GIB/YT/4] "Ya dari lahir bentuk matanya seperti ini, mau gimana lagi." (Well, I was born with eyes like this, what can you do?) [gesture pointing his eyes]	Carrier: <i>bentuk matanya seperti ini</i> (this my original eye shape)	Relational attributive: (<i>adalah</i>) [implicit] <i>seperti ini</i> (like this)	Time: dari lahir
[GIB/YT/5] "Ga masalah, di-roasting siapapun ga masalah." (It's no problem, I don't mind getting roasted by anyone)	Target/goal: (<i>saya</i>) <i>di-roasting</i> (I was roasted) [implicit] Actor: <i>siapapun</i> (anyone)	Material process: <i>di-roasting</i> (being roasted)	Matter: <i>ga masalah</i> (no problems)
[GIB/YT/6] "Tapi gapapa sih... untuk menghibur orang lah." (But it's no big deal... it's just to entertain people anyway)	Goal: that critique [implicit]	Material process: <i>menghibur</i> (cheering someone up)	Cause: <i>orang lah</i> (someone)
[GIB/YT/7] "...yang disampaikan Pandji di Mens Rea ya, itu kan kritikan, masukan untuk kita semua lah..." (...I mean, it's a critique, it's feedback for all of us...)	Carrier: <i>yang disampaikan Pandji itu</i>	Verbal process: <i>disampaikan</i> (delivered)	Contingency: <i>kritikan, masukan</i> (critique, suggestion) Recipient: <i>untuk kita semua</i> (for all of us)
[GIB/YT/8] "...gak usah saling mem-bully, gak usah saling melaporkan." (...there's no need to bully each other, and no need to report one another)	Actor: (netizens / supporter) [implicit]	Material process: <i>mem-bully, melaporkan</i> (bullying, reporting)	Contingency: <i>saling</i> (mutual respect)

Source: Tahan Sabar – (Tretan Universe, 2026) [00:00:43 – 00:02:55]

The transitivity analysis above shows that Gibran's response discourse uses a very advance linguistic strategy to stop political attacks. Instead of using defensive material processes like denial or anger, Gibran uses three structures ideational maneuvers: First, Deflection through Appreciation (Verbal and Mental Processes). In the first two parts of the conversation, Gibran doesn't directly respond to the criticism. He uses Verbal Processes "we

congratulate" and Mental Processes "*we share in the pride*" to change the subject of the conversation from "Gibran as the object of satire" to "Pandji as the subject of success on Netflix." Choosing "we" over "I" shows that he wants to be inclusive and not make himself seem like an enemy being attacked. Second, Substance Reduction and Biological Normalization (Relational and Material Processes). Gibran uses the Material Process to make Pandji's criticism seem like just something to "*make fun of*," and the important Attributive Relational Process to say, "my eyes were born like this." This statement may function as the political force of the satire. Gibran turns a harsh political criticism of his lack of energy or work ethic as a leader into something that is just biological fate and unchangeable physical anatomy "*what can I do?*". By normalizing the discourse, Gibran neutralizes Pandji's satirical power, reducing the critique to a depoliticized physical commentary devoid of political substance.

Third, the integration of criticism and the declaration of moral authority (relational process and material negation). Clauses 7 and 8 show the most important parts of Gibran's discourse strategy. He once more employs the Attributive Relational Process to recontextualize the content of "Mens Rea." Gibran doesn't see it as an attack; instead, he sees it as "*criticism, input for all of us*." This is a way of assimilating; he takes the criticism to show that he is open-minded and emotionally mature. In the end, Gibran uses a negated Material Process "*don't bully, don't report*". This clause, which doesn't have a clear subject, is basically an imperative sentence (a command). This is where he says he is in charge; he tells the people (netizens/his supporters) to stay calm and acts like a leader. This ideational analysis may reflect that Gibran's "an unruffled image" demeanor is not indicative of resignation, but rather a linguistic deflection. By choosing certain verbs, he was able to take away Pandji's mens rea (intent to attack), turn political criticism into simple physical entertainment, and come out of the conversation with the image of a tough, nonchalant attitude, and *anti-baper* new-generation political leader.

4.2 Interpersonal Metafunction Analysis

Halliday's Interpersonal Metafunction analysis divides sentences into Mood Elements (Subject and Finite/Auxiliary Verb) and Residues (Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct). The Mood type (Declarative, Interrogative, Imperative) tells you what the exchange is for (giving or asking for information or action) (Chen, 2025).

Table 4.

Interpersonal Metafunction Analysis of Pandji's Discourse

Clause / Utterance	Mood System Analysis	Mood Type & Exchange Function	Power Relation & Social Interaction (Speaker – Listener)
[PAN/NF/1] "Ada yang milih pemimpin berdasarkan tampang" (Some choose leaders based on looks)	Subject: <i>Ada</i> (existential) Finite: [present tense]	Declarative. Function: Giving information.	Pandji positions himself on an equal footing with the audience as a rational observer, establishing a premise or shared knowledge base.

[PAN/NF/2] "Ganjar ganteng, ya?" (Ganjar looks handsome, doesn't He?)	Subject: Ganjar / Anis / Prabowo Mood Adjunct (Tag): ya?	Declarative with Interrogative Tag. Function: Demanding agreement.	The use of the particle "ya?" functions interpersonally to draw the audience into agreeing with the premise. The gentle tone represents (mocking) the attitude of the public who blindly idolize politicians.
[PAN/NF/3] "Anis manis, ya?" (Anis looks sweet, doesn't He?)			
[PAN/NF/4] "Prabowo gemoy, ya?" (Prabowo looks cute, doesn't He?)			
[PAN/NF/5] "Atau Wakil Presidennya, Gibran ngantuk, ya?" (or The Vice President, Gibran looks sleepy, doesn't He?)	Subject: Gibran Mood Adjunct: ya?	Declarative with Interrogative Tag. Function: Demanding agreement.	Pandji builds an interactional trap. He maintains the same mood structure and tone to deceive the audience's expectations.
[PAN/NF/6] "Salah nada maaf." (wrong tone, sorry)	Salah (Minor Clause / Subject Ellipsis)	Minor Clause (Exclamative/Apolo gy). Function: Breaking the theatrical frame (breaking the fourth wall).	Pandji breaks down the authority distance between himself (performer) and the audience. He displays artificial "vulnerability" to create emotional intimacy and lower the audience's guard.
[PAN/NF/7] "Gibran ngantuk, ya?" [Nada heran] (Gibran looks sleepy, doesn't He?) [surprised tone]	Subject: Gibran Mood Adjunct: ya? (pronounced with rising intonation)	Interrogative (Polar). Function: Demanding confirmation.	The dramatic change in tone positions Pandji as a representation of a confused public. The power dynamic shifts: Pandji + the audience are now in a superior position (laughing at) the target object (Gibran).
[PAN/NF/8] "Yakan dia kayak orang ngantuk kan, ya?" (Right, he looks like a somnolent expression, doesn't he, yeah?)	Subject: dia (Gibran) Mood Adjunct: Yakan, kan, ya?	Declarative with Multi-Tag. Function: Forcing consensus.	The consecutive use of three emphasizing particles (yakan, kan, ya) indicates a high level of interpersonal pressure. Pandji compels the audience to form an alliance with him to validate the critique.

Source: Mens Rea – Netflix (Pragiwaksono, 2025) [00:43:30]

In the first part (Clauses 1 to 5), Pandji mostly uses a Declarative Mood ending with a question tag "ya?". This sentence structure is not just meant to give information; it is also a way to negotiate in an uneven way. Pandji says that politicians are elected based on how they look, and then he uses the word "ya?" as bait to get everyone to agree with him. He uses a "gentle" tone to show that he is being ironic in his interactions with others. He acts as if he is speaking for the many blindly fanatical supporters of politicians. This is how he gets his critical audience to agree with him. The manipulation of power relations reaches its zenith in Clause 6 "Sorry for the wrong tone". This is a minor clause that breaks the grammatical structure that was already in place. Pandji disrupts the performance frame, reducing social distance and fostering audience intimacy. The performer breaks down the social distance between himself and the audience by tapping his forehead, laughing, and saying sorry. Pandji stops being a "omniscient narrator" and becomes a friend who talks to the audience. This change in relationship is important because it makes the audience less on guard before the real attack.

The language function changes a lot in Clauses 7 and 8. When Pandji says, "*Gibran is sleepy, right?*" again, his tone goes from pseudo-declarative to purely interrogative with a tone of surprise. The last part, "*Right, he looks like a somnolent expression, doesn't he, yeah?*" is full of stacked Mood Adjuncts (right, doesn't he, yeah). This buildup of particles shows a very high level of interpersonal insistence (high modality of inclination). Pandji is no longer just presenting a premise; he is almost forcing or "cornering" the audience to agree with the conclusion. By doing an impersonation of Gibran's somnolent expression, Pandji makes a clear social divide: on one side is the Rational Alliance (Pandji and the laughing audience), and on the other is the Target Object (Gibran, who is made to look ridiculous). By using this mood system, Pandji effectively undermines the Vice President's authority not with harsh political speeches, but by getting the audience to agree that the political figure looks weak.

Table 5.

Interpersonal Metafunction Analysis of Gibran's Discourse

Clause / Utterance	Mood System Analysis	Mood Type & Exchange Function	Power Relation & Social Interaction (Speaker - Listener)
[GIB/YT/1] "Ya kita ucapkan selamat lah ke Bang Pandji ya." (Well, let's just congratulate Bang Pandji)	Subject: kita (we) Finite: ucapkan [present]	Declarative. Function: Giving information (Appreciation).	Gibran uses the inclusive "kita" (we) and the respectful address "Bang" (Brother) to equalize social distance. He positions himself as a supportive peer rather than a defensive political target.
[GIB/YT/2] "Oh, iya sih. Ya gapapa, dibuat lucu-lucuan aja. Santai." (Oh, yeah. It's fine, it's just for laughs. Take it easy)	Subject: [The critique] Finite: [is]	Declarative / Minor Clause. Function: Giving evaluation.	The use of casual vocabulary (gapapa, lucu-lucuan, santai) interpersonally trivializes the impact of the satire. It projects an "unbothered" persona, diminishing the attacker's power.

[GIB/YT/3] "Ya dari lahir bentuk matanya seperti ini, mau gimana lagi." (Well, I was born with eyes like this, what can you do?)	Subject: bentuk matanya (the eye shape) Finite: [is]"	Declarative + Rhetorical Interrogative. Function: Giving explanation.	He frames a political critique as an unchangeable biological fact. The rhetorical tag "mau gimana lagi" asks for sympathy or shared helplessness, effectively neutralizing hostility.
[GIB/YT/4] "Ga masalah, di-roasting siapapun ga masalah." (It's not a big deal, I don't mind getting roasted by anyone)	Subject: [I] Finite: [have] ga masalah	Declarative. Function: Giving assurance.	By stating he is fine being roasted by "siapapun" (anyone), Gibran asserts a high level of psychological dominance and untouchability.
[GIB/YT/5] "...itu kan kritikan, masukan untuk kita semua lah..." (...I mean, it's a critique, it's feedback for all of us...)	Subject: itu (that) Finite: [is]	Declarative. Function: Giving evaluation.	He assumes the role of a wise figure who gracefully accepts input, maintaining a moral high ground over the comedian who mocked him.
[GIB/YT/6] "...gak usah saling mem-bully, gak usah saling melaporkan." (...there's no need to bully each other, and no need to report one another)	Subject: [You / Supporters] (implicit) Finite: gak usah (do not need to)	Negative Imperative. Function: Demanding goods & services (Commanding action).	A sudden shift in power dynamic. Gibran drops the casual peer persona and adopts the role of an authoritative leader commanding his followers to stand down.

Source: Tahan Sabar – Tretan Universe (2026) [00:00:43 – 00:02:55]

Gibran didn't use the word "I" at the beginning of the conversation (Clause 1). Instead, he said "we" and called Pandji "Bang." This is what linguists call an effort to close the gap between people. Gibran didn't stand up straight like a police officer under attack; instead, he acted performative egalitarianism. Gibran destroys Pandji's plan to attack (Mens Rea) by praising the success of Pandji's Comedy Show on Netflix. It's easy to see why: it's hard for people to keep hating a politician who responds to insults with compliments. Gibran uses declarative sentences with casual words like "it's not a big deal," "it's just for laughs," and "take it easy" in Clauses 2 and 4. When someone is attacked and says things like "take it easy," they are showing that they are stronger or more mentally stable than the person who attacked them. Gibran discursively positions Pandji's satire as lacking the requisite political weight to undermine his authority. He turns sharp political criticism into nothing more than silly fun. Clause 6 is the most important part. He uses casual, everyday language throughout the video, but at the end of his answer, he switches to a commanding tone: "don't bully each

other, don't report each other." Even though he sounds calm, this sentence structure makes him sound like an authority figure. Gibran goes back to being a political elite, whether he knows it or not. He is telling people on the internet and his fans what to do. This moment shows that even though he seems like an unperturbed, emerging political figure, he is still an authority figure who can move or hold back the people (Mariana & Husin, 2017).

4.3 Textual Metafunction

According to Halliday's theory, the Theme is the first thing the speaker wants to talk about in a sentence, and the Rheme is the rest of the sentence, which gives new information or the main point about that Theme (Kanwal et al., 2025).

Table 6.

Textual Metafunction Analysis of Pandji's Discourse

Clause / Utterance	Theme (Starting Point of the Message)	Rheme (New Information / Core Message)
[PAN/NF/1] "Ada yang milih pemimpin berdasarkan tampang" (Some choose leaders based on looks)	Topical Theme: <i>Ada yang</i> (Some people)	<i>milih pemimpin berdasarkan tampang.</i>
[PAN/NF/2] "Ganjar ganteng, ya?" (Ganjar looks handsome, doesn't He?) [Gentle/soft tone]	Topical Theme: Ganjar	<i>ganteng, ya?</i>
[PAN/NF/3] "Anis manis, ya?" (Anis looks sweet, doesn't He?) [Gentle/soft tone]	Topical Theme: Anis	<i>manis, ya?</i>
[PAN/NF/4] "Prabowo gemoy, ya?" (Prabowo looks cute, doesn't He?) [Gentle/soft tone]	Topical Theme: Prabowo	<i>gemoy, ya?</i>
[PAN/NF/5] "Atau Wakil Presidennya, Gibran ngantuk, ya?" (or The Vice President, Gibran looks sleepy, doesn't He?) [Gentle/soft tone]	Textual Theme: <i>atau</i> (or) Topical Theme: <i>Wakil Presidennya, Gibran</i> (The Vice President, Gibran)	<i>ngantuk, ya?</i>
[PAN/NF/6] "Salah nada maaf." (wrong tone, sorry) [Laughing, gesture of slapping forehead]	Topical Theme: <i>Salah nada</i> (Wrong tone)	<i>maaf.</i>
[PAN/NF/7] "Gibran ngantuk, ya?" (Gibran looks sleepy, doesn't He?) [Questioning & wondering tone]	Topical Theme: Gibran	<i>ngantuk, ya?</i>

[PAN/NF/8] "Yakan dia kayak orang ngantuk kan, ya?" (Right, he looks like a somnolent expression, doesn't he, yeah?) [Impersonation gesture]	Interpersonal Theme: <i>kayak orang ngantuk kan, ya?</i> Yakan Topical Theme: <i>dia</i> (he/Gibran)
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Source: Mens Rea – Netflix (Pragiwaksono, 2025) [00:43:30]

If we look at how these words are put together from start to finish, we can see that the attacking comedian and the defending politician are using very different ways to talk to each other. According to Pandji's table (Clauses 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7), he always puts the names of political figures (Ganjar, Anis, Prabowo, Gibran) at the beginning of the sentence as Topical Themes. In stand-up comedy, this is a way to get people to focus on that person's face by putting the spotlight on them. After the audience imagining the person, Pandji gives the Rheme as a punchline or an adjective (handsome, sweet, cute, sleepy). This repetitive way of organizing the message makes the audience's brain compare Gibran to the other figures, which makes the word "sleepy" at the end stand out and have a big effect. This textual analysis shows that the way Pandji writes his sentences is meant to be sharp to attack Gibran's visual identity.

Table 7.

Textual Metafunction Analysis of Gibran's Response

Clause / Utterance	Theme (Starting Point of the Message)	Rheme (New Information Core Message)
[GIB/YT/1] "Ya kita ucapkan selamat lah ke Bang Pandji ya." (Well, let's just congratulate Bang Pandji)	Textual Theme: <i>Ya</i> (Well) Topical Theme: <i>kita</i> (we)	<i>ucapkan selamat lah ke Bang Pandji ya.</i>
[GIB/YT/2] "Oh, iya sih. Ya gapapa, dibuat lucu-lucuan aja. Santai." (Oh, yeah. It's fine, it's just for laughs. Take it easy)	Textual Theme: <i>Ya</i> (Well) Topical Theme: (Implicit) <i>[Kritikan itu]</i>	<i>gapapa, dibuat lucu-lucuan aja.</i>
[GIB/YT/3] "Ya dari lahir bentuk matanya seperti ini, mau gimana lagi." (Well, I was born with eyes like this, what can you do?)	Textual Theme: <i>Ya</i> (Well) Topical Theme (Marked): <i>dari lahir</i> (since birth)	<i>bentuk matanya seperti ini...</i>
[GIB/YT/4] "Ga masalah, di-roasting siapapun ga masalah." (It's not a big deal, I don't mind getting roasted by anyone)	Topical Theme: (Implicit) <i>[Saya]</i>	<i>ga masalah, di-roasting siapapun ga masalah.</i>

[GIB/YT/5] <i>"Tapi gapapa sih... untuk menghibur orang lah."</i> (But it's no big deal... it's just to entertain people anyway)	Textual Theme: <i>Tapi</i> (But) Topical Theme: (Implicit) <i>[Itu]</i>	<i>gapapa sih... untuk menghibur orang lah.</i>
[GIB/YT/6] <i>"...yang disampaikan Pandji di Mens Rea ya, itu kan kritikan, masukan untuk kita semua lah..."</i> (...I mean, it's a critique, it's feedback for all of us...)	Topical Theme: <i>yang</i> <i>disampaikan Pandji di Mens Rea ya</i> (what Pandji said in Mens Rea)	<i>itu kan kritikan...</i>
[GIB/YT/7] <i>"...gak usah saling mem-bully, gak usah saling melaporkan."</i> (...there's no need to bully each other, and no need to report one another)	Topical Theme: (Implicit) <i>[Kalian/Netizen]</i>	<i>gak usah saling mem-bully, gak usah saling melaporkan.</i>

Source: Source: Tahan Sabar – Tretan Universe (2026) [00:00:43 – 00:02:55]

Gibran's answers are much more cultivated nonchalance in terms of sentence structure, but they are very strategic. Textual Themes "Yes," "But" The word "Yes" or "But" starts almost all of Gibran's sentences. These are called continuatives (conversational connectors) in linguistics (Mikolov et al., 2013). Beginning a sentence with "Yes" gives you time to think and makes the conversation seem very natural, smooth, and not tense. Look at Gibran's Clause 3: *"Yeah, my eyes were shaped like this from birth."* People usually say, *"My eyes have looked like this since I was born."* Gibran, on the other hand, puts the time adverbial *"from birth"* at the very front as the main theme. This is a way to change the focus. The utterance directs audience attention toward to *"fate/inborn traits"* right away, instead of Pandji's political criticism. Gibran hides the words *"I"* or *"You"* at the start of sentences that are not very important, like *"No problem"* or *"Don't need to bully."* Even though the message itself (the Rheme) tells people to calm down, this makes it sound more universal and less like a direct order. This analysis of the text shows that Pandji's sentence or discourse structure was carefully made to be sharp in attacking Gibran's visual identity. In contrast, Gibran's sentence or response structure was made to Gibran's discourse exhibits fluid thematic progression, shifting focus from political critique to personal traits, which eased the tension and moved the conversation from politics to entertainment and even physical anatomy. This moment shows that behind the mask of a rising political actor who seems easy-going and an unfazed persona is a figure of authority who can move or hold back the masses.

4.4 Representation, Relation, and Identity

This paper analyses the potential effects of political satire on discourse by drawing on Fairclough's argument that discourse can operate upon three aspects of society: Representation, Relations and Identity. An in-depth analysis is conducted of two forms of political satire: a netflix comedy show where the comedian, Pandji, performs live in front of an audience and reacts to comments from vice-president Gibran to what they perceive as a

threat to their way of life from elements of the government and the media including Vice President Gibran. The representations of politics and democracy offered in the television comedy show and the blogs, as well as the relations and identities that are constructed, challenge the notion of the marginal impact of 'popular' or 'public' discourse.

4.4.1 Representational Analysis

Representation is how an issue is shown or "framed" so that people will believe it (Fairclough, 1995; Ogbo & Nuhu, 2016). In this situation, there is a very different framing battle. Pandji uses satire to show that Indonesian politics is shallow when voters only see visual gimmicks (Sentosa et al., 2024). He specifically calls Gibran "sleepy," which is a word that means weak, lazy, and unable to lead. On the other hand, Gibran works hard to break down this image when he responds. Gibran doesn't use performance data to prove the "sleepy" label wrong; instead, he says that it's just a natural biological trait "my eyes are just shaped like this". In terms of politics and society, this strategy reframes criticism as non-political, thereby deflecting substantive engagement. Gibran strategically disarms a harsh political critique by reframing it as a mundane somatic derogation. Gibran makes the criticism less dangerous by framing it as something silly and "just for laughs."

4.4.2 Relational Analysis

The relational dynamic shows who is in charge of the interaction (Fairclough, 1995). Pandji uses a "punching up" style of comedy on stage, which means he makes fun of people who are higher up. He gets the crowd to put the authority figure (Gibran) in a lower position so they can all laugh at him. But Gibran responds with a very modern way of relating to people. In the past, officials might have gotten angry when people criticized them, which would have made the gap between elites and the public bigger (Fretes et al., 2023). Gibran, on the other hand, chooses to lower his own position. Gibran uses the word "we," calls him "Bang Pandji," and praises his work in Netflix show to connect with him. He says he's a friend who also watches Netflix and hangs out with him. In the age of social media, the strategic relational move is not to fight back, but to embrace the critique as it discursively neutralizes the antagonistic premise of the satire (Ilham et al, 2022). But at the end of his comment "no need to bully", Gibran reaffirms his original role as a leader who controls his followers.

4.4.3 Identity Analysis

Discourse is ultimately utilized to construct identity in the public perception (Fairclough, 1995). Pandji's satire strengthens his image as protector of democracy by boldly speaking out against the people's unhappiness. Gibran's composed demeanor response on Tretan Universe's YouTube channel, on the other hand, is a very planned way of branding himself politically. In Indonesia's paternalistic political culture, where leaders are often strict, obsessed with respect, and don't like being criticized, Gibran is making a name for himself as a "Young Leader of the Digital Era." He gives off the impression that he is easy-going, not easily offended, and willing to take criticism. Young voters (Gen Z and Millennials) really like this identity because social media platform is a powerful counter-narrative (Oboko & Ukwueze, 2025). Gibran is using Pandji's criticism not as a threat, but as a chance to prove that his politically strong identity can withstand psychological pressure.

5. Conclusion

This study shows how the interplay between satirical comedy and political responses in digital media is a complex space of power struggles. At the micro-level, the application of Halliday's three metafunctions exhibits clear strategic differences. While Pandji delegitimises authority by weaponizing the political term "sleepy," Gibran turns this criticism into an innocuous biological fact "since birth" and a joke in his discourse. On an interpersonal level, Gibran acts like this is all just casual peer-level stuff to defuse tension, then puts his foot down, and manoeuvres the textual gaze away from political matters. Through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, validated at the macro-level, sociocultural practices reveal Gibran contesting representation, relations, and identity. He discursively reduces ideological threats into mere biological reductionism and solidifies his persona as an unassuming, young politician. This indicates a change in the political communication of Indonesia: a shift to non-coercive power maintenance. This case suggests that contemporary politicians may increasingly employ self-deprecating humour and nonchalance as strategies to manage criticism.

The research adds to the field but is limited in its methodology to a dyadic interaction between Netflix and YouTube and the findings are based solely on multimodal interpretation without audience reception data to evaluate the real socio-political effects on voter behaviour. The implications for research are nonetheless significant. Theoretically, it extends the reach of SFL and CDA frameworks beyond formal political discourse, demonstrating that casual digital spaces are highly sophisticated sites of ideological negotiation. Practically it offers an important framework to deconstruct hegemonic co-optation masquerading as comedy. Future research should extend this by comparing discursive defensive strategies across different emerging political figures on sites such as TikTok or X. Furthermore, the addition of audience reception analysis (by measuring digital sentiment / netizen comments) will give a complete insight into how the modern-day electorate ultimately consumes, contests or confirms these mechanisms of soft power maintenance.

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SUMMARISING AS A PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY FOR ENHANCING GRAMMAR ACCURACY AND WRITING QUALITY AMONG GRADE 12 EFAL LEARNERS

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Abstract

English writing is increasingly important in both educational and professional contexts in non-native English-speaking countries. Several studies have used summary writing strategies to enhance learners' reading comprehension. However, few studies have examined the relationship between summarising and improvements in grammar accuracy, organisation, and overall writing quality. Therefore, this study investigates whether summarising as an instructional strategy enhances the grammar accuracy and writing quality of English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners. The study adopted a convergent mixed-method research design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analysed separately, and merged during interpretation. Simple random sampling was used to select 50 Grade 12 EFAL learners and purposive sampling was used to select two EFAL teachers. A pre-test on summary writing was administered prior to the six-week summarising intervention. The post-test mean scores were consistently higher than the pre-test mean scores, indicating improvement in learners' writing abilities after the intervention. The findings suggest that summarising effectively enhances learners' vocabulary, grammar accuracy, and overall writing quality. The study has implications for learners, curriculum development and future research. For Grade 12 EFAL learners, summarising helps them to become independent writers by enabling them to organise ideas, reduce repetition, and communicate information effectively, which may also improve examination performance. For curriculum development, curriculum planners and teachers may incorporate structured summarising activities, comprehension-based writing tasks, and grammar-focused exercises. Future studies may also investigate the effectiveness of summarising across different educational contexts, grade levels, and language proficiency groups.

Keywords: *Academic writing; grammar accuracy; EFAL; summarising strategy; reading comprehension*

1. Introduction

Writing in a second or additional language requires learners to demonstrate competence in grammar, vocabulary, organisation of ideas, coherence, and critical thinking (Kim & McCarthy, 2021; Mogano & Motlhaka, 2023). However, English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners in South Africa continue to experience significant challenges in writing effectively and accurately. These challenges are often linked to inadequate exposure to meaningful writing activities, limited language proficiency, and the use of teacher-centred instructional approaches that do not sufficiently develop learners' writing abilities. Among the different writing difficulties experienced by EFAL learners, grammar inaccuracies and poor writing quality remain persistent concerns in secondary schools (Thaba & Motlhaka, 2022; Sucita & Hukom, 2022). In other words, learners frequently produce written work characterised by incorrect sentence structures, tense inconsistencies, spelling errors, punctuation problems, and weak paragraph development. Such difficulties negatively affect the clarity and coherence of their writing.

In many classrooms, writing instruction tends to emphasise the final product rather than the writing process, thereby limiting opportunities for learners to practise, reflect, and improve their language use through meaningful engagement with texts (Mulaudzi & Motlhaka, 2023; Li, 2025; Khan et al., 2025). Thus, summarising has increasingly been recognised as an important pedagogical strategy that can support the development of language and writing skills. This process engages learners cognitively and linguistically, encouraging active interaction with language structures and vocabulary. Through summarising, learners are exposed to correct grammatical patterns and organised writing models, which may contribute to improved grammar accuracy and overall writing quality (Calvani et al., 2023). Although previous studies have explored summarising as a strategy for reading comprehension and writing development, limited research has examined its direct contribution to grammar accuracy and writing organisation among Grade 12 EFAL learners in South African secondary school contexts. Furthermore, few studies have integrated Cognitive Load Theory to explain how summarising facilitates grammatical and textual development. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how the use of summarising activities can influence learners' grammatical competence and enhance the quality of their written work. By exploring the effectiveness of summarising in the EFAL classroom, the study aims to contribute to language teaching practices and provide insights that may assist teachers in developing more effective writing instruction strategies for EFAL learners. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does summarising improve grammar accuracy and writing quality among Grade 12 EFAL learners?
2. How do EFAL teachers perceive the effectiveness of summarising in improving learners' grammar and writing skills?

2. Literature Review

This section presents summary writing as a complex academic skill closely connected to reading comprehension, language proficiency, grammar, vocabulary, and writing development. Across several studies, scholars agree that summary writing requires learners to identify key ideas, condense information, and reconstruct meaning using their own words. However, scholars differ slightly in emphasis regarding the causes of poor summary writing and the educational benefits associated with summarisation. The following subheadings will improve readability and scholarly structure of the literature review:

2.1 The Relationship Between Summary Writing and Reading Comprehension

The literature establishes a reciprocal relationship between summary writing and reading comprehension. Scholars such as Sucita and Hukom (2022), Chew et al. (2020), and Solikhah and Sari (2022) conceptualise summary writing as evidence of comprehension because learners must reconstruct meaning from source texts rather than merely reproduce information. Their perspectives suggest that successful summarisation depends on learners' ability to distinguish central ideas from supporting details. Similarly, Xie (2023) extends this argument by emphasising that summarisation encourages active engagement with texts, thereby deepening comprehension. This position is significant because it frames summary writing not only as an assessment tool but also as a learning strategy that promotes meaning-making. In contrast, Shibabaw (2023) and Budianto, et al., (2022) approach the issue from a deficit perspective by focusing on how poor comprehension undermines summary quality. While these scholars highlight the negative consequences of weak comprehension, their arguments complement rather than contradict earlier studies because they reinforce the idea that comprehension forms the foundation of effective summarisation. Collectively, the literature reveals consensus that reading comprehension and summary writing are interdependent processes. However, the studies largely focus on comprehension outcomes and pay less attention to how instructional strategies could strengthen learners' summarisation abilities, thereby creating a gap that warrants further investigation.

2.2 Cognitive Demands of Summary Writing

The reviewed literature consistently portrays summary writing as a cognitively demanding activity that requires higher-order thinking skills. Susanti and Oktaviana (2023) argue that learners must analyse texts, identify main ideas, condense information, and construct meaning concisely. This perspective positions summarisation as more than a mechanical writing exercise because learners are required to interpret and reorganise information. Zhao et al. (2024) deepen this argument by linking summary writing to critical thinking, particularly because learners must express ideas originating from another author while maintaining accuracy and coherence. Their emphasis on intellectual processing highlights the complexity of balancing comprehension with original expression. Similarly, Ferdinandus and Hukom (2024) emphasise the educational value of summary writing, arguing that it promotes reading comprehension and supports the development of integrated literacy skills. Although these scholars agree on the educational value of summary writing, their arguments differ slightly in emphasis. While Susanti and Oktaviana (2023) focus on the cognitive processes involved, Ferdinandus and Hukom (2024) emphasise the contribution of summarisation to literacy development and academic learning outcomes. This distinction suggests that summary writing serves both as a cognitive skill and as a tool for academic literacy development. Nevertheless, the literature tends to idealise summarisation as beneficial without sufficiently addressing contextual factors such as learners' language proficiency or classroom support, which may influence learners' ability to perform these complex tasks successfully.

2.3 The Challenges Learners Face in Summary Writing

The literature identifies multiple and interconnected challenges that learners encounter in summary writing. Khazaal (2019) and Mulaudzi and Motlhaka (2023) primarily attribute learners' difficulties to inadequate reading comprehension, implying that learners

cannot summarise effectively if they fail to understand source texts. In contrast, Qin and Groombridge (2023) argue that summary writing difficulties extend beyond comprehension and are associated with limited language proficiency, weak writing ability, and ineffective reading-to-write strategies. Their findings are particularly significant because they demonstrate that comprehension difficulties cannot be separated from broader linguistic and writing-related challenges. Similarly, Plakans et al. (2019) highlight poor language proficiency and weak writing skills as significant constraints on effective summarisation. Although these scholars focus on different contributing factors, their findings collectively reveal that summary writing difficulties are multidimensional rather than isolated. The literature therefore suggests that learners' struggles stem from the interaction of reading comprehension, language proficiency, writing competence, and strategic processing skills. This interconnectedness indicates that improving summarisation requires comprehensive instructional approaches rather than focusing on a single skill area.

2.4 Grammar and Language Competence

The literature also demonstrates strong agreement regarding the role of grammar and language competence in summary writing. Alawaji (2020) argues that explicit grammar instruction is essential for effective writing because mastery of grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and paragraph organisation improves learners' writing quality. Similarly, Shodieva (2023) associates poor writing performance with inadequate language background and limited vocabulary knowledge. Both scholars therefore position language competence as central to learners' ability to paraphrase, organise ideas logically, and communicate meaning effectively. Despite this consensus, the literature appears to focus predominantly on general writing competence rather than specifically examining how summarisation contributes to grammatical development. Most studies emphasise the benefits of summarising for reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, while the relationship between summarisation and grammar accuracy remains insufficiently explored. This gap is important because grammar competence directly affects the clarity and coherence of learners' summaries. Consequently, the reviewed literature justifies the current study's focus on investigating whether summarisation strategies can improve the grammar accuracy and writing quality of English First Additional Language learners.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory (1988), which explains that learning is more effective when instructional activities are aligned with the limited capacity of working memory. Cognitive Load Theory distinguishes among three types of cognitive load: intrinsic, extraneous, and germane (Lovell & Sherrington, 2020). In this study, summarising was viewed as a strategy that supports Grade 12 EFAL learners' writing development by reducing unnecessary cognitive demands while enhancing deeper language processing. Intrinsic cognitive load in EFAL writing enables learners to focus on the main ideas of a text while simultaneously attending to grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, coherence, and content organisation. This assists learners in processing information more effectively and constructing grammatically correct and meaningful sentences. Summarising also reduces extraneous cognitive load because learners learn to identify key ideas and eliminate irrelevant information (Khan et al., 2025). As a result, learners can concentrate more on grammar accuracy, coherence, and organisation in their writing. Furthermore, summarising promotes germane cognitive load by encouraging learners to analyse, organise,

and restate information in their own words. This process strengthens their understanding of sentence construction, vocabulary use, and text organisation, thereby improving grammar accuracy and overall writing quality. Therefore, the study adopted Cognitive Load Theory to explain how summarising can enhance writing performance and grammar accuracy among Grade 12 EFAL learners.

3. Research Method

3.1 Setting of the Study

This study is conducted at the selected secondary school in rural Mankweng area, Kgakotlou Circuit, Capricorn South District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The Kgakotlou Circuit comprises many rural secondary schools in the Ga-Mothiba and Mankweng areas. Sepedi Home Language is spoken by the majority of the population in the Ga-Mothiba and Mankweng area, and English serves as the primary language of learning and teaching (LoLT). Thus, many learners in rural Mankweng area, Kgakotlou Circuit struggle with English structures, conventions, and reading comprehension due to poor foundational literacy, poor vocabulary, grammatical errors, a lack of resources, and heavy reliance on Sepedi Home Language during instruction.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design that integrated quantitative quasi-experimental data and qualitative interview data. In this design, quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analysed separately, and merged during interpretation. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), a convergent mixed-methods design involves the concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data, separate analysis of each dataset, and the integration of findings during interpretation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This design was considered appropriate for the present study because it enabled the researcher to examine both measurable changes in learners' writing performance and teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of summarising as an instructional strategy. Simple random sampling was used to select 50 Grade 12 EFAL learners from the population of 85 who participated in the quantitative strand of the study. This method ensured that every learner had an equal chance of being selected and helped reduce sampling bias. Purposive sampling was used to select two EFAL teachers for interviews because they are teaching writing skills and implementing pedagogical strategies in the classroom.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the University of Limpopo's Research and Ethics Committee (TREC) (Ethical Clearance Certificate, project number: TREC/224/2022: UG) on the 27 June 2022. Informed consent forms were issued and signed on 04 July 2022 by participants who were taking part in the study to allow them to take part in the study willingly and understand the procedure that will take place during the investigation. This study ensured that the name of the school was anonymous and the participants' information was kept confidential. Participants' identities were protected through anonymisation, and confidentiality was maintained to encourage free participation.

3.4 Data Collection

Quantitative data were obtained through pre-tests and post-tests measuring learners' grammar accuracy and writing quality after exposure to summarising activities. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of summarising as a pedagogical strategy. Fifty Grade 12 learners completed a pre-test prior to the intervention to establish baseline summary writing ability. Learners participated in six intervention sessions over six weeks, each involving summary writing tasks based on comprehension passages. A post-test on climate change was administered after the intervention. The quantitative strand followed a one-group pre-test–post-test design in which the same participants were assessed before and after the intervention. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), this design enables researchers to determine whether an intervention contributes to measurable changes in participants' performance by comparing outcomes obtained before and after treatment.

The selected written passage for post-test was on “climate change” and participants were asked to summarise the passage within 50 minutes. 50 Grade 12 learners were given a pre-treatment test, before the start of the treatment sessions, to ensure that they were all at the same level when it came to their summary writing ability. Grade 12 learners were not given any instructions regarding the method to use while summarising the information. Grade 12 English First Additional Language teacher administered the pre-treatment test. The Grade 12 English teacher facilitated the intervention, guiding learners on identifying key ideas and paraphrasing them. The learners were given the opportunity to learn summary writing as part of the usual school curriculum for the class throughout the lesson. The intervention was carried out in the week following the conclusion of the teaching sessions, which was the last week of the experiment. The purpose of the intervention was to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between learners' performance before and after the intervention. Both the pre-test and post-test followed identical procedures. Semi-structured interviews with two EFAL teachers explored their perceptions of summarising as a strategy to enhance grammar and writing skills. The integration of the two datasets enabled the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of summarising in improving Grade 12 EFAL learners' writing skills.

3.5 Instrument Validity and Reliability

The rubric for this study was designed based on the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) requirements for Grade 12 English First Additional Language (EFAL) writing tasks. The rubric was submitted to two EFAL subject specialists and one research supervisor for expert review. These experts examined whether the assessment criteria aligned with the objectives of the study and the expected writing competencies of Grade 12 EFAL learners. Their recommendations regarding clarity, relevance, and weighting of criteria were incorporated into the final version of the rubric. Construct validity was achieved by ensuring that the rubric measured the intended constructs of grammar accuracy and writing quality. Each rubric category was directly linked to the study objectives and the theoretical framework underpinning summarising as a pedagogical strategy. The pre- and post-tests were pilot tested with a small group of Grade 12 EFAL learners from a school that was not part of the main study. The purpose of the pilot study was to identify ambiguous instructions or questions, determine whether the tasks were age-appropriate, assess the estimated completion time and evaluate the clarity and effectiveness of the rubric. Feedback obtained

from the pilot study informed minor revisions to the test instructions and assessment criteria. To ensure scoring consistency, two independent raters assessed a sample of the learners' scripts using the same rubric. The raters included the researcher and an experienced EFAL teacher. After the scoring process, the scores were compared to determine the level of agreement between the raters. A high level of consistency between the raters indicated acceptable inter-rater reliability. To determine the reliability of the research instruments, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated. The pre-test writing rubric yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81, while the post-test rubric produced a coefficient of 0.86, indicating good internal consistency.

3.6 Trustworthiness

Credibility was ensured with semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to provide detailed responses about their experiences and observations. Member checking was also conducted by allowing participants to verify the accuracy of the interview transcripts and interpretations. Dependability was enhanced by maintaining a detailed audit trail of the interview procedures, recordings, transcriptions, and coding processes. The researcher ensured that the same interview guide was used with all participants to maintain consistency. Confirmability was enhanced through audit trails and reflective notes, while transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the study context by ensuring that data collection procedures were provided to enable other researchers to determine whether the findings may be applicable to similar educational contexts. Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were analysed using statistical comparison of scores, while qualitative interview data were examined thematically as discussed below:

3.7 Quantitative Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data, including means, standard deviations, t-values, degrees of freedom, effect sizes, and confidence intervals, to examine the performance of 50 learners in the pre-test and post-test. The study analysed pre-test and post-test data to determine the effectiveness of summarising as an instructional strategy in improving learners' grammar accuracy and overall writing quality. Learners completed a pre-test before the intervention and a post-test after the intervention. The writing tasks were assessed using an analytical scoring rubric that measured five textual characteristics of writing: grammar, vocabulary, organisation, coherence, and content. The scores for each writing component were recorded separately and combined to obtain an overall writing performance score for each learner. The mean scores from the two tests were compared to determine changes in learners' grammar accuracy and overall writing quality following the instructional intervention. To establish whether the differences between pre-test and post-test scores were statistically significant, a paired-samples t-test was employed because the same group of learners participated in both tests. Field (2018) explains that a paired-samples t-test is appropriate for comparing the means of two related measurements obtained from the same participants. An increase in post-test mean scores indicated improvement in learners' writing performance, as higher scores represented better performance on the analytical rubric. The findings were presented in tables and interpreted according to the extent of improvement observed in grammar, vocabulary, organisation, coherence, and content.

3.8 Qualitative Data Analysis

This study used inductive data analysis method to analyse semi-structured interview data and gain in-depth insights into English First Additional Language Grade 12 teachers' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward the use of summarising in enhancing learners' academic writing skills. Responses from teachers were transcribed, coded, and grouped into themes based on recurring patterns related to the impact of writing support strategies on learners' writing skills. Initial codes were identified from teachers' responses, and similar codes were combined to form broader themes. The analysis focused on identifying how teachers perceived improvements in learners' writing abilities. The table was used to present the themes, codes, and supporting participant responses.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings from the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. Quantitative findings are reported first to demonstrate the effect of the summarising intervention on learners' grammar accuracy and overall writing quality, followed by qualitative findings that provide teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of summarising as a pedagogical strategy. The combined interpretation of both datasets offers a more comprehensive understanding of the role of summarising in enhancing EFAL learners' writing skills.

4.1 Quantitative Results

Pre- and post-tests measured learners' grammar and writing skills to evaluate the effectiveness of summarising. The findings of the pre-and post-tests on grammar and writing skills employed analytical scoring to measure textual characteristics of writing (grammar, vocabulary, organisation, coherence, and content aspects) were given a score between 1 and 5, with 5 being the best and 1 being the worst. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviations, t-value, degrees of freedom, effect size and confidence intervals to analyse 50 learners' performance in the pre-and post-tests to measure textual characteristics of writing (grammar, vocabulary, organisation, coherence, and content in table 1 below:

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Learners' Performance in the Pre-test and Post-test (N = 50)

Variable	Test	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>P</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>	95% CI of Mean Difference
Grammar	Pre-test	2.14	0.61	8.42	49	< .001	1.19	[0.48, 0.86]
	Post-test	2.81	0.58					
Vocabulary	Pre-test	2.08	0.64	7.95	49	< .001	1.12	[0.42, 0.79]
	Post-test	2.69	0.60					
Organisation	Pre-test	2.21	0.67	8.77	49	< .001	1.24	[0.51, 0.91]
	Post-test	2.94	0.63					
Coherence	Pre-test	2.17	0.59	8.11	49	< .001	1.15	[0.46, 0.82]
	Post-test	2.86	0.56					
Content	Pre-test	2.25	0.65	9.04	49	< .001	1.28	[0.54, 0.96]
	Post-test	3.01	0.61					

The descriptive statistics revealed that learners' writing performance improved from the pre-test to the post-test across all measured textual characteristics, namely grammar, vocabulary, organisation, coherence, and content. The post-test mean scores were consistently higher than the pre-test mean scores, indicating improvement in learners' writing abilities after the intervention. A paired-samples *t*-test showed statistically significant differences between the pre-test and post-test scores for grammar, $t(49) = 8.42, p < .001$, vocabulary, $t(49) = 7.95, p < .001$, organisation, $t(49) = 8.77, p < .001$, coherence, $t(49) = 8.11, p < .001$, and content, $t(49) = 9.04, p < .001$. The confidence intervals did not include zero, further suggesting that the improvements were statistically significant. Furthermore, the Cohen's *d* effect sizes ranged from 1.12 to 1.28, indicating large practical effects. The qualitative findings demonstrate that writing practice reinforced grammar rules and improved language accuracy, which triangulates with the significant increase in grammar performance shown in the quantitative results. Accordingly, Golparvar and Khafi (2021) agree that summarising could strengthen learners' ability to organise ideas logically and think critically, which corresponds with the quantitative improvements in organisation, coherence, and content. This suggests that the intervention had a strong positive impact on learners' writing skills in all assessed areas.

4.2 Qualitative Results

The purpose of using semi-structured interviews was to gain in-depth insights into English First Additional Language Grade 12 teachers' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward the use of summarising in enhancing learners' academic writing skills. Semi-structured interview data is presented in table 2 below:

Table 2.

Presentation and discussion of the qualitative data results

Theme	Codes	Participant Responses
Improved sentence structure and clarity	Clear expression; concise writing; sentence construction	Learners use concise language and clearer sentences. (Teacher 1)
Enhanced vocabulary and word choice	Vocabulary expansion; precise word use	They use appropriate words and build their vocabulary. (Teacher 2)
Reinforcement of Proper Grammar Usage	Subject-verb agreement; tense consistency; punctuation	Grammar mistakes have reduced because it strengthens the understanding of subject-verb agreement and tense consistency. (Teacher 1)
Development of Critical Thinking and Organisation	Logical sequencing; idea development; coherence	Learners are able to organise their ideas better because it improves the flow and structure of their writing. (Teacher 2)
Enhanced Paraphrasing and Avoidance of Plagiarism	Paraphrasing skills; originality	It improves learners' ability to paraphrase effectively and avoid plagiarism. (Teacher 1)
Improved Editing and Proofreading Skills	Error correction; revision; redundancy elimination	Learners learn to correct grammatical errors, and improve the overall quality of their writing through careful revision before submitting. (Teacher 2)

The findings indicate that summary writing instruction promotes clarity and conciseness because learners develop better control over sentence construction, which enhances their writing skills. This suggests that learners' exposure to structured writing activities expands their vocabulary and improves lexical choice, leading to more effective and expressive writing. The findings also demonstrate that writing practice reinforces core grammar rules and promotes language accuracy and improves grammatical accuracy. Li (2025) concurs that summarising enhances learners' ability to think critically and structure ideas logically, improving coherence and flow in written texts. Furthermore, the findings indicate that summary writing develops learners' paraphrasing skills, which reduces plagiarism and promotes academic integrity and independent thinking. In other words, summary writing enables learners to engage in self-editing, demonstrating improved proofreading skills and greater responsibility for the quality of their writing.

In this study, triangulation of the findings is used to enhance validity and credibility by combining quantitative (post-test) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) data to examine the effectiveness of summarising as an instructional strategy. Allagui and Al Naqbi (2024) concur with post-test results that suggest noticeable improvement in learners' vocabulary, grammar and writing skills after the implementation of summarising activities. This is confirmed by the post-test mean scores which were consistently higher than the pre-test mean scores, indicating improvement in learners' writing abilities after the intervention. This suggests that the summarising technique greatly improves academic writing skills of English First Additional Language Grade 12 learners. The findings are supported by Bakhshayesh and Geng (2025) who found that summarising technique improves the organising component of academic writing skills among learners. These findings were also supported by interview data, in which teachers reported that summarising helped learners focus on key ideas, construct grammatically correct sentences, and organise their writing more effectively. Furthermore, several studies concur with these findings that summarising improves learners' writing skills by encouraging them to shrink text, paraphrase ideas, construct new sentences, experiment with verb tenses, and apply grammar rules (Calvani et al., 2023; Azaky et al., 2025). Consequently, the large Cohen's *d* effect sizes further demonstrate that the intervention produced substantial practical improvements in learners' writing abilities. It could be concluded that convergence of quantitative and qualitative data indicates that summarising is an effective instructional strategy for enhancing writing skills among learners. Overall, the triangulation of findings demonstrates convergence between the quantitative and qualitative data. Both sets of findings demonstrate that the intervention was effective in improving learners' writing performance, not only in measurable textual characteristics but also in the underlying cognitive and linguistic processes associated with effective writing.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to determine whether summarising as an instructional strategy enhances the grammar accuracy and overall writing quality of English First Additional Language learners. The findings revealed that summarising improved learners' grammar accuracy, vocabulary use, organisation, coherence, and content development. The intervention also encouraged learners to engage actively with texts, think critically, and apply language rules more effectively in their writing. Repeated exposure to summarising activities increased learners' awareness of grammatical structures and contributed to clearer and more coherent written texts.

The study contributes theoretically by demonstrating how summarising supports writing development through the principles of Cognitive Load Theory. By reducing unnecessary cognitive demands and promoting deeper language processing, summarising functions as both a cognitive and linguistic tool for improving writing performance. Pedagogically, the findings highlight summarising as a practical, low-cost, and curriculum-aligned strategy that can be integrated into EFAL classrooms to enhance grammar accuracy and overall writing quality.

The study was limited to a relatively small sample drawn from one rural secondary school and a six-week intervention period. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the study and may not be generalisable to all EFAL learners.

Based on the findings, schools and curriculum developers are encouraged to integrate structured summarising activities into EFAL instruction and assessment practices. Teacher development programmes should provide training on effective summarising strategies and learner-centred approaches to support grammar accuracy and writing quality. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, examine the long-term effects of summarising, and compare summarising with other instructional approaches across different educational contexts to determine which approaches are most effective in enhancing learners' writing development.

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SCHEMATIC STRUCTURE OF GUEST SPEAKERS' SPEECHES AT A GHANAIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The present study explored the schematic structure in Guest Speakers' Speeches (GSS) in a Ghanaian university. A total of 20 speeches was purposively collected between 2014 and 2020. We utilized the frameworks proposed by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) in identifying the schematic structure of the speeches. The findings revealed a macro-structure of four (4) Moves (*Welcome, Appreciation and Thanks, Teaching the last lesson and Closing moves*). Among the moves, *Teaching the Last Lesson* occupied the greatest textual space (i.e. 78%) of the data. As regards the sequence of moves, the study revealed (1) that the 10-move sequence was the most frequent pattern; and (2) that the moves are chronologically structured, with Move 1 followed by Move 2, Move 3, and finally Move 4. The study validates guest speakers' speeches as a conventionalized yet contextually adaptable genre that scaffolds graduates' identity transition. The findings advance genre research and inform professional practice in similar contexts.

Keywords: *ESP; genre; graduation ceremonies; guest speakers' speeches; schematic structure.*

1. Introduction

Universities host a range of ceremonial speeches, among which guest speakers' speeches (GSS) at graduation ceremonies hold particular rhetorical significance. According to Tashi and Suksawas (2018), GSS are interpersonal acts in speeches as presented to an audience with the intention of changing attitudes, behavior, and sentiments as well as further inspiring and impressing the audience with words and meanings during a graduation ceremony. As a result, GSS are regarded as a data source that scholars use to learn more about the phenomenon of graduation ceremonies. Delivered by guest speakers such as accomplished alumni, national figures, or distinguished professionals, these speeches are designed not only to honor the graduates but also to offer wisdom, instill hope, and provide a broader societal perspective. They are characterized by a particular use of language through which speakers express their ideas, intentions, and experiences. (Gault, 2008; Zhu,

2018). This is particularly significant, given the covert identities and corporate marketisation drive that the concerned institutions (universities) associate with graduation ceremonies.

While previous studies on Guest Speakers' Speeches (GSS) have examined linguistic features such as modal auxiliaries (Duku et al., 2024), thematic content (Basilio et al., 2020; Partch & Kinnier, 2011), and rhetorical strategies (Heracleous & Klaering, 2017; Ortega Ribeiro, 2013), these studies have largely focused on Western and Asian contexts, often employing theoretical frameworks such as Speech Act Theory and Aristotelian rhetoric. Other scholars have investigated cross-cultural metadiscourse (Zhu, 2018) and professional differences in the use of figurative language (Chang & Tanangkingsing, 2022). Despite these contributions, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to the organizational patterns of GSS, particularly within African contexts. As a result, little is known about how such speeches are rhetorically structured in Ghanaian universities. Given their rhetorical, interpersonal, and institutional significance, GSS provide a productive site for genre analysis. In addition to reflecting the personal experiences and ideologies of the speakers, these speeches serve ceremonial, ideological, and promotional functions for the host universities. Against this background, the present study investigates the schematic structure of GSS delivered at graduation ceremonies in a Ghanaian public university. The study is guided by the following research question: What is the schematic structure of Guest Speakers' Speeches delivered at graduation ceremonies in a Ghanaian university?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework – The Genre Theory

Genre theory has developed through three major traditions: Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL), New Rhetoric (NR) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). SFL views genres as culturally shaped, staged processes for achieving social purposes, reflected in schematic structures (Halliday & Martin, 1993). NR emphasizes genres as dynamic responses to recurring social situations and focuses on context, community practices and social action (Bazerman, 1994; Miller, 1984). ESP, associated with Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), combines textual and ethnographic analysis to examine how discourse communities construct genres. This study adopts the ESP approach because of its emphasis on analyzing rhetorical structures and communicative purposes within specific discourse communities. The framework is particularly relevant for examining the schematic structure and rhetorical functions of Guest Speakers' Speeches in a Ghanaian university context.

2.2 Previous Studies

Building on these theoretical traditions, prior studies have examined GSS across diverse contexts. Some studies (e.g. Duku et al., 2024; Basilio et al., 2020; Heracleous and Klaering, 2017) have demonstrated their rhetorical and sociocultural relevance across different contexts. Heracleous and Klaering (2017) argued that Steve Jobs's Stanford commencement address derives its persuasive effectiveness from the rhetoric of identification, whereby personal stories and shared values are employed to create a sense of connection between the speaker and the audience. In a related study, Basilio et al. (2020) found that GSS within the Philippine educational context functioned as discursive instruments for projecting national educational policies and societal values relating to youth development. Similarly, Duku et al. (2024), in a comparative analysis of American and Ghanaian GSS, identified both quantitative and qualitative differences in the use of modal

auxiliaries, noting that American speeches predominantly emphasized interpersonal relationships, whereas Ghanaian speeches foregrounded individual empowerment and resilience.

Zhu (2018) compared English and Chinese GSS and yielded important insights into cultural variations in metadiscourse patterns, particularly in how speakers construct their authorial presence and engage audiences. Furthermore, Partch and Kinnier's (2011) large-scale content analysis of American GSS not only identified predominant value messages but also revealed significant gender-based differences in thematic emphasis, suggesting how ceremonial speeches reflect and reinforce societal norms. Ortega Ribeiro's (2013) examination of Barack Obama's commencement rhetoric illustrated the complex interplay between ceremonial conventions and political communication, showing how epideictic occasions can serve multiple discursive purposes. Finally, Chang and Tanangkingsing's (2022) focus on professional differences in figurative language use further enriched our understanding of how speaker identity shapes ceremonial discourse.

Despite studies on linguistic and rhetorical features of GSS, little is known about their schematic structure in African contexts, particularly Ghana. Despite extensive research in Western and Asian contexts, Ghanaian GSS remain underexplored, limiting our understanding of how ceremonial discourse functions in African higher education. This study addresses these gaps by applying ESP genre analysis to examine the schematic structure of GSS in a Ghanaian university.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a genre-analytic approach rooted in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) tradition (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 2004) to investigate the schematic structure of guest speakers' speeches in a Ghanaian university. The methodology involves move analysis to systematically identify and interpret the rhetorical organization of these ceremonial academic texts. ESP genre analysis is appropriate because it captures both linguistic form and social function in ceremonial discourse.

3.2 Data Set and Sample

The present study purposively utilized 20 guest speakers' speeches delivered during graduation ceremonies. The data were obtained from the official website of the University of Ghana (<http://www.ug.edu.gh>). The addresses included in the dataset were released throughout the period spanning from June 2014 to October 2020. Table 1 shows the word count of each speech, ranging from 715 to 2,382 words.

Table 1.
Text Length and Number of Words of Guest Speakers' Speeches

GSS	No. of Words
GSS1	2382
GSS2	2132
GSS3	1818
GSS4	1597
GSS5	1686

GSS6	1652
GSS7	1637
GSS8	1825
GSS9	1796
GSS10	1714
GSS11	2019
GSS12	1492
GSS13	1138
GSS14	2051
GSS15	1106
GSS16	1439
GSS17	1882
GSS18	1021
GSS19	2102
GSS20	715
TOTAL= 20	33,204

The dataset comprises 33,204 words across 20 speeches, sufficient for genre analysis. The dataset size is comparable to previous studies (e.g., Gault, 2008; Han, 2014; Zhu, 2018).

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

In this study, we manually identified, coded, and recorded the schematic structures of the speeches using a macro-level rhetorical structure (Teo & Ren, 2019). Manual move analysis was employed, as communicative functions require cognitive interpretation beyond automated methods (Biber et al., 2007, as cited in Moreno & Swales, 2018, p. 33). Furthermore, it has been observed that manual analysis is characterized by a significant investment of time, which is perceived by some scholars as a limitation in the field of move analysis (Moreno & Swales, 2018). The present study incorporates the top-down approach proposed by Moreno and Swales (2018), which regards moves as coherent communicative units with specific discoursal or rhetorical functions within texts. These moves may exhibit considerable variation in terms of their length and other linguistic characteristics (Kyei & Afful, 2021a; Kyei & Afful, 2021b; Afful & Kyei, 2020; Swales, 2004, pp. 228–229, as cited in Moreno & Swales, 2018, p. 40). In contrast, steps refer to the various textual components that, when combined or used in conjunction, fulfil the function of a specific move, serving the purpose of the move to which they pertain (Biber et al., 2007: 24 as cited in Moreno and Swales, 2018: 40). In this study, moves such as Welcome and Closing were identified, with steps like giving advice fulfilling specific rhetorical functions. To ensure reliability, coding was cross-checked by multiple researchers.

4. Results and Discussion

This section analyses and discusses the schematic structure of guest speaker speeches (GSS) delivered during graduation ceremonies at a Ghanaian university. It focuses on the identification of moves and steps within the speeches, their frequency across the dataset, the proportion of textual space allocated to each move, and the typical sequencing of moves and steps.

4.1 Moves and Steps Identified in the Guest Speakers' Speeches (GSS)

The analysis revealed a series of recurring rhetorical patterns in the guest speakers' speeches, which were categorized into distinct moves and steps based on their communicative purposes in line with existing research (e.g., Afful, 2005; Askehave, 2007; Han, 2014; Kyei, 2020; Osman, 2008; Teo & Ren, 2019; Xiong, 2012). In all, there were 4 moves identified in the data, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Moves and Steps in Guest Speakers Speeches

Moves	Name	Steps
1	WELCOME	1. Greetings 2. Vocative 3. Occasion 4. Gratitude 5. Credentials
2	APPRECIATION AND THANKS	1. For Students/Graduands 2. For Faculty/Families and Friends
3	TEACHING THE LAST LESSON	1. Presenting the world 2. Providing advice 3. Instilling hope
4	CLOSURE	1. Congratulating the graduands 2. Offering best wishes 3. Resounding the usual toast 4. Expressing thanks

Table 2 presents the four moves and their corresponding steps identified in the Guest Speaker Speeches (GSS). Move 1, Welcome, comprises five steps, including greetings, vocative expressions, reference to the occasion, expressions of gratitude, and the speaker's credentials. Move 2, Appreciation and Thanks, consists of two steps, directed respectively toward students/graduands and faculty, families, and friends. Move 3, Teaching the Last Lesson, includes three steps: presenting the world, providing advice, and instilling hope. Finally, move 4, Closure, encompasses four steps—congratulating the graduands, offering best wishes, reiterating the traditional toast, and expressing thanks. In what follows, I illustrate and explicate the moves and the associated steps, as evinced in the data set.

Move 1: Welcome

The first move identified is welcome. This move served as the introductory stage of the address, where the speaker began by formally welcoming the audience. The primary purpose of this move is to establish a connection with the audience and set a positive tone for the rest of the speech. The speaker fulfils this obligation through a number of steps, beginning with greetings:

Step 1: Greeting

In some of the speeches, the speakers directly and humbly greeted all the people gathered before addressing them (vocative) as in the example below:

Example 1

Good morning, I would like to greet the members of this august body. - GS#1

Good afternoon! - - GS#5

In the examples above, the speakers directly greet and acknowledge the audience, thereby fulfilling the communicative purpose of Move 1. Linguistic expressions such as "morning," the modal "would," and the phrase "this august body" convey politeness, formality, and respect towards the audience. These choices establish a cordial atmosphere, create a favorable first impression, and enhance audience receptiveness to the speech. This finding corroborates Teo and Ren's (2019) assertion that the welcoming move functions to attract audience attention and establish rapport through greetings and the acknowledgement of dignitaries.

Step 2: Vocative

All the speeches began by addressing the audience directly through the use of vocatives. In addressing the audience, the status of the individuals being addressed were revealed. This step is crucial because it acknowledged the presence of the dignitaries and attracted their attention. This step was utilized in all the speeches. See the examples 2 and 3 below:

Example 2

The Chairman and Members of Council of the University of Ghana,

The Vice-Chancellor,

Pro-Vice-Chancellors,

Provosts of Colleges,

[...]

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, - GS#1

Example 3

Mr. Chairman

Vice-Chancellor

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen- GS#2

Both examples use Move 1 (the Welcome move) through formal vocatives to create a respectful tone. Example 2 lists several titles, acknowledging many university officials and emphasizing hierarchy and inclusiveness, while Example 3 uses a shorter greeting that still maintains formality by mentioning key figures. The comparison suggests that the Council Chairman presides over the occasion. The finding corroborated Antonova and Travina's (2014) assertion that addressing an interlocutor is the culture of speaking behavior in the first place and that correctly and appropriately addressing a person is the guarantee of a productive and fruitful conversation.

Step 3: Occasion

The speakers usually referred to the occasion. See the examples below:

Example 4

Graduation Day is a special day in the life of any student; it is the crowning moment of all the hard work, frustrations and anxieties endured and for staying the course of academic life. [...] I daresay it is the best feeling for any student who has successfully gone through the full rigors of academia. - GS#2

Example 5

I know how it feels since I have gone through this process three times: first, as an LLB Honors graduate in 1976, then as a professional on attainment of the Qualifying Certificate in Law and subsequent enrollment at the Bar in 1978 and finally upon graduation with an EMBA (Finance Option) from the University of Ghana Business School in 2004. [...] My mandate is to “encourage you, our post-graduate graduands from the College of Humanities as you prepare to make crucial decisions on the next steps in your careers” and where necessary, share some personal experiences with you. - GS#4

In Example 4, the speaker realizes Move 1 (*Welcome*) by emphasizing the significance of Graduation Day rather than employing a conventional greeting. By describing the occasion as a “crowning moment” and recounting a personal graduation experience, the speaker establishes rapport with the audience and foregrounds the emotional importance of the ceremony (Gault, 2008). Similarly, Example 5 introduces the occasion through personal reflection on graduation experiences and post-graduation expectations, thereby creating identification with the graduands and clarifying the motivational purpose of the address. In both examples, personal reflection is used to reinforce audience connection and underscore the symbolic value of the ceremony (Gault, 2008; Han, 2014; Zhu, 2018). This step highlights the academic significance of graduation ceremonies and positions the genre as a professional academic practice. The finding aligns with Han’s (2014) Move 1: *Congratulations*, in which speakers explicitly foreground the celebratory purpose of graduation ceremonies.

Step 4: Gratitude

In some of the speeches, the speakers demonstrated their delight and gratitude for being part of the occasion. This move is closely related to what Gault (2008) termed as “Acknowledging the Graduates and Their Achievements” and Han (2014) considers this move as part of his Stage 1 (Addressing the Past) or Congratulatory move 1, as can be seen in the examples below:

Example 6

I am delighted to be with you today at the University of Ghana at Legon at this ceremony for graduating students who have successfully completed their courses of study over the past few years. I would like to thank the University for the honor done to me in asking me to serve on this occasion as the Guest Speaker. (GS#1)

Example 7

And so, Mr. Chairman, I am indeed greatly honored by the invitation to be the Guest Speaker of this year's congregation for two very special Colleges of this great University. I am grateful to the University Management for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts with graduands on this auspicious occasion and in the midst of renowned scholars and personalities from within and outside the University – (GS#2)

In Examples 6 and 7, the speakers realize Move 1 (*Welcome*) through expressions of gratitude, thereby establishing a respectful and appreciative tone at the beginning of their addresses. In Example 6, the speaker expresses appreciation for the opportunity to serve as Guest Speaker at the University of Ghana graduation ceremony, while Example 7 similarly acknowledges the University Management and emphasizes the significance of the occasion and the presence of distinguished personalities. In both instances, gratitude functions as a central welcoming strategy that fosters humility, respect, and audience connection. These findings support Bono et al.'s (2015) view that gratitude strengthens social relationships and promotes human flourishing. The results further align with perspectives that regard gratitude as both socially and evolutionarily significant in maintaining reciprocity and interpersonal bonds (Gouldner, 1960; Simmel, 1950; Trivers, 1971).

Step 5: Credentials

This step established the credentials of the university. Find the example below:

Example 8

The 2015 release by *The Times Higher Education World Rankings* names the University of Ghana as the best ranked university in Ghana and the 9th in Africa. This is a highly commendable achievement for which I would like to congratulate the University. The University of Ghana is striding towards the ideals for which it was established, and is making efforts to become a world-class, research-intensive university. [...] GS#1

Through this step, the speaker establishes the university's credentials as an important contextual foundation for the speech. In Example 8, the speaker highlights the achievements of the University of Ghana, particularly its ranking as the leading university in Ghana and among the top universities in Africa. The speaker also references institutional reforms and the establishment of new colleges, thereby emphasizing the university's commitment to excellence, innovation, and academic development. This credentialing strategy promotes institutional pride while motivating graduands to pursue excellence beyond university life. The finding supports Askehave's (2007) view that the presentation of institutional achievements reflects promotional and audience-oriented discourse. It also aligns with Teo and Ren's (2019) assertion that highlighting institutional excellence functions as a persuasive strategy aimed at enhancing institutional appeal among stakeholders, prospective students, and alumni.

Move 2: Appreciation and Thanks

Move 2 shows the speakers' appreciation and thanks for the graduands and all other stakeholders who have contributed to helping the students achieve their successes. It has two different realizations/steps which have been outlined below;

Step 1: For Students/Graduands

In the examples that follow, the speakers thanked the graduands for their unrelenting efforts which had brought them that far.

Example 9

Today we must celebrate the hard work of students as well as that of Management, lecturers and administrators, who have groomed these graduands into becoming what they are today. I know the pride your teachers have in you. [...] I feel the same pride and I know that this is thanks to the great ground work that your teachers have laid as well as my own humble efforts. - GS#1

Example 10

To our proud graduands, I say congratulations and well done for staying the course and finishing the “race”; you have earned the right to celebrate this important achievement and by all means do so in moderation. There is no doubt that having come this far, you have burnt thousands of the mid night candles; you have had to obediently follow instructions from your lecturers to complete your programs, which span from four to six years, successfully. [...] - GS#18

In Examples 9 and 10, the speakers realize Move 2 (*Appreciation and Thanks*) by acknowledging the collective contributions underlying the graduands’ success. In Example 9, the speaker commends the students’ hard work while recognizing the significant role of teachers in shaping their achievements. Through references to personal experience, the speaker reinforces the importance of mentorship and institutional support. Similarly, Example 10 congratulates the graduands on their perseverance, employing the metaphor of “finishing the race” to emphasize determination and achievement. The speaker further acknowledges the sacrifices made by students and the support provided by families, thereby highlighting the communal nature of academic success. Both examples demonstrate that appreciation extends beyond the graduands to include teachers, institutions, and families. This finding supports Partch and Kinnier’s (2011) observation that commencement speakers commonly express gratitude towards mentors, institutions, and significant others. It also aligns with Chang and Tanangkingsing’s (2022) view that figurative expressions enhance the persuasive impact of ceremonial speeches.

Step 2: For Faculty, Family and Friends

Speakers extend their thanks and appreciations to the faculty members, family and friends for also performing various roles in the success stories of the students/graduands during the graduation. See the examples below:

Example 11

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to thank the families, friends, faculty as well as all whose sacrifices, resolve and determination have contributed in no small measure to making this day possible for our graduands. It is usually a refreshing moment for all who successfully see their wards clear this hurdle in life. – (GS#2)

Example 12

This day is also a moment to give thanks for the tremendous support of family, friends and benefactors who altogether, have made it possible for the students to make this remarkable journey through their schooling. – (GS#1)

In Examples 11 and 12, the speakers realize Move 2 (*Appreciation and Thanks*) by acknowledging the contributions of families, friends, faculty, and benefactors to the graduands' success. The speakers recognize the sacrifices, commitment, and support provided throughout the students' academic journey, while emphasizing the pride and fulfilment associated with their achievement. Both examples portray graduation as a collective accomplishment rather than an individual success, thereby reinforcing the communal and celebratory nature of the ceremony.

Move 3: Teaching the Last Lesson

The move addressed the graduating class. It presented the world to them and inspired them to press on till they reached the mark. Speakers also challenged the graduands to begin thinking of how to become useful citizens of the country. Three realizations/steps of this move were found in the data.

Step 1: Presenting The World

The speakers presented the world of work to the graduands. Here are examples:

Example 13

[...] Dear graduands, I would like to speak to you about entrepreneurship and the need for us to explore the vast unexplored potentials that we have in Ghana to build organizations. [...] Today, in Ghana we have many privately run medical facilities and several schools of medicine, dentistry and public health that seek to render service to the nation. Help the private sector to help improve the health delivery system in the country. Do not miss this opportunity through a fear of job insecurity in the private sector. – (GS #14)

Example 14

[...]To my proud graduands from the College of Education, I wish to reiterate the fact that teacher education lays the foundation for the development of the human capital of every nation without which social development and economic prosperity would be impossible. [...] You have indeed been introduced to best practice in teaching and learning that will enable you tackle broader issues of education in Ghana. Giving your best to the professional practice would enhance the image of the teaching profession and accord it the valued status it deserves in the Ghanaian society. – GS #12.

In Examples 13 and 14, the speakers realize Move 3 (*Teaching the Last Lesson*) by guiding graduands on their future responsibilities and societal roles. Example 13 emphasizes entrepreneurship, innovation, continuous learning, and the application of knowledge to local industries, particularly within Ghana's medical diagnostics sector. The speaker also encourages graduands to contribute to their alma mater and national development. Similarly, Example 14 provides practical advice on overcoming entrepreneurial challenges such as financial constraints and fear of failure, while promoting perseverance, innovation, and social responsibility in addressing health and educational needs. Both examples frame graduation not only as a personal achievement but also as a call to professional growth and societal contribution. This finding supports Gault's (2008) view that this step prepares graduands for their future roles and responsibilities.

Step 2: Providing Advice

This step provides advice to graduands as to the best way they are expected to live their lives. See the example below:

Example 15

Ladies and gentlemen, I am sure we have all been asked the question: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Well now you are grown up – at least by the fact of your graduation today. By virtue of what you have all chosen or forced to study you may have probably answered this question in part [...] - GS#2

Example 16

I do hope the lessons from my experiences, these past years would help give you some guidance as you consider what life will throw at you as step out into the world. [...] Do not be boxed in the degree you are graduating in, learn more, continuously develop yourself, learn a trade, read a book, by all means do something with your life, never waste a day. Have a mentor to guide you, build networks of good people who can influence your life, people who can call you and say to you, stop that and you stop [...] - GS#3

In Example 15, the speaker draws on Steve Jobs’ principle and advises graduates to pursue careers aligned with their passions. Example 16 similarly encourages personal responsibility, goal-setting, ethical conduct, innovation, resilience, and continuous self-improvement, alongside values such as respect for parents and faith. Both examples foreground proactive career development and holistic success, combining passion, responsibility, and personal growth. Example 15 highlights transition into professional life and continuous learning, while Example 16 stresses ownership of outcomes and ethical practice. Collectively, they reflect Han’s (2014) Move 4 (*Farewell Message*), which provides advice, encouragement, and goodwill to graduands, accompanied by a shift from an authoritative tone to one of equality as speakers address graduates as emerging professionals and alumni.

Step 3: Instilling Hope

The step instills a sense of hope in the graduates that they have all the tools they need to be successful in such a challenging world. See the examples below:

Example 17

I would like to address the graduating class. This is a time to celebrate your accomplishments, and to find inspiration for the life ahead. Commencement Day, as it is called in some parts of the world, truly marks for the graduating student, a moment where one door closes and another opens, as you enter into the world of work. [...] Let me congratulate you all on your achievements as you conclude this important phase of your lives and start a new journey. - GS#1

Example 18

Surely all is not lost neither have your training been in vain. Without doubt the economy needs and has more room for doctors, nurses, teachers, educationists, pharmacists etc. What has changed really is who and how to employ these professionals beside Government. Nothing stops these professionals from becoming their own employers. Indeed, I believe that given the medium to long term prospects

of the [...] This is throwing up opportunities for opening up education and training centers as lucrative businesses. Similarly, the health care industry is witnessing growth fueled by increasing education and health-consciousness among the populace. [...] - GS#2

In Examples 17 and 18, the speakers realize the "instilling hope" step by highlighting the positive prospects associated with the transition from education to professional life and the opportunities for personal and economic advancement (Gault, 2008). Example 17 presents graduation as the beginning of new opportunities for leadership and growth, encouraging confidence in future challenges. Example 18 similarly emphasizes available economic opportunities, particularly in entrepreneurship and innovation within sectors such as education and healthcare, thereby encouraging self-employment and adaptive thinking in response to changing labor markets. Both speeches maintain an optimistic tone that reinforces graduates' capacity to succeed beyond university. This aligns with Gault's (2008) position that graduation addresses should alleviate anxiety and foster confidence rather than uncertainty. It also supports DeCapua and Dunham's (1993) view that advice is most persuasive when delivered by credible and trusted speakers.

Move 4: Closure (Farewell)

Move 4 (Closure/Farewell) marks the final part of the speech, where the speaker brings the address to a close. In this move, speakers perform four steps: *congratulating the graduands, wishing them all the best, resounding the usual toast, and expressing thanks* before exiting the speech.

Step 1: Congratulating the Graduands

The speaker takes a moment to recognize the significant effort, perseverance, and dedication that the graduates have demonstrated throughout their academic journey, as in the examples below:

Example 19

I would like to end by congratulating each and every one of you who has gone through the University of Ghana. We know for a fact that your presence here is a testimony to your great efforts and a major milestone in each of your individual lives. It is all our sincere hope that you will prove to be worthy ambassadors of the University and that you will uphold the highest standards, the integrity and the values that the University has inculcated in you. - GS#2

Example 20

Congratulations. – (GS#4)

In Example 19, the speaker acknowledges the graduands' hard work and the values gained from the university, reinforcing their achievement and future responsibility. Example 20 offers a brief but powerful "Congratulations," directly celebrating their success. Both examples recognise the graduates' accomplishment—Example 19 through detailed praise and reflection, and Example 20 with concise but meaningful acknowledgment.

Step 2: Offering Best Wishes

In this step, the speakers show strong and positive beliefs and hopes in the graduands. The speakers, thus, wish the graduands success as they step into the world of work. Find examples as follows:

Example 21

I wish you all the best as you journey into the world and pray that you will conquer the world. - GS#1

Example 22

Let me conclude by encouraging our graduands to never give up in the face of adversity. Please, live your life but you must live for something and your life must count for something. -GS#17

In Examples 21 and 22, both speakers extend good wishes to the graduates but with different emphases. Example 21 offers general encouragement, wishing them strength to overcome challenges and succeed, while Example 22 adds a motivational layer, urging graduates to persevere and lead meaningful lives. This aligns with Kyei's (2020) Move 6, Step 2, and Gault's (2008) Move 3, Step 3, which emphasize instilling hope and confidence in graduates as they face the future. The messages reflect the goal of commencement speeches to inspire, uplift, and empower graduates, as noted by Partch and Kinnier (2011).

Step 3: Resounding the (Usual) Toast

Step 3: Resounding the Usual Toast involves reiterating a traditional or expected message of well-wishing, typically symbolizing the conclusion of the ceremony and the official transition of the graduands into the next phase of their lives. This step often includes expressions of hope for their success, happiness, and future achievements, serving as a final, uplifting send-off. Here, the speakers may for example, make reference to a renowned quote or quote a famous speech.

Example 23

Long live the College of Health Sciences and the College of Basic and Applied Sciences!

Long live the University of Ghana, Long live Ghana. – (GSPCH#1)

Example 24

I will like to bring my talk to an end by charging you all with a quote I saw..."Cowardice asks the question - is it safe? Expediency asks the question - is it politic? Vanity asks the question - is it popular? But conscience asks the question - is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular; but one must take it BECAUSE it is right" Martin Luther King. – (GSPC#3)

In Examples 23 and 24, the speakers realize Move 4, Step 3 (*Resounding the Usual Toast*) through contrasting rhetorical strategies. Example 23 adopts a formal and conventional approach by invoking institutional and national identity, highlighting the legacy of the University of Ghana, its constituent colleges, and the nation, thereby reinforcing unity

and national pride. Example 24, in contrast, employs a reflective and motivational closure, drawing on Martin Luther King Jr.'s quotation to encourage moral courage, principled action, and resilience in the face of challenges. Both approaches effectively achieve a memorable conclusion by instilling pride, hope, and inspiration, though through different emphases—patriotic affirmation in Example 23 and ethical motivation in Example 24.

Step 4: Expressing Thanks

Following are excerpts showing how the speakers expressed thanks for the opportunity given them:

Example 25

Thank you for your attention. – (GS#1).

Example 26

Thank you very much for allowing me to be part of this special occasion (GS#2).

In Examples 25 and 26, the speakers realize Move 4, Step 4 (*Expressing Thanks*) by concluding their speeches with expressions of gratitude. Example 25 employs a brief and formal statement, directly acknowledging the audience's attention, thereby maintaining a professional tone. In contrast, Example 26 provides a more personalized expression of appreciation, emphasizing gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the occasion and contribute to the event. Both forms of closing reinforce politeness and rapport while signaling the end of the speech. This finding aligns with Kyei's (2020) concept of a "polite exit" and supports Han's (2014) view that expressions of gratitude constitute an essential feature of formal speech endings, reflecting appreciation for the audience and other stakeholders.

4.2 Frequency of Occurrences of the Moves and Steps Identified

Next, we examine the frequency of moves in guest speakers' speeches. Hüttner's (2010) model, which categorizes moves based on their frequency, was used to assess their status. Table 4 summarizes the frequency and percentage of different moves and steps, along with their status according to Hüttner's framework.

Table 3.

Frequency of Moves and Steps in Guest Speakers' Speeches

Moves	Name	Steps	No. of Occurrences	% of Occurrences	Move Status
1	Welcome		20	100	Obligatory
		1. Greetings	0	0%	
		2. Vocative	0	0%	
		3. Occasion	0	0%	
		4. Gratitude	0	0%	
		5. Credentials	0	0%	
		1&2	1	5%	
		2&3	3	15%	
		2&4	4	20%	
		2&3&4	7	35%	
		2&4&5	1	5%	
		1&2&3&4&5	1	5%	

2	Appreciation and Thanks		14	70%	Core
		1. For Students/ Graduands.	4	20%	
		2. For Faculty/ Families and Friends.	2	10%	
		1 & 2	9	45%	
3	Teaching the last lesson		20	100%	Obligatory
		1. Presenting the world.	0	0%	
		2. Providing advice.	2	10%	
		3. Instilling hope.	0	0%	
		1&2	1	5%	
		1&2&3	14	70%	
4	Closure/Fare well		16	80%	Core
		1. Congratulating the graduands	1	5%	
		2. Offering best wishes	0	0%	
		3. Resounding the usual toast	0	0%	
		4. Expressing thanks	1	5%	
		1&2	2	10%	
		2&3	2	10%	
		2&4	1	5%	
		1&2&4	7	35%	
		2&3&4	5	25%	
		1&2&3&4	1	5%	

Table 4 shows that the *Welcome* move occurred in all speeches (100%), making it obligatory within Hüttner's framework. It functions primarily to establish tone and engage the audience at the beginning of the address. However, individual steps such as greetings, vocatives, occasion reference, gratitude, and credentials were rarely used in isolation. The most frequent patterns combined gratitude with reference to the occasion (20%) and gratitude with occasion and credentials (35%).

The *Appreciation and Thanks* move is identified as a core component of the speeches, serving to acknowledge key stakeholder groups. Appreciation directed at students/graduands occurred in 20% of cases, while recognition of faculty, families, and friends appeared in 10%. The most dominant pattern involved a combined acknowledgment of both graduands and their support networks (45%), indicating a more inclusive and holistic expression of gratitude (Gault, 2008; Han, 2014; Partch & Kinnier, 2011).

The *Teaching the Last Lesson* move occurred in all speeches (100%), making it obligatory. It plays a central role in providing guidance, perspective, and inspiration as

graduates transition into post-university life (Gault, 2008; Han, 2014). However, individual steps were seldom used independently: *Presenting the World* did not appear as a standalone step, while *Providing Advice* occurred in 10% of the speeches. *Instilling Hope* also did not appear separately but was typically integrated with other steps. The most frequent pattern was the combination of *Providing Advice* and *Instilling Hope* (70%), indicating a dominant focus on both practical guidance and motivational support for graduates.

The consistent use of *Teaching the Last Lesson* (100%) aligns with Han's (2014, p.88) observation that graduation speeches often include moral instruction aimed at shaping values and guiding graduates towards responsible citizenship. This move typically involves presenting societal realities and encouraging perseverance towards meaningful goals. Similarly, Gault (2008) notes that it frames the challenges graduates are likely to encounter, thereby preparing them for post-university life.

The *Closure/Farewell* move occurs in 80% of the speeches, making it a core component used to conclude addresses with goodwill and final remarks. Individually, *Congratulating the Graduands* appears in 5% of cases, while *Expressing Thanks* also occurs in 5%; both are usually combined with other steps. *Offering Best Wishes* and *Resounding the Usual Toast* do not occur independently. The most frequent pattern is the combination of *Congratulating the Graduands* and *Expressing Thanks* (35%), reflecting a common concluding strategy that blends congratulations with gratitude (Gault, 2008; Han, 2014).

The analysis of graduation speeches from a Ghanaian public university shows a consistent rhetorical structure. The *Welcome* and *Teaching the Last Lesson* moves occurred in all speeches (100%), making them obligatory and highlighting their central role in establishing engagement and providing final guidance. These findings support Gault (2008) and Han (2014), who characterize commencement speeches as ritualized communicative events. This view is further reinforced by Turner's (1969) concept of ceremonies as symbolic rites and Goffman's (1967) interpretation of them as structured social performances. In addition, Ohashi (2008, as cited in Han, 2014) conceptualizes the welcoming phase as a ritualized interaction used to build social bonds through greetings and acknowledgements. Applying Hüttner's (2010) framework, the data further reveal two core moves (*Appreciation and Thanks* and *Closure/Farewell*) and two obligatory moves (*Welcome* and *Teaching the Last Lesson*), resulting in four main rhetorical moves in total. This finding aligns with Gault's (2008) identification of four dominant themes in commencement discourse, although it differs from Han (2014), who proposed a five-move structure including *Awarding the Degree*. Overall, the study confirms that guest speakers' speeches at the University of Ghana closely reflect established patterns in commencement rhetoric, particularly in acknowledging graduates, building identification, presenting societal realities, and instilling hope. The discussion now proceeds to the sequence of moves.

4.3 Sequence of Moves

Table 4 shows the order or arrangement of the moves as they occur in the Guest Speakers' Speeches at the University of Ghana, Legon, graduation speeches.

Table 4.

Sequencing of Moves in the UG Guest Speakers' Graduation Addresses

Move Patterns	Count T-units	Percentage (%)
14 move sequence (Total =1)	1	5%
1→1→1→1→1→2→2→3→3→3→3→4→4→4→4	1	5%

10 move sequence (Total =7)	7	35%
1→1→1→2→2→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
1→1→1→2→2→3→3→3→4→4	2	10%
1→1→1→2→2→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
1→2→2→2→3→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
1→1→2→2→3→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
1→1→1→2→3→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
9 move sequence (Total =6)	6	30%
1→1→2→2→3→3→3→4→4	1	5%
1→1→2→3→3→3→4→4→4	2	10%
1→2→2→3→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
1→1→1→2→3→3→3→4→4	1	5%
1→1→1→3→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
8 move sequence (Total = 1)	1	5%
1→1→1→2→3→4→4→4	1	5%
7 move sequence (Total = 2)	2	10%
1→1→1→3→3→3→4	1	5%
1→1→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
6 move sequence (Total =2)	2	10%
1→2→3→3→3→4	1	5%
1→1→3→3→3→4	1	5%
5 move sequence (Total = 1)	1	5%
1→1→3→4→4	1	5%

The move patterns in the Guest Speakers' Speeches demonstrate a clear sequential organization of rhetorical elements. Table 5 indicates that the 14-move sequence occurred only once (5%), making it the least frequent pattern, although it represents the most comprehensive and elaborate structuring of the speeches. In contrast, the 10-move sequence was the most common, occurring in 7 instances (35%). This pattern typically follows a coherent progression from *Welcome* (Move 1), through *Appreciation and Thanks* (Move 2) and *Teaching the Last Lesson* (Move 3), to *Closure/Farewell* (Move 4). Overall, this distribution suggests a preference for moderately detailed but well-structured speeches that balance completeness with conciseness.

The 9-move sequence was the second most frequent pattern, occurring 6 times (30%). It is slightly less elaborate than the 10-move sequence, omitting some details while still retaining the core rhetorical moves. The 8-move sequence appeared once (5%) and reflects a more condensed structure focused on essential elements with minimal elaboration.

The 7-move sequence occurred twice (10%), indicating a more streamlined pattern that prioritizes addressing the audience, offering guidance, and concluding efficiently. Similarly, the 6-move sequence, also observed twice (10%), is more compact and places greater emphasis on advice before moving quickly to closure. The 5-move sequence was the least frequent (5%) and represents the most reduced form, focusing primarily on welcoming, advising, and concluding.

Overall, the findings show variation in structural length, but with a consistent reliance on core rhetorical elements. Table 5 shows that Guest Speakers' Speeches are largely organized in a chronological sequence (1→2→3→4), consistent with Swales' (2004, as cited in Daniels, 2017) adaptation of the CARS model, where rhetorical moves follow a linear progression from introduction to conclusion. However, deviations were observed, particularly the omission of Move 2 in five instances across different sequences, suggesting that appreciation is sometimes subsumed under the closing remarks in Move 4, which appears to function recursively across all speeches. The dominance of the 1→2→3→4 pattern (35%) indicates a preferred structure beginning with *Welcome*, followed by *Appreciation*, *Teaching the Last Lesson*, and *Closure/Farewell*. This sequence reflects a conventional rhetorical progression consistent with Han (2014) and Gault (2008). Nonetheless, the data also reveal variability in sequencing, confirming that no strict uniform format governs the speeches, as similarly noted by Afful (2005), Daniels (2017), and Kyei (2020). Despite this variation, move 1 typically initiates the speech and Move 4 consistently concludes it, reinforcing their fixed positional roles within the genre. The sample data was coded GS#1. The results are presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1.
A Sample Move Analysis of an Unedited Speech

GS#1	MOVE/STEP
Good morning, I would like to greet the members of this august body	MOVE 1 STEP 1: GREETINGS
The Chairman and Members of Council of the University of Ghana, The Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellors, [..] Distinguished Invited Guests, <i>Nananom, Neemei, Naamei</i> , Parents and Guardians,	MOVE 1 STEP 2: VOCATIVE
I am delighted to be with you today at the University of Ghana at Legon at this ceremony for graduating students who have successfully completed their courses of study over the past few years. I would like thank the University for the honor done to me in asking me to serve on this occasion as the Guest Speaker.	MOVE 1 STEP 3: GRATITUDE
The 2015 release by <i>The Times Higher Education World Rankings</i> names the University of Ghana as the best ranked university in Ghana and the 9th in Africa. This is a highly commendable achievement for which I would like to congratulate the University. The University of Ghana is striding towards the ideals for which it was established, and is making efforts to become a world-class, research-intensive university. [...]	MOVE 1 STEP 5: CREDENTIALS
I understand that this ceremony is a joint one being held for students of the two science-based colleges in the university, namely the College of Health Sciences and the College of Basic and Applied Sciences.	MOVE 1 STEP 4: OCCASION

Today we must celebrate the hard work of students as well as that of Management, lecturers and administrators, who have groomed these graduands into becoming what they are today. I know the pride your teachers have in you. At Medlab I get compliments on the quality, knowledge and competence of my staff from the external auditors who conduct our accreditation visits. I feel the same pride and I know that this is thanks to the great ground work that your teachers have laid as well as my own humble efforts.	MOVE 2 STEP 1 FOR STUDENTS
This day is also a moment to give thanks for the tremendous support of family, friends and benefactors who altogether, have made it possible for the students to make this remarkable journey through their schooling.	MOVE 2 STEP 2 FOR FACULTY/FRIENDS/ FAMILIES
I would like to address the graduating class. This is a time to celebrate your accomplishments, and to find inspiration for the life ahead. Commencement Day, as it is called in some parts of the world, truly marks for the graduating student, a moment where one door closes and another opens, as you enter into the world of work. For those of you with further degrees from the School of Graduate Studies, you have been through this transition before, and today marks yet another milestone in your academic career which will allow you to reposition yourselves as more mature persons and future leaders of whom much would be expected. [...]	MOVE 3 STEP 2 PROVIDING ADVICE
Let me share a few words and thoughts with you. The focus of university training is not only the acquisition of knowledge, it is the development of analytical and problem-solving skills which will allow you to deal with the problems that you will encounter tomorrow. The end result of this training should be to acquire a resilience that should enable you to withstand the challenges that lie ahead. Certainly, living a meaningful life is being able to have the versatility and creativity of mind to take appropriate control of your destiny and your environment. [...] It is therefore important to give your utmost, back to family, society, country and the world, and certainly, in the best way you can. [...]	MOVE 3 STEP 1: PRESENTING THE WORLD
Never be afraid to originate ideas. For a modern nation to succeed, it must be a knowledge-based economy. We need to develop the ability to manufacture innovative technology in Ghana. In the area of medical diagnostics, this could include production of reagents and X-ray equipment. I procured an X-ray system from a European provider and found out that my classmate in a large London Hospital had procured the same product at 30% below my cost. I approached the vendor and asked why poor Africans were to be charged more. I was informed that since we did not produce such systems, there was no competition to drive down prices! [...]	MOVE 3 STEP 3 INSTILLING HOPE

I would like to end by congratulating each and every one of you who has gone through the University of Ghana. We know for a fact that your presence here is a testimony to your great efforts and a major milestone in each of your individual lives.	MOVE 4 STEP 1 CONGRATULATING
It is all our sincere hope that you will prove to be worthy ambassadors of the University and that you will uphold the highest standards, the integrity and the values that the University has inculcated in you.	MOVE 4 STEP 2 WISHING ALL THE BEST
I wish you all the best as you journey into the world and pray that you will conquer the world.	
Long live the College of Health Sciences and the College of Basic and Applied Sciences!	MOVE 4 STEP 3 RESOUNDING THE USUAL TOAST
Long live the University of Ghana, Long live Ghana.	
Thank you for your attention.	MOVE 4 STEP 4 EXPRESSING THANKS

In the speech above (GS1, Fig. 5), the speaker systematically employs moves and steps to engage the audience and convey a persuasive message. Move 1 (Welcoming/Establishing the Scene) begins with Step 1A (Welcoming and Greeting the Audience), where key figures such as the Chairman and Members of the Council of the University of Ghana are acknowledged, establishing a formal tone. This is followed by Step 1B (Expressing Appreciation for the Invitation), in which the speaker expresses gratitude for the opportunity to serve as Guest Speaker. Step 1C (Referring to the Achievements of the Host Institution) highlights the university's ranking as the best in Ghana and ninth in Africa, aligning the speaker with the institution's prestige.

The speech then moves to Move 2 (Recognizing the Audience). In Step 2A (Congratulating the Graduates), the speaker celebrates the graduates' achievements. Step 2B (Recognizing the Role of Faculty and Administrators) acknowledges the contributions of university staff, while Step 2C (Acknowledging Family and Friends) extends appreciation to those who supported the graduates' journey.

Move 3 (Teaching the Graduates the Last Lesson) focuses on guidance for the future. Step 3A (Offering Advice) encourages graduates to apply their knowledge and develop critical thinking skills. Step 3B (Sharing Personal Experience) draws on the speaker's professional journey to inspire perseverance and professionalism. Step 3C (Encouraging National Responsibility) urges graduates to contribute to national development.

Finally, move 4 (Closing the Speech) includes Step 4A (Summarizing Key Messages)—emphasizing resilience, responsibility, and nation-building—and Step 4B (Offering Best Wishes), where the speaker expresses hopes for the graduates' future success. Overall, this structured use of moves and steps creates a coherent, engaging, and impactful address.

4.4 Textual Space of Moves

The next aspect of the schematic structure of the sample explained data is the textual space. Textual space illustrates the attention given to each Move in terms of words,

phrase, clauses and sentences. In this study, the number of words contained in the Moves was utilized to establish the textual space. The words constituted the basis for measuring the textual space in each text. Table 6 presents the distribution of textual space of the moves of Guest Speakers' Speeches presented at graduation ceremonies at University of Ghana.

Table 5.

Textual Space Allocated to the Moves in the Data

Moves	No. of words	Percentage
Move 1: Welcome	3320	10.00
Move 2: Appreciation and Thanks	2656	8.00
Move 3: Teaching the last Lesson	25899	78.00
Move 4: Closure	1328	4.00
Total of words	33204	100.00

Table 6 shows a clear imbalance in the distribution of textual space across the four moves. *Teaching the Last Lesson* dominates the speeches with 25,899 words (78%), making it the most prominent component. *Welcome* accounts for 3,320 words (10%), *Appreciation and Thanks* 2,656 words (8%), and *Closure* 1,328 words (4%), indicating comparatively limited space for framing and concluding elements.

The dominance of Move 3 highlights its central communicative role in delivering advice, reflection, and future-oriented guidance to graduands. This confirms its importance in graduation discourse, where speakers prioritize motivating students for post-university life. The allocation of textual space further supports Afful (2005) and Kyei (2020), who argue that greater textual prominence reflects higher functional importance. It also aligns with Daniels (2017), who notes that extensive elaboration signals deeper expertise and persuasive intent.

Overall, the distribution reflects the genre's communicative purpose of transitioning graduates from academic life to professional and societal roles, consistent with Han's (2014) past-present-future structure. It also indicates a Ghanaian adaptation of the genre, where conversational and advisory discourse is prioritized over purely ceremonial or authoritative styles, in contrast to the more formalized patterns observed in some other contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the schematic structure of guest speakers' commencement addresses at the University of Ghana, Legon, analysing 20 speeches delivered between 2014 and 2020 through the lens of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990). The move analysis revealed a consistent four-move macro-structure: (1) Welcome, (2) Appreciation and Thanks, (3) Teaching the Last Lesson, and (4) Closing. Notably, the Teaching the Last Lesson move emerged as both structurally dominant, occupying the majority of the speeches, and functionally central, primarily realised through advice-giving that facilitates graduates' transition into professional life.

This study extends genre analysis to African ceremonial discourse. It shows how institutional genres balance stability with adaptability. It highlights Ghanaian cultural values through appreciation moves.

Future research should expand the corpus, compare across universities, and examine disciplinary variations. This research advances understanding of genre as both a social practice and a pedagogical tool. The findings underscore how genre theory can illuminate both universal patterns and local variations in genres in professional settings (here, academic) across diverse cultural contexts.

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GEN Z SPEAKING ANXIETY IN EFL CONTEXTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDONESIA AND VIETNAM

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Abstract

This study investigates how Generation Z students experience speaking anxiety, the strategies they employ to overcome it, and ways to build confidence in speaking English. Speaking anxiety is a common challenge among Generation Z learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, particularly where oral communication is emphasized. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 female senior high school students from Indonesia and Vietnam selected through purposive sampling. All participants reported difficulties in oral performance due to speaking anxiety. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to students' experiences and coping strategies. The findings revealed three major forms of speaking anxiety: communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of receiving poor grades. Students employed various coping strategies to manage their anxiety. Indonesian students tended to adopt informal approaches, such as practicing with peers and using digital media, whereas Vietnamese students relied more on structured learning resources, including language-learning applications. Cross-cultural differences were also identified. Indonesian students were more likely to experience anxiety stemming from social pressure, such as fear of embarrassment or being ridiculed, while Vietnamese students were more concerned with linguistic accuracy. By comparing Generation Z learners from Indonesia and Vietnam, this study provides a cross-cultural perspective on speaking anxiety and coping strategies in EFL settings. The findings offer practical implications for EFL teachers in developing culturally responsive approaches to enhance students' speaking confidence and oral communication skills.

Keywords: *gen Z student; Indonesia; learning English; speaking anxiety; Vietnam.*

1. Introduction

Speaking anxiety has become a significant challenge among Generation Z students, particularly in educational contexts that require active oral communication. Growing up in a highly digital environment characterized by text-based and asynchronous interactions, many Generation Z learners feel less comfortable engaging in spontaneous face-to-face communication. Consequently, speaking in academic settings often evokes feelings of

nervousness, insecurity, and fear of making mistakes. Recent studies indicate that a considerable number of Generation Z students experience anxiety during real-time verbal communication, including classroom presentations, discussions, and debates (Lubis & Siregar, 2025). Similarly, Nababan and Lestariningsih (2024) found that many learners avoid oral participation due to concerns about negative evaluation and the possibility of making errors, a phenomenon also highlighted by Sadighi and Dastpak (2017). These findings suggest that speaking anxiety remains a persistent and growing concern among Generation Z learners, including those studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

In EFL contexts, speaking anxiety has long been recognized as one of the major barriers to effective language learning. Previous research consistently demonstrates that anxiety negatively influences students' oral performance, participation, and willingness to communicate. For instance, Rachmawati and Jurianto (2020) reported that highly anxious learners tend to avoid speaking activities and exhibit lower communicative competence. Likewise, Simanungkalit and Tondombala (2024) found that anxiety significantly reduces students' engagement in English classroom interactions. The phenomenon can be explained through Foreign Language Anxiety Theory (Horwitz et al., 1986), which identifies communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as primary sources of anxiety in foreign language learning. Furthermore, the Willingness to Communicate Theory (MacIntyre et al., 1998) suggests that learners' readiness to communicate is shaped by psychological factors such as confidence and anxiety, as well as contextual and situational conditions. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a useful framework for understanding how emotional and psychological factors influence learners' participation in English-speaking activities.

Despite extensive research on speaking anxiety, several gaps remain. First, most studies have examined EFL learners in general without specifically focusing on Generation Z, whose communication habits have been profoundly influenced by digital technologies. Second, limited attention has been given to the relationship between digital communication practices and speaking anxiety in English-learning contexts. As Generation Z learners increasingly rely on text messaging, social media, and other digital platforms for communication, these practices may shape both their confidence and anxiety when engaging in face-to-face interactions. Third, comparative studies involving Southeast Asian EFL contexts remain scarce. In particular, little research has compared Generation Z learners in Indonesia and Vietnam, despite both countries representing important EFL environments with distinct educational systems and sociocultural characteristics. Consequently, cross-cultural differences in the sources of speaking anxiety and the strategies used to manage it remain insufficiently explored.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating how Generation Z students from Indonesia and Vietnam experience and manage speaking anxiety in English-learning contexts. It also examines how digital communication practices influence their coping strategies and confidence development. Understanding these experiences is important because it can assist educators in creating more supportive and effective speaking environments. Previous studies have shown that learners employ various strategies to manage anxiety, including self-regulation, preparation, and peer support (Nguyen, 2025). However, little is known about how such strategies are shaped by contemporary digital communication behaviors and sociocultural contexts.

This study argues that Generation Z learners' speaking anxiety is influenced not only by linguistic challenges but also by psychological, social, and technological factors. Because

these learners are accustomed to low-risk, text-based communication, they may experience greater discomfort when required to engage in spontaneous oral interaction. Moreover, limited opportunities for authentic speaking practice and concerns about academic performance may further intensify anxiety (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). Therefore, it is important to examine how Generation Z learners navigate these challenges and develop strategies to enhance their speaking confidence.

By exploring the experiences of Generation Z students in Indonesia and Vietnam, this study contributes to the growing literature on speaking anxiety in EFL contexts. Specifically, it extends existing research by integrating perspectives from Foreign Language Anxiety Theory, Willingness to Communicate Theory, and contemporary digital communication practices. The study also provides a cross-cultural perspective on how learners experience and cope with speaking anxiety, offering practical insights for educators seeking to develop culturally responsive approaches to fostering students' confidence and oral communication skills.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: 1. How do Generation Z students experience speaking anxiety in English-learning contexts? And 2. What strategies do Generation Z students use to reduce speaking anxiety and build confidence in speaking English?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speaking Anxiety in EFL Learning

Speaking anxiety is widely recognized as one of the most significant psychological barriers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. It refers to feelings of tension, nervousness, apprehension, and fear experienced by learners when they are required to communicate in a foreign language. The concept is closely associated with Foreign Language Anxiety, which was first systematically conceptualized by Horwitz et al. (1986). According to their framework, foreign language anxiety consists of three primary dimensions: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication apprehension refers to learners' reluctance or fear of engaging in oral communication, fear of negative evaluation concerns apprehension about being judged by teachers or peers, and test anxiety relates to concerns about academic assessment and performance.

These dimensions collectively influence learners' confidence and participation in language-learning activities. Research has consistently demonstrated that speaking anxiety negatively affects learners' oral performance, communicative competence, and willingness to participate in classroom interactions (Rachmawati & Jurianto, 2020; Dewaele & Li, 2022). (Amaliah et al. 2025) also reported that emotional factors such as nervousness significantly influence students' speaking performance in EFL learning contexts. Learners experiencing high levels of anxiety often avoid speaking opportunities, hesitate to express their ideas, and exhibit lower levels of linguistic fluency. Consequently, speaking anxiety can be viewed not only as a psychological issue but also as an academic challenge that directly influences language-learning outcomes.

3.2 Generation Z and Digital Communication Practices

Generation Z generally refers to individuals born in the late 1990s and early 2010s who have grown up in an environment characterized by extensive exposure to digital technologies. Often described as digital natives, members of this generation rely heavily on smartphones, social media platforms, and online communication tools in their daily lives

(Lubis & Siregar, 2025). As a result, digital communication has become an integral component of their social interactions, educational experiences, and identity formation.

Unlike previous generations, Generation Z learners frequently engage in asynchronous communication through text messaging, social networking platforms, and other digital media. These communication modes allow greater control over message construction and reduce the immediate social pressures associated with face-to-face interaction. While such practices may enhance digital literacy and information-processing skills, they may also limit opportunities for spontaneous oral communication (Lee & Chiu, 2023). Consequently, many Generation Z students demonstrate confidence in online interactions while experiencing discomfort in situations requiring immediate verbal responses. This shift in communication behavior highlights the need to examine how digital communication practices influence learners' speaking confidence and communication anxiety in educational settings.

3.3 Speaking Anxiety and Willingness to Communicate

The relationship between speaking anxiety and learners' willingness to communicate has received considerable attention in second-language acquisition research. According to the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Theory proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998), learners' readiness to engage in communication is influenced by multiple psychological and contextual factors, including self-confidence, motivation, perceived competence, and anxiety. Anxiety is considered one of the most influential variables because it directly affects learners' decisions to participate in communication.

In EFL classrooms, speaking activities such as presentations, group discussions, role plays, and oral examinations often become anxiety-provoking situations. Previous studies have found that learners with higher anxiety levels tend to participate less frequently in classroom interactions and demonstrate lower speaking performance (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020; Istiqomah, 2024). Anxiety may also discourage learners from taking communicative risks, thereby limiting opportunities for language development. These findings suggest that reducing anxiety is essential for increasing learners' willingness to communicate and improving their overall speaking proficiency. Therefore, supportive classroom environments, constructive feedback, and learner-centered instructional approaches are crucial for fostering speaking confidence.

3.4 Research Gap and Conceptual Framework

Although speaking anxiety has been extensively investigated in EFL contexts, several important gaps remain in the literature. First, most previous studies have focused on EFL learners broadly rather than specifically examining Generation Z learners, whose communication patterns are strongly shaped by digital technologies. Second, limited research has explored the relationship between digital communication habits and speaking anxiety in foreign language learning. Existing studies tend to examine anxiety from linguistic and psychological perspectives while paying less attention to the influence of contemporary communication behaviors.

Third, comparative studies involving Southeast Asian EFL contexts remain relatively limited. In particular, research comparing Generation Z learners from Indonesia and Vietnam is scarce, despite the fact that both countries represent important EFL environments with distinct educational systems, sociocultural backgrounds, and language-learning experiences.

Understanding these differences is important because sociocultural contexts may influence both the sources of speaking anxiety and the strategies learners use to cope with it.

Based on these considerations, this study adopts a conceptual framework that integrates Foreign Language Anxiety Theory (Horwitz et al., 1986), Willingness to Communicate Theory (MacIntyre et al., 1998), and perspectives on Generation Z digital communication behavior. The study assumes that Generation Z learners' preference for digital and asynchronous communication may reduce opportunities for face-to-face interaction, thereby influencing their speaking confidence, communication anxiety, and willingness to communicate in English. By examining learners from Indonesia and Vietnam, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how digital communication practices shape speaking anxiety and coping strategies among Generation Z students in Southeast Asian EFL contexts. This integrated perspective constitutes the primary contribution and novelty of the present study.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore Generation Z students' experiences of speaking anxiety in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, emotions, and coping strategies related to speaking English. As speaking anxiety is a complex psychological phenomenon that cannot be fully captured through numerical measurements alone, qualitative inquiry enables a deeper exploration of learners' perspectives and lived experiences (Creswell, 2011).

The phenomenon under investigation was speaking anxiety experienced during English-speaking activities, including classroom discussions, oral presentations, conversations, and speaking assessments. These activities were selected because they represent contexts in which foreign language anxiety commonly emerges (Horwitz et al., 1986). The study was conducted in senior high school settings in Indonesia and Vietnam to enable a cross-cultural examination of students' experiences within different educational and sociocultural environments. By focusing on classroom-based speaking activities, the study aimed to capture the contexts in which speaking anxiety is most likely to affect learners' confidence and participation.

3.2 Participants and Research Setting

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, which allows researchers to identify information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). The study involved ten female Generation Z students aged 18 years, consisting of five participants from Indonesia and five from Vietnam. All participants were enrolled in public senior high schools and were in their final year of study.

Two inclusion criteria were used in participant selection: (1) relatively low performance in English-speaking assessments and (2) self-reported experiences of speaking anxiety during English-speaking activities. Final-year students were selected because speaking performance at this stage is frequently evaluated through formal assessments and is associated with increased academic demands. Furthermore, learners with lower speaking performance were considered more likely to provide rich insights into the challenges associated with speaking anxiety and confidence development.

In addition to interview data, contextual information related to classroom practices and learning environments was considered to support the interpretation of participants' experiences. This approach enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to speaking anxiety in different EFL settings.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which provided participants with opportunities to describe their experiences while allowing the researcher to explore emerging issues in greater depth (Creswell, 2011). The interviews focused on participants' perceptions of speaking anxiety, factors contributing to their anxiety, and the strategies they employed to manage it.

Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. Indonesian participants were interviewed face-to-face, whereas Vietnamese participants participated through WhatsApp video calls due to geographical constraints. To facilitate accurate and comfortable expression of personal experiences, interviews were conducted in Indonesian for Indonesian participants and in a combination of English and Vietnamese for Vietnamese participants. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were carefully observed throughout the research process. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw from the research at any stage without penalty. To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in place of real names, and all personal information was kept confidential. Prior approval to conduct the study was obtained from the academic supervisor and the participating schools before data collection commenced.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). This method was selected because it provides a systematic procedure for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data.

The analysis involved six stages. First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data through repeated reading of the interview transcripts. Second, meaningful segments of data were coded systematically. Third, related codes were grouped into potential themes. Fourth, the preliminary themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and relevance to the research questions. Fifth, the themes were clearly defined and named. Finally, the themes were interpreted and reported in relation to the study's objectives and theoretical framework.

Through this process, several overarching themes emerged, including communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and coping strategies. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to identify recurring patterns across participants' experiences while also capturing contextual differences between Indonesian and Vietnamese learners. These findings provided insights into how Generation Z students experience and manage speaking anxiety in EFL learning environments.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Communication Apprehension

The findings reveal that communication apprehension constitutes one of the most prevalent dimensions of speaking anxiety experienced by Generation Z learners in both Indonesia and Vietnam. A considerable number of participants reported feelings of nervousness, hesitation, fear, and low self-confidence when required to communicate in English, particularly in situations involving spontaneous oral interaction. These emotional responses indicate that speaking English is frequently perceived as a demanding task that exposes learners to potential errors and negative evaluation.

A Vietnamese participant expressed this concern by stating, *"Tôi cảm thấy lo lắng vì tôi không giỏi tiếng Anh"* (I feel worried because I am not good at English). Likewise, an Indonesian participant remarked, *"Saya merasa sedikit gugup dan takut salah"* (I feel a little nervous and afraid of making mistakes). Participants from both countries further indicated that they experienced discomfort when they were unexpectedly called upon to answer questions or speak in front of their classmates without prior preparation.

Similar perceptions emerged from other participants. One Vietnamese participant stated, *"Tôi thường cảm thấy lo lắng khi nói tiếng Anh với giáo viên hoặc bạn bè có trình độ tiếng Anh rất tốt"* (I often feel nervous when speaking English with teachers or friends who have very good English skills). Another participant explained, *"Tôi cảm thấy sợ khi phải thuyết trình bằng tiếng Anh vì khả năng phát âm của tôi chưa tốt"* (I feel afraid when I have to give presentations in English because my pronunciation is not good enough). These responses suggest that communication apprehension is closely associated with learners' perceptions of their linguistic competence, particularly in relation to pronunciation and overall language proficiency. The presence of more proficient interlocutors, such as teachers or highly skilled peers, appears to intensify feelings of inadequacy and anxiety.

Comparable experiences were reported by Indonesian participants. One participant stated, *"Pernah, seperti saat sedang ujian bahasa Inggris saya disuruh berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris dan itu membuat saya merasa sangat gugup"* (I experienced it during an English examination when I was asked to speak English, which made me very nervous). Another participant reported, *"Ya gugup, saat berpidato dalam bahasa Inggris"* (Yes, I feel nervous when delivering a speech in English). These statements indicate that formal speaking situations, such as examinations and public speeches, often trigger heightened levels of anxiety. The requirement to perform in front of an audience increases learners' self-consciousness and concern about making mistakes, thereby reducing their confidence in using English orally.

Overall, the findings suggest that learners perceive oral communication in English as a challenging activity characterized by uncertainty, immediate language processing, and the possibility of making linguistic errors. Communication apprehension becomes particularly pronounced in situations that require spontaneous responses, where learners have limited time to formulate ideas and monitor language accuracy. Such circumstances place considerable cognitive and emotional demands on learners, often resulting in increased anxiety and reduced willingness to communicate.

A cross-cultural comparison reveals both similarities and subtle differences in the manifestation of communication apprehension. Vietnamese participants predominantly linked their anxiety to perceived deficiencies in linguistic competence, including pronunciation and overall English proficiency. In contrast, Indonesian participants more

frequently emphasized emotional reactions, such as nervousness, embarrassment, and fear of making mistakes during public speaking situations. Despite these differences, communication apprehension emerged as a common experience among participants from both countries. This finding suggests that spontaneous oral communication remains a significant source of anxiety for Generation Z learners, regardless of cultural context, highlighting the persistent challenges associated with speaking English as a foreign language.

4.1.2 Fear of Negative Evaluation

Another major theme emerging from the data is fear of negative evaluation, which was consistently identified as a significant source of speaking anxiety among Generation Z learners in both Indonesia and Vietnam. Participants frequently expressed concerns about how their English-speaking performance would be perceived by teachers and peers. These concerns often stemmed from the possibility of making mistakes, receiving criticism, or being viewed negatively by others, all of which contributed to heightened anxiety during oral communication activities.

An Indonesian participant explained, "*Saya takut dipermalukan atau ditertawakan oleh teman*" (I am afraid of being embarrassed or laughed at by my friends). Similarly, a Vietnamese participant stated, "*Tôi sợ bị đánh giá khi nói sai*" (I am afraid of being judged when I make mistakes while speaking). These statements illustrate that learners are highly sensitive to external evaluations and often associate speaking performance with potential social and academic consequences. As a result, the anticipation of negative judgments can create psychological barriers that discourage active participation in English-speaking activities.

Additional responses further demonstrate the prevalence of this concern. A Vietnamese participant stated, "*Tôi sợ bị bạn bè cười nhạo hoặc chế giễu khi mắc lỗi*" (I am afraid of being laughed at or mocked by my friends when I make mistakes), while another participant reported, "*Tôi sợ bạn bè trêu chọc và nghĩ rằng tiếng Anh của tôi rất kém*" (I am afraid that my friends will tease me and think that my English is very poor). These responses suggest that learners not only fear making mistakes but also worry about the social implications of those mistakes. The possibility of being ridiculed, underestimated, or perceived as linguistically incompetent appears to intensify feelings of anxiety and self-consciousness.

Indonesian participants expressed similar concerns. One participant stated, "*Takut salah dan akhirnya malu*" (I am afraid of making mistakes and feeling embarrassed). Another explained that speaking anxiety occurs because "*takut salah, tidak percaya diri seolah olah orang lain akan menertawakan kita*" (I am afraid of making mistakes and lack confidence, as if other people will laugh at me). These statements indicate that fear of negative evaluation is closely linked to diminished self-confidence. Learners tend to anticipate unfavorable reactions from others, even when such reactions may not actually occur, which in turn discourages them from engaging in classroom communication.

The findings suggest that speaking anxiety is strongly shaped by social pressure and learners' perceptions of how they are evaluated by others. Many participants reported hesitating to participate in speaking activities because they expected criticism, negative comments, or unfavorable judgments. This anticipation of negative evaluation often reduced their willingness to communicate and limited opportunities for language practice. Consequently, fear of evaluation becomes a self-reinforcing cycle in which anxiety leads to

avoidance of speaking activities, thereby restricting learners' opportunities to develop communicative competence.

A cross-cultural comparison reveals both commonalities and distinctive patterns in the way fear of negative evaluation is experienced. Indonesian participants tended to emphasize peer reactions, social embarrassment, and concerns about being laughed at or rejected by their classmates. Their responses indicate that maintaining positive social relationships and peer acceptance plays a central role in shaping speaking confidence. In contrast, Vietnamese participants more frequently associated anxiety with linguistic accuracy and formal evaluation. Their concerns focused on being judged for grammatical, lexical, or pronunciation errors, reflecting a stronger emphasis on language performance and correctness. These differences may be influenced by variations in classroom culture, educational expectations, and assessment practices. Nevertheless, despite these cultural nuances, fear of negative evaluation emerged as a shared and influential factor affecting learners' willingness to speak English, highlighting the important role of social and evaluative contexts in the development of speaking anxiety among Generation Z learners.

4.1.3 Test Anxiety and Coping Strategies

The third major theme identified in the data is test anxiety, which emerged as a significant factor influencing participants' speaking performance. Both Indonesian and Vietnamese learners reported experiencing substantially higher levels of anxiety during formal speaking assessments than during routine classroom interactions. The findings suggest that evaluative situations, particularly those involving grades and performance judgments, intensify learners' concerns about their language abilities and increase the pressure associated with oral communication.

One Indonesian participant stated, "*Saya biasanya merasa gugup saat ujian speaking karena takut salah grammar*" (I usually feel nervous during speaking examinations because I am afraid of making grammatical mistakes). Similarly, a Vietnamese participant explained, "*Tôi rất lo lắng khi thi nói tiếng Anh*" (I feel very anxious during English-speaking examinations). These responses indicate that formal assessment contexts are often perceived as high-stakes situations in which learners become increasingly aware of their linguistic performance and potential shortcomings. The fear of making errors, particularly those that may affect grades or academic evaluation, appears to heighten feelings of tension and anxiety.

Other participants reported similar experiences, emphasizing that speaking tests and graded presentations were considerably more stressful than ordinary classroom communication. This finding suggests that the evaluative nature of formal assessments creates additional psychological pressure beyond the challenges of language production itself. During examinations, learners must simultaneously manage content delivery, language accuracy, fluency, and audience expectations, which can increase cognitive load and contribute to heightened anxiety.

The findings further indicate that formal assessment situations intensify anxiety because students become highly conscious of evaluation, grading criteria, and performance expectations. As a result, concerns regarding grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, fluency, and the possibility of failure become more pronounced. In such contexts, learners often focus not only on communicating meaning but also on avoiding mistakes, which may interfere with their ability to speak naturally and confidently.

Despite these challenges, participants actively employed a variety of coping strategies to manage their speaking anxiety. The data reveal both shared and culturally distinctive approaches to anxiety management. Vietnamese participants generally favored structured and systematic learning methods, frequently utilizing language-learning applications and regular practice routines to improve their speaking proficiency and confidence. Applications such as *Duolingo* and *Elsa Speak* were commonly mentioned as useful tools for enhancing language skills and reducing anxiety through repeated practice.

Additional responses further illustrate these strategies. A Vietnamese participant explained, *"Tôi liên tục luyện tập và ôn tập mỗi ngày"* (I continuously practice and review every day), while another participant stated, *"Tôi thường ghi âm giọng nói của mình, học từ vựng và luyện nói tiếng Anh với bạn bè"* (I often record my voice, learn vocabulary, and practice speaking English with my friends). These responses demonstrate a strong emphasis on consistent preparation, self-monitoring, and skill development as mechanisms for reducing anxiety. Recording one's voice, reviewing vocabulary, and engaging in repeated speaking practice appear to help learners become more familiar with spoken English and improve their confidence over time.

In contrast, Indonesian participants tended to adopt more informal and socially oriented strategies. Many reported practicing with friends, consuming English-language content through digital platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, and engaging in self-directed speaking exercises. These approaches suggest that learners sought to increase their exposure to authentic language use while creating less stressful opportunities for practice.

For example, one Indonesian participant stated, *"Ya, saya sering berlatih berbicara sendiri di rumah dan mencoba mengucapkan kosakata baru dengan benar"* (Yes, I often practice speaking by myself at home and try to pronounce new vocabulary correctly). Another participant explained, *"Latihan rutin dan mempersiapkan materi sebelum berbicara sangat efektif untuk meningkatkan kepercayaan diri"* (Regular practice and preparing materials before speaking are very effective for improving self-confidence). These statements highlight the importance of preparation and repeated practice in fostering a sense of competence and reducing anxiety. By familiarizing themselves with vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking content in advance, learners reported feeling more confident and better prepared for oral communication tasks.

Although the coping strategies varied in form and implementation, they shared a common objective: enhancing learners' confidence and reducing anxiety before speaking activities. Whether through structured technological resources, regular self-practice, peer interaction, or increased exposure to English-language content, participants sought to strengthen their communicative competence and psychological readiness. While these strategies did not completely eliminate speaking anxiety, most participants perceived them as effective in improving their preparedness, self-confidence, and willingness to engage in oral communication.

A cross-cultural comparison reveals that Vietnamese learners generally relied on more structured and proficiency-oriented approaches, emphasizing systematic practice, language-learning applications, and continuous skill development. Indonesian learners, on the other hand, tended to employ more flexible and socially interactive methods, focusing on informal practice opportunities and exposure to authentic English content. Despite these differences, participants from both countries recognized the value of consistent practice and preparation as essential strategies for managing speaking anxiety. This finding underscores the importance of fostering supportive learning environments and encouraging effective

coping mechanisms to help Generation Z learners navigate the challenges of English-speaking performance.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Generation Z learners experience English-speaking anxiety through three interrelated dimensions: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. These findings provide strong empirical support for the Foreign Language Anxiety Theory proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986), which conceptualizes foreign language anxiety as a situation-specific construct comprising communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The emergence of these three dimensions among both Indonesian and Vietnamese participants indicates that speaking anxiety remains a persistent emotional and psychological barrier in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning contexts. Consistent with previous research, the findings suggest that anxiety negatively influences learners' confidence, willingness to communicate, and oral performance, particularly in situations requiring spontaneous language production and public communication.

A significant contribution of the present study lies in its focus on Generation Z learners, a cohort whose communication practices have been profoundly shaped by digital technologies. While previous studies have primarily examined speaking anxiety from linguistic, cognitive, and affective perspectives, the present findings suggest that contemporary communication habits may also influence learners' experiences of foreign language anxiety. As digital natives, Generation Z learners are accustomed to communicating through text messages, social networking platforms, and digital applications that allow time for planning, revising, and editing messages before transmission. In contrast, classroom speaking activities require immediate verbal responses, real-time interaction, and rapid linguistic processing. The transition from asynchronous digital communication to spontaneous face-to-face communication appears to create additional psychological pressure, contributing to reduced speaking confidence and heightened anxiety. This finding extends existing understandings of foreign language anxiety by highlighting the potential role of digital communication culture in shaping learners' oral communication experiences.

The findings related to communication apprehension reveal that many participants experienced discomfort when required to communicate in English without prior preparation. Learners frequently reported nervousness when responding to unexpected questions, participating in classroom discussions, or delivering oral presentations. Such findings align with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) argument that communication apprehension arises when learners perceive themselves as lacking sufficient communicative competence to express their ideas effectively in a foreign language. However, the present study suggests that communication apprehension among Generation Z learners may be intensified by their familiarity with digital communication environments that permit greater control over message construction. Because online communication allows users to carefully formulate and revise responses, spontaneous speaking situations may be perceived as more demanding, unpredictable, and threatening. Consequently, learners may experience greater anxiety when confronted with communicative situations that require immediate language production and real-time interaction.

Fear of negative evaluation emerged as another prominent source of speaking anxiety. Participants consistently expressed concerns about being criticized, judged, laughed at, or negatively evaluated by teachers and peers. This finding is consistent with Horwitz et

al.'s (1986) proposition that fear of negative evaluation constitutes one of the most influential components of foreign language anxiety. Learners' concerns regarding possible mistakes often resulted in avoidance behaviors, including reluctance to participate in classroom discussions, reduced willingness to volunteer answers, and a tendency to remain silent even when they possessed relevant knowledge. Such behaviors demonstrate how anxiety can impede language development by limiting opportunities for meaningful interaction, communicative practice, and feedback, all of which are essential for language acquisition.

The cross-cultural comparison further revealed important differences in the manifestation of fear of negative evaluation. Indonesian participants predominantly emphasized peer reactions, social embarrassment, and concerns about being laughed at by classmates. In contrast, Vietnamese participants were more likely to associate anxiety with linguistic accuracy, academic performance, and formal evaluation. These differences may reflect broader sociocultural and educational influences operating within each context. Indonesian learners' concerns appear to be closely associated with collectivist cultural values and face-saving orientations, where maintaining positive interpersonal relationships and avoiding public embarrassment are highly important. Meanwhile, Vietnamese learners' stronger emphasis on language accuracy and performance evaluation may be influenced by examination-oriented educational traditions and rigorous academic expectations. These findings suggest that although the underlying dimensions of foreign language anxiety may be universal, their specific manifestations are mediated by local cultural norms, educational systems, and classroom practices.

The findings concerning test anxiety further highlight the significant role of assessment-related pressure in shaping learners' emotional experiences. Participants from both countries reported substantially higher anxiety levels during speaking examinations and graded presentations than during routine classroom communication. This finding supports Horwitz et al.'s (1986) assertion that formal evaluation contexts intensify anxiety because learners become increasingly aware of the potential consequences of their performance. During speaking assessments, concerns regarding grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and overall communicative effectiveness create additional cognitive demands that may interfere with performance. From a cognitive perspective, anxiety consumes attentional resources that would otherwise be available for language processing, thereby reducing speaking effectiveness. Consequently, learners may perform below their actual level of linguistic competence, reinforcing perceptions of inadequacy and contributing to a cycle of anxiety and avoidance.

Another noteworthy finding concerns the coping strategies employed by learners to manage speaking anxiety and enhance confidence. Although participants from both countries actively sought ways to improve their speaking ability, notable differences emerged in their preferred approaches. Vietnamese learners generally favored structured learning methods, including language-learning applications such as Duolingo and Elsa Speak, daily practice routines, vocabulary review, and self-recording activities. These strategies reflect a systematic approach to language improvement and a strong focus on skill development through repetitive practice and feedback. In contrast, Indonesian learners tended to prefer more informal and socially oriented strategies, including practicing with friends, watching English-language content on YouTube, and engaging with English-language

materials on social media platforms such as TikTok. These approaches emphasize exposure, familiarity, and communicative interaction rather than formalized skill training.

The effectiveness of these coping strategies can be interpreted through the lens of the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Theory proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998). According to this framework, learners are more likely to engage in communication when they possess sufficient confidence, perceived competence, and psychological readiness. The strategies identified in the present study appear to function as mechanisms for strengthening these psychological resources. Through repeated practice, increased language exposure, and enhanced familiarity with spoken English, learners gradually develop greater confidence in their communicative abilities. As a result, they become more willing to participate in speaking activities despite experiencing varying degrees of anxiety. This finding reinforces the notion that anxiety reduction and confidence building are closely interconnected processes that influence learners' willingness to communicate.

The findings also underscore the increasingly complex role of digital technology and social media in contemporary language learning. On the one hand, digital platforms provide valuable opportunities for autonomous learning, language exposure, pronunciation practice, and communicative engagement beyond the classroom. The widespread use of language-learning applications, online videos, and social networking platforms demonstrates how technology can facilitate language development and support learners' efforts to manage anxiety. On the other hand, extensive reliance on mediated communication may inadvertently reduce opportunities for spontaneous face-to-face interaction. As learners become increasingly accustomed to communicating through digital channels, they may develop greater confidence in online environments than in direct oral communication settings. This imbalance may contribute to the confidence gap observed among Generation Z learners, who often demonstrate strong digital communication skills but experience anxiety during real-time spoken interaction.

Taken together, these findings suggest that speaking anxiety among Generation Z learners is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by an interplay of linguistic, psychological, technological, and sociocultural factors. The study therefore extends traditional perspectives on foreign language anxiety by incorporating the influence of digital communication culture into the discussion. While the fundamental dimensions identified by Horwitz et al. (1986) remain highly relevant, the experiences of contemporary learners indicate that communication practices associated with the digital era may amplify or reshape these dimensions in unique ways.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that language educators should move beyond an exclusive emphasis on linguistic accuracy and give greater attention to learners' emotional experiences during speaking activities. Creating supportive classroom environments, providing constructive rather than punitive feedback, encouraging collaborative learning, and gradually increasing the complexity of speaking tasks may help reduce anxiety and foster communicative confidence. Furthermore, educators may benefit from integrating familiar digital tools into speaking instruction to bridge the gap between students' digital communication habits and face-to-face communication demands. By leveraging technology as a scaffold rather than treating it as a separate learning domain, teachers can facilitate a smoother transition from mediated communication to spontaneous oral interaction. Such an approach may ultimately enhance learners' confidence, willingness to communicate, and overall speaking proficiency in English.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated how Generation Z learners from Indonesia and Vietnam experience and manage speaking anxiety in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The findings revealed that speaking anxiety is primarily manifested through communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, all of which influence learners' confidence, willingness to communicate, and participation in speaking activities. Although both groups shared similar anxiety-related experiences, notable cross-cultural differences emerged. Indonesian learners were more concerned with peer reactions, social embarrassment, and interpersonal relationships, whereas Vietnamese learners emphasized linguistic accuracy, academic performance, and formal assessment. The study also identified the influence of digital communication practices on speaking anxiety. As digital natives, participants reported greater confidence in text-based and asynchronous communication than in spontaneous face-to-face interaction, suggesting a gap between digital communicative competence and oral communication performance.

The findings further demonstrated that learners actively employ various coping strategies to manage anxiety, including regular practice, increased exposure to English, and preparation for speaking tasks. Vietnamese participants generally preferred structured strategies such as language-learning applications and self-monitoring activities, while Indonesian learners favored peer interaction, English-language media, and social media engagement. These findings highlight speaking anxiety as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by linguistic, psychological, sociocultural, and technological factors. Consequently, EFL educators should create supportive learning environments, provide constructive feedback, encourage gradual participation in speaking activities, and integrate familiar digital tools into instruction. While the study is limited by its small sample of ten female participants and qualitative design, it offers valuable insights into the experiences of Generation Z learners and suggests the need for future research involving larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal approaches. Overall, speaking anxiety among Generation Z learners emerges from a complex interaction of personal, cultural, educational, and technological influences that must be addressed to foster greater confidence and willingness to communicate in English.

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WHITEWASHING HEATHCLIFF: RACIAL ERASURE IN WUTHERING HEIGHTS ADAPTATIONS (2011, 2026)

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Abstract

This study examines the whitewashing of Heathcliff in film adaptations of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and argues that such practices constitute a form of structural racial erasure. Drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT), adaptation theory, close reading, and Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA), the study investigates how Heathcliff's racial identity is constructed in the novel and represented in the 2011 and 2026 film adaptations. Film adaptations play a crucial role in shaping public interpretations of literary texts, yet they often reproduce dominant racial ideologies through casting practices. The findings reveal that Heathcliff's racial otherness is central to the narrative, shaping his experiences of exclusion, marginalization, and revenge. A review of adaptation history demonstrates a persistent pattern of whitewashing, with Andrea Arnold's 2011 adaptation serving as a notable exception through its casting of a Black actor as Heathcliff. Comparative visual analysis further shows that the 2011 adaptation foregrounds Heathcliff's racial identity through casting and cinematographic techniques, whereas Emerald Fennell's 2026 adaptation minimizes racial difference and reconstructs Heathcliff as a racially unmarked romantic hero. The study concludes that the repeated erasure of Heathcliff's racial identity reflects broader structural inequalities within the film industry and significantly alters the cultural interpretation of Brontë's novel. By integrating CRT, close reading, and VDA, this research contributes to adaptation studies and media representation scholarship by demonstrating how racial erasure operates across literary adaptations and reinforces dominant racial narratives within contemporary visual culture.

Keywords: *miscasting; mischaracterization; movie adaptation; perfect casting; racism; wuthering heights.*

1. Introduction

The whitewashing of characters of color in film adaptations of canonical literary works represents one of the most visible manifestations of structural racism within contemporary media industries. Whitewashing, defined here as the systematic practice of casting white actors in roles associated with characters of color, or of erasing a character's established racial identity through visual and narrative recoding, has been documented across a wide range of Hollywood adaptations (Dowie-Chin et al., 2020). Far from being an isolated casting anomaly, it constitutes what Critical Race Theory identifies as a systemic institutional behavior: one in which racism operates not through the explicit prejudice of

individuals but through the normalized conventions and commercial logics that structure the film industry as a whole (Bhopal, 2023; Delgado et al., 2017)

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) offers a particularly instructive case for examining this phenomenon. Heathcliff, the novel's central protagonist, is constructed through a dense network of racially marked language described variously as a "dark-skinned gipsy" (Chapter I), "a little Lascar" (Chapter VI), and "an American or Spanish castaway" (Chapter VI) terminology that, within the social and colonial context of mid-Victorian England, functions to position him as a racial and cultural outsider (Meyer, 1996; Michie, 1993). His racial otherness is not peripheral to the narrative but structurally constitutive of the social exclusion, humiliation, and dispossession he endures, and therefore of the resentment that drives the novel's central conflict. To misread or visually erase Heathcliff's racial identity is to alter the interpretive conditions of the text fundamentally. Despite this textual foundation, the overwhelming majority of film adaptations spanning from the 1920 silent film to the 2026 adaptation directed by Emerald Fennell have cast white or light-skinned actors in the role. Of all major English-language adaptations produced across more than a century, only Andrea Arnold's 2011 film cast a Black actor, James Howson, in the central role (Abraham, 2024; Thalken et al., 2024). The 2026 adaptation, in which Jacob Elordi plays a role, represents not an aberration but a continuation of a deeply entrenched pattern, one whose consistency across directorial generations and industrial contexts strongly suggests systemic rather than individual causes.

Scholarship at the intersection of film adaptation, racial representation, and Critical Race Theory has grown substantially in recent years, addressing whitewashing in Hollywood adaptations (Dowie-Chin et al., 2020), the reproduction of racial ideology through casting norms (Bhopal, 2023; Brown & Zuo, 2025), and the role of adaptation in reshaping literary characterization for commercial audiences (Abraham, 2024; Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013). However, a focused critical examination of how racial erasure specifically operates across the long adaptation history of *Wuthering Heights*, one that attends to both textual characterization and the visual strategies through which that characterization is retained or suppressed, remains absent from the literature. This gap is significant because *Wuthering Heights* presents a case in which racial identity is not incidental to but constitutive of the source text's thematic structure, making the repeated visual suppression of that identity a matter of both representational politics and literary interpretation.

This study addresses that gap through a three-method approach combining close reading of Brontë's novel, visual discourse analysis (VDA) of selected scenes from the 2011 Arnold and 2026 Fennell adaptations, and Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the primary interpretive framework. It is guided by three research questions: How is Heathcliff's racial identity constructed through language and narrative in Brontë's novel, and what is the structural function of that identity within the text? How has that identity been represented, minimized, or erased across the adaptation history of *Wuthering Heights*, and what structural factors account for this pattern? How do the Arnold and Fennell adaptations construct Heathcliff's racial identity visually, and what do the differences between them reveal about the industrial conditions governing racial representation in contemporary film? By situating the analysis of individual adaptations within both the textual evidence of the source novel and the broader structural context of the film industry, this study contributes a detailed literary-critical account of how racial identity functions within the original text, and demonstrates how Critical Race Theory, applied alongside visual discourse analysis, can illuminate the mechanisms by which racial erasure is produced and normalized across a

culturally significant adaptation history. This analysis contributes to film and cultural studies by highlighting how miscasting perpetuates systemic racism and distorts literary meaning.

This study addresses this gap by bringing the three fields into direct conversation. Through close reading of the novel, visual discourse analysis of the 2011 and 2026 film adaptations, and a CRT-informed structural analysis of adaptation history, it examines not only how Heathcliff's racial identity has been erased but why, and with what consequences for the cultural interpretation of a novel whose racial politics are inseparable from its literary significance.

The repeated casting of white actors as Heathcliff reflects broader structural biases within film industries, resulting in the gradual erasure of the character's racial identity. Although contemporary discussions on diversity and representation in media have increased, racial ambiguity in literary characters is still frequently minimized in adaptation practices.

Despite extensive scholarship on adaptation and representation, and racism in film, limited studies specifically examine Heathcliff's racial identity and its erasure in film adaptations of *Wuthering Heights*. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how whitewashing and racial misrepresentation reshape the interpretation of Heathcliff in contemporary adaptations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Heathcliff's Racial Identity in Brontë's Novel: Textual Evidence and Scholarly Context

The question of Heathcliff's racial identity has occupied Victorian literary scholarship for several decades. Susan Meyer's foundational study argues that Brontë's novel is deeply engaged with the racial politics of British imperialism, and that Heathcliff's darkened, ambiguous body functions as a site where the colonial anxieties of mid-Victorian England are played out within the domestic space of the family home (Meyer, 1996). Meyer identifies the novel's repeated racial epithets "dark-skinned gipsy" (Chapter I), "a little Lascar" (Chapter VI), "an American or Spanish castaway" (Chapter VI), not as casual characterization but as deliberate textual markers that situate Heathcliff within a recognizable Victorian taxonomy of racial otherness. Similarly, Elsie Michie reads Heathcliff's ambiguous origins as reflecting the instability of racial categories within a colonial society simultaneously dependent on and anxious about racial mixing (Michie, 1993). His darkness, both literal and figurative, marks him as outside the boundaries of normative English identity, a figure through whom Brontë mediates broader social tensions around class, race, and imperial order.

This body of Victorian scholarship establishes a clear critical consensus: Heathcliff's racial identity is not incidental but structurally constitutive of the novel's central conflicts. His social exclusion within the Earnshaw household, the systematic humiliation he endures at Hindley's hands, and his subsequent transformation into a figure of calculated revenge are all inseparable from his positioning as a racial outsider. As Cannon Schmitt has observed in his work on the Gothic and colonial bodies, the racially othered figure in Victorian fiction frequently functions as both symptom and critique of the social order that excludes him. Heathcliff's desire for social ascension and revenge can thus be understood not merely as personal grievance but as a colonial counter-narrative embedded within the domestic realist genre, a dimension that any adaptation suppressing his racial identity necessarily forecloses. Despite this scholarly consensus, the adaptation history of *Wuthering Heights* reveals a sustained and systematic departure from the novel's racial characterization. Across more

than a century of film adaptations, the textual evidence for Heathcliff's racial otherness has been consistently minimized or suppressed in the visual medium. The critical task for this study is therefore not merely to note this discrepancy but to account for it to examine what structural conditions produce and sustain racial erasure across such a long adaptation history.

2.2 Adaptation Theory: Fidelity, Reinterpretation, and Ideological Reproduction

Adaptation theory provides the conceptual vocabulary through which the transformation of literary texts into cinematic form can be analyzed. Linda Hutcheon's foundational account defines adaptation as a form of "repetition without replication," in which the adapted work maintains a palimpsestic relationship with its source, simultaneously invoking and departing from the original (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2013, p. 7). For Hutcheon, adaptations are not inferior copies but independent interpretive acts shaped by the cultural, institutional, and technological conditions of their moment of production. This framework is significant for the present study because it licenses an analysis attentive not only to what adaptations change but to why, to the cultural and institutional logics that determine which elements of a source text are retained, transformed, or discarded.

Robert Stam's work on adaptation and ideology extends Hutcheon's framework in a direction directly relevant to questions of race. Stam argues that film adaptations are not culturally neutral translations but ideologically freighted acts of rewriting, in which the selection and emphasis of narrative elements reflect the dominant cultural assumptions of the production context (Stam, 2004). Applied to the case of *Wuthering Heights*, this framework suggests that the repeated suppression of Heathcliff's racial identity across adaptation history is not a neutral aesthetic choice but an ideological one, a systematic privileging of whiteness that aligns with, and thereby reproduces, the racial hierarchies embedded in the structures of the Anglo-American film industry.

The role of audience reception in shaping the cultural life of adaptations further complicates the picture. Diko and Saule (2024) demonstrate that readers frequently develop strong personal interpretations of literary characters, causing film adaptations to become contested sites when visual representations depart significantly from textual descriptions. Thalken (2024) adds that, for many audiences, adaptation films function as the primary and sometimes sole point of access to a literary work, meaning that the visual characterization of a figure like Heathcliff effectively becomes the culturally dominant version of the character. The implications for racial representation are significant: when whitewashed adaptations become the dominant cultural referent for a literary text, they do not merely misrepresent the source but actively reshape its cultural memory, producing an audience whose understanding of the character is divorced from the racial identity that drives the original narrative.

2.3 Critical Race Theory and Structural Racism in Media Representation

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides the primary analytical framework for this study. As elaborated by Delgado and Stefancic (2017) CRT holds that racism is not reducible to individual prejudice but is embedded within the structures, institutions, and normalized practices of society. The theory's insistence on examining the systemic rather than the interpersonal dimensions of racial inequality makes it particularly well-suited for analyzing patterns of behavior, such as the sustained whitewashing of a literary character across more than a century, that cannot be attributed to the intentions or biases of any single individual.

Within media studies, this structural perspective has been developed by several scholars whose work is directly relevant to the present analysis. Brown and Zuo (2025) demonstrate that race in film functions as a social and political construct sustained by institutional power, operating through casting norms, distribution decisions, and the commercial logics of the studio system rather than through explicit individual discrimination. Bhopal (2023) extends this argument to cultural institutions more broadly, showing that racial inequality persists through structural systems that normalize whiteness as an unremarked default, a normalization so deep that departures from it (such as Arnold's 2011 casting of a Black Heathcliff) require explicit justification in critical discourse, while adherence to it does not. Sere et al. (2020) further argue that film representation actively constructs cultural identity: when media systems consistently render certain racial identities invisible or marginal, they do not merely reflect social norms but participate in producing them.

The specific practice of whitewashing has been examined within this structural framework by Dowie-Chin (2020), whose analysis of Hollywood's adaptation of Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* demonstrates how the racial identity of a source text is systematically minimized in the visual medium through a combination of casting choices, narrative framing, and aesthetic decisions. Dowie-Chin argues that critical race media literacy, the capacity to recognize and interrogate these practices, is essential for audiences and scholars alike. Her case study provides a directly comparable parallel to the *Wuthering Heights* adaptations examined in this study: in both instances, a text in which the protagonist's racial identity is structurally central to the narrative is adapted in ways that render that identity visually and narratively peripheral.

Lawrence and Hylton (2022) further demonstrate that CRT can be productively combined with visual and semiotic methods of analysis, providing a methodological basis for examining racial representation in film. Their approach informs the integration of Critical Race Theory with visual discourse analysis in the present study's methodology, discussed in Section 3.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative interpretive research design situated within the humanities tradition of literary and cultural analysis. Qualitative methods are appropriate here because the object of inquiry, the construction and suppression of racial identity across literary and cinematic texts, is not reducible to quantifiable variables but requires sustained interpretive engagement with language, image, and cultural context (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The study integrates three complementary methods: close reading of Brontë's novel, visual discourse analysis (VDA) of selected scenes from two film adaptations, and comparative textual and cinematic analysis. These three methods are not applied sequentially, but in dialogue with one another. The close reading of the novel establishes the textual baseline against which the VDA findings are evaluated, and the comparative analysis synthesizes both to address the study's three research questions.

Critical Race Theory (CRT), as elaborated by Delgado and Stefancic (2017). It functions as the overarching theoretical framework within which all three methods operate. CRT is not employed here as a method in itself but as an interpretive lens that orients the analytical questions: it directs attention toward structural rather than individual explanations of racial patterns, foregrounds the normalization of whiteness as an institutional default, and requires the analyst to examine whose racial identity is rendered

visible and whose is suppressed and by what institutional mechanisms. This distinction between CRT as a framework and the three named methods as analytical procedures is critical; conflating them, as prior studies sometimes do, produces methodological imprecision that weakens the analysis.

3.2 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The primary literary data source is Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, cited throughout from the Norris Classics edition physical book (1847/2025), which is used for its scholarly apparatus and critical introduction. Passages for close reading were selected according to two criteria: (1) they contain explicit racial or ethnic descriptors applied to Heathcliff, and (2) they situate Heathcliff's racial otherness in direct relation to acts of social exclusion, class discrimination, or narrative conflict. This produced a corpus of fourteen passages distributed across Volumes I and II of the novel, ranging from Mr. Lockwood's initial description of Heathcliff in Chapter I to Nelly Dean's retrospective characterizations in the late chapters.

The two film adaptations selected as cinematic data sources are Andrea Arnold's *Wuthering Heights* (2011, UK, Film4/Ecosse Films) and Emerald Fennell's *Wuthering Heights* (2026, UK/USA). These two adaptations were selected for three convergent reasons. First, they represent the two most recent major English-language theatrical adaptations of the novel, meaning they are the most culturally proximate to contemporary discourses about diversity and racial representation in film, making any casting decision within them a culturally legible choice rather than a historically distant one. Second, and crucially, they represent opposed casting choices in relation to Heathcliff's racial identity: Arnold cast a Black actor (James Howson) in the role, while Fennell cast a white actor (Jacob Elordi), making the two films a natural contrastive pair for comparative analysis. Third, both adaptations have generated significant critical commentary on the question of Heathcliff's race, providing a substantial secondary corpus of film reviews and scholarly responses against which the VDA findings can be triangulated.

The decision to exclude earlier adaptations (1920, 1939, 1970, 1992) from the primary analysis is an acknowledged limitation of the study. These films are not ignored in the contextual account of adaptation history (Section 2.1) but are not subjected to full VDA due to the constraints of the present study's scope. Future research extending the VDA methodology to the complete adaptation history of the novel would provide a more comprehensive longitudinal account of racial erasure across the twentieth century.

3.3 Method 1: Close Reading

Close reading, as the foundational method of literary studies, involves sustained, theoretically informed attention to the language, rhetoric, and semantic structure of a literary text to connect textual particulars to broader interpretive, historical, and cultural questions (Culler, 2007; Ohrvik, 2024). In this study, close reading is applied to *Wuthering Heights* to establish what the novel's language actually says about Heathcliff's racial and ethnic identity, a necessary prior step before any evaluation of how adaptations depart from it can be made.

The close reading procedure was organized around three analytical categories derived from the CRT framework and from the existing Victorian scholarship reviewed in Section 2.1:

Category	Description	Example from text
RACIAL MARKER	Explicit ethnic or racial descriptors applied to Heathcliff by the narrator or other characters	"a little Lascar," "dark-skinned gipsy," "American or Spanish castaway" (Ch. I, VI)
SOCIAL EXCLUSION	Passages in which Heathcliff's racial or cultural otherness is directly linked to acts of social rejection, humiliation, or dispossession	Hindley's degradation of Heathcliff after Mr. Earnshaw's death (Ch. VI); Edgar's refusal to treat Heathcliff as a social equal (Ch. VIII)
COUNTER-NARRATIVE	Passages in which Heathcliff reclaims or weaponizes his outsider identity — moments of resistance or reversal that can be read as a colonial counter-narrative (cf. Schmitt, 1997)	Heathcliff's return as a wealthy gentleman (Ch. X); his systematic acquisition of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights

3.4 Method 2: Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA)

Visual discourse analysis, as developed by Gillian Rose in her landmark methodological text *Visual Methodologies* (Rose, 2014). It provides a systematic framework for examining how images, including moving images, construct meaning through their compositional, technological, and social dimensions. Rose's framework identifies three "sites" at which meaning is produced in visual texts: the site of production (the conditions and decisions through which an image is made), the site of the image itself (its formal and compositional properties), and the site of audiencing (how the image is received and interpreted). Applied to film, this three-site model allows the analyst to examine not only what an image shows but how it shows it, under what industrial conditions it was produced, and how it positions its audience in relation to what it depicts.

For each of the two film adaptations, scenes were selected for VDA according to the following criteria: (1) scenes in which Heathcliff appears prominently as the focal subject of the frame, allowing assessment of how his physical appearance and racial identity are visually constructed; (2) scenes that correspond directly to source passages in the novel coded under the three categories above, enabling systematic text-to-film comparison; and (3) scenes that have been specifically discussed in published critical reviews or scholarly commentary, providing a secondary body of evidence against which the analysis can be triangulated.

This produced a corpus of eight scenes for detailed VDA, four from the Arnold (2011) adaptation and four from the Fennell (2026) adaptation as specified in Table 2 below. For each scene, the following visual elements were analyzed:

Visual element	Analytical question
Casting and physical appearance	How does the actor's physical appearance (skin tone, features, body language) correspond to or depart from the novel's racial descriptors?

Visual element	Analytical question
Cinematography and lighting	How does the film's visual grammar — lens choice, lighting, color grading — construct or suppress the racial visibility of the character?
Framing and shot scale	Is Heathcliff framed as an object of spectacle, agent of action, or object of romantic idealization? What does the shot scale (close-up, long shot) emphasize?
Costume and production design	How does the costuming of Heathcliff position him within or outside the social world of the film's <i>mise-en-scène</i> ?
Narrative emphasis and dialogue	Are racial epithets from the novel retained, adapted, or deleted in the screenplay? How does the screenplay handle scenes of racial exclusion?

3.5 Method 3: Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis synthesizes the findings of the close reading and VDA by systematically evaluating correspondence and divergence across three axes: (1) the textual-to-visual axis, comparing how the novel's racial language is rendered (or not rendered) in each adaptation's visual language; (2) the inter-adaptation axis, comparing the two films with each other to identify what specifically differs between Arnold's and Fennell's representational choices; and (3) the structural axis, reading both sets of differences through the CRT framework to ask what institutional and structural conditions make each set of choices intelligible.

This three-axis structure directly corresponds to the study's three research questions: RQ1 is addressed primarily through close reading and the textual-to-visual comparison; RQ2 through the inter-adaptation comparison situated within the broader adaptation history; and RQ3 through the structural CRT analysis. This mapping ensures that the methodology is fully accountable to the research questions and that the findings section can address each question with evidence drawn from the appropriate analytical procedure.

3.6 Trustworthiness, Positionality, and Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness in qualitative literary and cultural analysis is achieved not through statistical replication but through interpretive rigour: the transparency of analytical procedures, the consistency of category application, and the triangulation of findings across multiple evidence types (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, trustworthiness is strengthened in three ways. First, the close reading categories (Table 1) were defined prior to the analysis and applied consistently across all fourteen passages, with each coding decision supported by a direct quotation from the text. Second, the VDA findings are triangulated against published scholarly commentary and critical film reviews, which are cited as secondary evidence throughout Section 4. Third, where the analysis involves interpretive judgment, for example, in deciding whether a particular cinematographic choice constitutes racial suppression, the reasoning is made explicit in the analysis rather than presented as self-evident, allowing the reader to assess and, if necessary, contest the interpretation.

Positionality requires explicit acknowledgment in any study employing CRT as its framework, because CRT demands that researchers recognize how their own social positioning, including their racial identity, shapes their interpretive perspective (Delgado et al., 2017). The researchers in this study are Indonesian academics working within an English-language literary studies tradition. This positioning produces both specific strengths and specific limitations. As researchers writing from outside the dominant Anglo-American cultural context within which both the novel and its film adaptations were produced, we bring a perspective that is less likely to naturalize the whiteness normalization that CRT analysis seeks to denaturalize. At the same time, our distance from the specific cultural and historical contexts of Victorian racial discourse and contemporary Hollywood casting practices means that our analysis is necessarily dependent on published scholarly accounts of those contexts, which we have cited accordingly throughout.

All film material is analyzed under the provisions of fair dealing for criticism, research, and private study, in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (UK). No copyrighted material is reproduced beyond the extent necessary for critical commentary. All citations from Brontë's novel refer to the Norris Classics edition physical copy (1847/2025) and include chapter references to enable reader verification.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the findings of the study across three subsections, each corresponding directly to one of the three research questions established in Section 1. Section 4.1 addresses RQ1 through a close reading of Brontë's novel, establishing the textual evidence for Heathcliff's racial identity and its narrative function. Section 4.2 addresses RQ2 through a comparative account of adaptation history, analyzing the structural conditions that have produced a sustained pattern of racial erasure across more than a century of film adaptations. Section 4.3 addresses RQ3 through a visual discourse analysis of selected scenes from the 2011 Arnold and 2026 Fennell adaptations, reading the visual evidence through the CRT framework developed in the literature review.

4.1 Heathcliff's Racial Identity in Brontë's Novel: Close Reading Findings (RQ1)

4.1.1 Racial Markers: Textual Evidence and Victorian Semantic Context

The close reading of *Wuthering Heights* (1847/2025) identified fourteen passages containing explicit or implied racial markers applied to Heathcliff, distributed across Volumes I and II of the novel. Table 1 presents the six most analytically significant passages, coded according to the three categories established in the methodology (RACIAL MARKER, SOCIAL EXCLUSION, COUNTER-NARRATIVE).

Table 1.

Selected close reading findings: racial markers, social exclusion, and counter-narrative coding in Wuthering Heights

Passage (chapter)	Racial descriptor	Code	Narrative function
"a dark-skinned gipsy in aspect" (Ch. I)	Gipsy; dark-skinned	RACIAL MARKER	First description of Heathcliff establishes racial otherness as foundational to his identity before any other characterization

Passage (chapter)	Racial descriptor	Code	Narrative function
"a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway" (Ch. VI)	Lascar; Spanish; American	RACIAL MARKER	Three competing ethnic identities, all non-English, underline the deliberate ambiguity of his origins within a Victorian colonial taxonomy
Hindley degrades Heathcliff to the status of a servant after Mr. Earnshaw's death (Ch.VI)	[implicit: racial/class inferiority]	SOCIAL EXCLUSION	Heathcliff's racial otherness is directly weaponized to justify social dispossession; the structural link between racial marking and economic exclusion is established
Edgar Linton refuses to acknowledge Heathcliff as a social equal (Ch. VIII)	[implicit: racial inferiority]	SOCIAL EXCLUSION	Racial otherness operates not only within the Earnshaw household but within the broader social order; exclusion is systemic, not merely domestic
Heathcliff returns as a wealthy gentleman of unknown origin (Ch. X)	[racial ambiguity now weaponized]	COUNTER-NARRATIVE	Heathcliff's unreadable racial identity becomes a tool of social destabilization; the colonial counter-narrative begins when the excluded outsider acquires power within the system that excluded him
Heathcliff acquires legal ownership of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange (Ch. XXIX–XXXIII)	[racial other now dominant]	COUNTER-NARRATIVE	The colonial reversal is complete: the figure marked as racially inferior now owns the property of those who excluded him, a narrative resolution inseparable from the racial logic that drives it

4.2 The Counter-Narrative Category: Racial Identity as Structural Driver

The counter-narrative coding category requires separate discussion, because it is the dimension of Heathcliff's racial characterization most consistently suppressed in both adaptation scholarship and in the adaptations themselves. Meyer (1996) establishes that Heathcliff's revenge narrative can be read as a colonial counter-narrative: a story in which the racially othered subject, after systematic dispossession by the dominant social order, acquires the very instruments of that order, property, economic power, and legal authority,

and turns them against those who dispossessed him. Schmitt (1997) reinforces this reading by locating Heathcliff within a Gothic tradition of colonial return, in which the excluded racial other re-enters the domestic space he was expelled from, not as a suppliant but as a structural threat.

This dimension of the novel's racial politics is not incidental to its literary value; it is constitutive of it. The novel's power as a critique of Victorian class and racial hierarchy depends on the reader recognizing that Heathcliff's dispossession is racially motivated and that his revenge is therefore legible as a structural response to structural injustice. An adaptation that casts a white actor in the role of Heathcliff does not merely alter his appearance; it removes the foundational logic of the counter-narrative. A white Heathcliff who acquires Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange is simply a wealthy man pursuing personal vengeance. A racially othered Heathcliff who does the same is enacting a form of colonial reversal, a categorically different story with categorically different social and critical stakes.

4.2.1 Structural Racism and Adaptation History: CRT Analysis (RQ2)

The findings establish that Heathcliff's racial identity is textually unambiguous and narratively essential. The question posed by RQ2 is therefore not whether racial erasure has occurred across the adaptation history of *Wuthering Heights*; the evidence is clear that it has, but why it has occurred with such consistency, and what structural conditions account for its persistence across directorial generations, production contexts, and shifting cultural attitudes toward racial representation.

A longitudinal review of the adaptation record reveals a pattern of near-total whitewashing. Table 2 summarizes the casting of Heathcliff across the seven major English-language adaptations produced between 1920 and 2026.

Table 2.

Casting of Heathcliff across major English-language adaptations, 1920–2026

Year	Director	Actor (Heathcliff)	Racial identity of the actor	Production context
1920	A.V. Bramble	Milton Rosmer	White British	UK silent film
1939	William Wyler	Laurence Olivier	White British	Hollywood studio (Goldwyn)
1970	Robert Fuest	Timothy Dalton	White British	UK/US co-production
1992	Peter Kosminsky	Ralph Fiennes	White British	Paramount Pictures
2009	Coky Giedroyc	Tom Hardy	White British	ITV television production
2011	Andrea Arnold	James Howson	Black British	Film4 / Ecosse Films — only racially accurate casting in adaptation history

Year	Director	Actor (Heathcliff)	Racial identity of the actor	Production context
2026	Emerald Fennell	Jacob Elordi	White Australian	Major studio theatrical release

The pattern in Table 2 is unambiguous: six of seven major adaptations cast white actors in the role of Heathcliff, with the sole exception being Arnold's 2011 film. This consistency across more than a century, across multiple production companies, multiple national contexts (British and American), and across a period that has seen substantial shifts in public discourse about racial representation, cannot be attributed to individual directorial preference. It points instead to what Delgado and Stefancic (2017) identify as the ordinary functioning of structural racism: the routinization of racial hierarchy through normalized institutional practices that do not require individual prejudice to reproduce themselves.

Brown and Zuo (2025) provide the specific institutional mechanisms through which this structural normalization operates in film: casting decisions are shaped by commercial risk assessments in which the perceived "bankability" of actors, their capacity to generate box office return, is assessed in racialized terms, with white actors systematically rated as lower-risk investments for commercially significant roles. Bhopal (2023) further demonstrates that this normalization is self-reinforcing: because white casting is the historical default for major literary adaptations, it is perceived as the neutral, unmarked choice, requiring no justification, while racially accurate casting is perceived as a deliberate, marked departure requiring critical defense. The reception history of the two adaptations examined in this study confirms this dynamic precisely: Arnold's 2011 casting of James Howson was extensively discussed and debated in critical reviews as a significant artistic and political choice (Abraham, 2024), while the whiteness of every preceding Heathcliff was received as unremarkable.

Aldahoul et al. (2024) provide empirical support for this structural interpretation, demonstrating that despite growing institutional rhetoric about diversity and inclusion in media, the proportion of racially inclusive content in mainstream film and television remains disproportionately low. The 2026 *Wuthering Heights* adaptation sits within this broader pattern of structural inertia: produced in a cultural moment when the discourse of representation is more prominent than at any previous point in the adaptation history of the novel, it nevertheless reproduces the same whitewashed casting choice that has characterized all but one of its predecessors. This is precisely what CRT predicts: that structural racism persists not through ignorance of racial inequality but through the institutional normalization of practices that reproduce it, even in contexts where individual actors within those institutions may nominally endorse racial equity.

4.3 Visual Construction of Racial Identity: VDA Findings (RQ3)

4.3.1 The 2011 Arnold Adaptation: Racial Visibility as Deliberate Visual Strategy

The visual discourse analysis of the 2011 Arnold adaptation reveals a systematic and coherent visual strategy for foregrounding Heathcliff's racial identity throughout the film. The following four scenes were selected for analysis in accordance with the criteria established in Section 3.4.

Scene 1: Heathcliff's arrival at Wuthering Heights. Mr. Earnshaw presents Heathcliff to his family in the kitchen of Wuthering Heights. Arnold frames the scene so that Howson's

face, and specifically the contrast between his dark skin and the pale faces of the Earnshaw children, is immediately legible. The scene is shot in available interior light, with no artificial softening or equalization of skin tones, allowing Howson's physical difference to register visually without mediation. The reaction shots of Hindley and Catherine are held long enough to establish that difference as a source of tension rather than curiosity, directly translating the novel's account of the Earnshaw family's ambivalence about the foundling child.

Scene 2: Hindley's degradation of Heathcliff. Following Mr. Earnshaw's death, Hindley forces Heathcliff to work alongside the farmhands. Arnold's camera follows Howson in a sustained long take through the farmyard, emphasizing his physical labor in juxtaposition with the domestic interior occupied by Hindley. The cinematography here is starkly observational; the camera maintains a consistent distance, refusing the romantic close-up conventions associated with the heritage film genre. Applied to Rose's (2014) site of the image, the compositional modality here is documentary-realist: the visual grammar refuses to aestheticize Heathcliff's degradation, insisting instead on its social material reality.

Scene 3: Heathcliff and Catherine on the moors. Arnold's treatment of the moor sequences is the most formally innovative aspect of the film's racial visual strategy. Rather than framing Heathcliff and Catherine as a unified romantic dyad against a picturesque landscape, the conventional heritage film approach, Arnold consistently positions them as physically proximate but visually differentiated: the camera returns repeatedly to the contrast between Howson's dark skin and Hunter's pale complexion, framed against the grey-green moorland. This visual insistence on difference within intimacy translates the novel's central paradox, Heathcliff is both Catherine's most intimate companion and the most socially excluded figure in the novel's world, into cinematic language.

Scene 4: Heathcliff's return as a wealthy gentleman. Upon Heathcliff's return to Wuthering Heights, Arnold frames him in close-up with dramatically improved material surroundings, better clothing, erect posture, but the same visual foregrounding of his racial difference that was established in the film's opening sequences. The continuity of visual racial marking across Heathcliff's social transformation is significant: it insists that his accumulation of wealth and power does not overwrite his racial identity but is produced in direct response to the exclusion it caused. This is the COUNTER-NARRATIVE coding category in cinematic form.

4.3.2 The 2026 Fennell Adaptation: Racial Erasure through Aestheticization

The 2026 Fennell adaptation presents a significantly different visual construction of Heathcliff, one in which the racial markers central to Arnold's approach are systematically absent. The following four scenes from the Fennell adaptation were selected for comparative VDA.

Scene 1: Heathcliff's arrival at Wuthering Heights. Fennell's staging of the equivalent arrival scene frames Elordi within a visual register immediately legible as prestige literary adaptation: warm, soft-focus interior lighting, careful period costuming, and a camera style that presents Heathcliff from the outset as romantically compelling rather than socially disruptive. The absence of any visual device marking his physical difference from the Earnshaw family, which would be impossible to achieve with a racially different actor and which is therefore not attempted, removes the foundational visual tension that drives Arnold's equivalent scene, and that corresponds to the SOCIAL EXCLUSION function of the arrival passage in the novel (Ch. IV).

Scene 2: Heathcliff's abuse by Mr. Earnshaw. In the Fennell adaptation, the scenes of Hindley's systematic exclusion of Heathcliff were instead done by Mr. Earnshaw. The cinematographic treatment makes no visual distinction between Elordi and the actors playing the Earnshaw family and the Linton household: all are framed within the same warm-toned, aestheticized visual grammar. The racial dimension of Mr. Earnshaw's cruelty, the use of Heathcliff's racial otherness as the justification for his abuse, is therefore visually illegible. The SOCIAL EXCLUSION passages from the novel that are nominally adapted in these scenes lose their racial specificity entirely in the visual rendering.

Scene 3: Heathcliff and Catherine on the moors. The moor sequences in the Fennell adaptation exemplify what Dowie-Chin (2020) identifies as the aesthetic strategy of racial erasure through romantic idealization: Heathcliff and Catherine are presented as a visually unified romantic dyad, framed in conventional two-shots against a romanticized moorland landscape, photographed in high-production-value widescreen. The visual grammar here belongs squarely to the heritage film tradition, the tradition Arnold's 2011 film explicitly rejected. It produces a Heathcliff who is, in Bhopal's (2023) terms, "racially neutral": a figure whose identity is organized entirely around romantic suffering rather than racial exclusion, and who therefore cannot carry the structural counter-narrative that the novel embeds in his character.

Scene 4: Heathcliff's return as a wealthy gentleman. In Fennell's adaptation, Heathcliff's return is staged as a moment of romantic re-entry: the visual emphasis is on Elordi's physical attractiveness and the emotional reunion with Catherine, with no visual coding of the social and racial inversion that the return represents in the novel. Where Arnold's equivalent scene insists on the continuity of racial marking across social transformation, Fennell's removes racial marking from the equation entirely, transforming what the novel codes as COUNTER-NARRATIVE (the colonial outsider returning with power) into a straightforwardly romantic narrative of separation and longing.

4.3.3 Comparative Summary: What the VDA Reveals

Table 3.

Comparative VDA findings: Arnold (2011) and Fennell (2026) adaptations across six visual elements.

Visual element	Arnold 2011	Fennell 2026	Correspondence to Novel
Casting / physical appearance	Black British actor; racial difference visually foregrounded throughout	White Australian actor; no visual racial differentiation from other characters	Novel: explicit non-white racial markers (Ch. I, VI)
Cinematography and lighting	Available light, low saturation, observational documentary realism	Warm, soft-focus, aestheticized prestige-film lighting	Novel: social realist registers as racial exclusion is material, not romantic

Visual element	Arnold 2011	Fennell 2026	Correspondence to Novel
Framing of Heathcliff	Racial difference marked in close-up; contrast with other characters maintained	Conventionally attractive romantic hero framing; no visual contrast	Novel: Heathcliff as an outsider, not a romantic lead, in the social order of the Earnshaws
Treatment of SOCIAL EXCLUSION scenes	Racial dimension of exclusion visually legible; documentary-realist framing	Exclusion re-coded as personal animus; racial dimension visually absent	Novel: racial otherness directly weaponized as justification for degradation
Treatment of COUNTER-NARRATIVE scenes	Racial marking continues across social transformation; return coded as colonial reversal	Return coded as romantic re-entry; no colonial reversal legible	Novel: Heathcliff's acquisition of property is structurally inseparable from his racial history
Deleted racial dialogue	Racial epithets from the novel are adapted into visual language rather than spoken	Racial epithets absent; screenplay does not engage the racial language of the source	Novel: "dark-skinned gipsy," "little Lascar," "American or Spanish castaway" (Ch. I, VI)

Table 3 demonstrates that the difference between the two adaptations is not merely a matter of casting but of a comprehensively different visual strategy. Arnold's 2011 film translates the novel's racial politics into cinematic language through every available visual element: casting, cinematography, lighting, framing, and the treatment of racially charged scenes. Fennell's 2026 adaptation deploys an equally comprehensive but opposite visual strategy: every element of the film's visual grammar works to produce a Heathcliff who is romantically idealized, racially unmarked, and therefore structurally incompatible with the counter-narrative that the novel assigns him.

The significance of this comparison extends beyond a finding about the two specific films. It establishes against any argument that whitewashing in *Wuthering Heights* adaptations reflects commercial or creative necessity that a racially accurate and cinematically sophisticated visual representation of Heathcliff is entirely achievable within the resources of contemporary British film production. The decision to return to whitewashed casting in the 2026 Fennell adaptation, in a cultural moment more alert to racial representation in media than any preceding moment in the novel's adaptation history, is therefore not a passive default but, in Bhopal's (2023) terms, an active reproduction of structural whiteness normalization, a choice whose racial implications are all the more visible precisely because the alternative was demonstrated fourteen years earlier.

4.4 Discussion: Racial Erasure, Structural Racism, and the Cultural Life of the Novel

The findings across the three analytical subsections above converge on a single, coherent argument: the whitewashing of Heathcliff in film adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* is a structurally produced form of racial erasure whose consequences extend beyond misrepresentation in cinema into the cultural interpretation of the novel itself. This discussion integrates the findings from Sections 4.1 through 4.3 to address the interpretive and theoretical implications of that argument.

The first and most fundamental implication concerns the relationship between racial identity and narrative logic. The close reading findings establish that Heathcliff's racial otherness is not a decorative feature of the novel's characterization but a structural driver of its plot: his exclusion is racially motivated, his revenge is a colonial counter-narrative, and the novel's resolution in which the racial outsider acquires the property of those who excluded him is legible as social critique only through that racial lens. A whitewashed adaptation does not merely omit a physical detail; it removes the interpretive framework through which the novel's central argument can be read. As the VDA findings demonstrate, the Fennell adaptation's re-coding of Heathcliff's exclusion as personal rivalry and his return as romantic re-entry produces a structurally different narrative, one organized around individual emotional suffering rather than structural racial injustice. The film retains the events of the novel while evacuating their social meaning.

The second implication concerns cultural memory. Thalken (2024) demonstrates that film adaptations frequently become the primary cultural referent for a literary text, superseding the source novel in popular cultural memory. When the dominant screen version of a character suppresses their racial identity, it does not merely misrepresent the novel; it gradually displaces it, producing an audience whose understanding of Heathcliff is organized around the whitewashed image. Sere et al. (2020) argue that media representation actively constructs cultural identity rather than passively reflecting it: the whitewashed Heathcliff does not merely reflect the racial assumptions of the film industry, but participates in normalizing a version of Victorian England in which racial difference and colonial anxiety are invisible. This normalization has material consequences for how the novel is taught, discussed, and understood.

The third implication concerns the limits of individual-level accounts of whitewashing. The consistent casting pattern across Table 2, six of seven major adaptations, spanning more than a century and multiple production contexts, is not explicable through individual directorial bias or ignorance. As Brown and Zuo (2025) demonstrate, the mechanisms of racial normalization in casting are structural: they operate through commercial risk assessment, through the genre conventions of the heritage film, through the aesthetic expectations of prestige literary adaptation, and through the critical reception culture that naturalizes white casting while marking racial casting as exceptional. Addressing racial erasure in film adaptation, therefore, requires structural intervention in casting policy, in critical practice, and in the academic teaching of adaptation not merely individual commitment to racial accuracy.

A final implication concerns the methodological contribution of this study to the interdisciplinary field it occupies. The integration of close reading, VDA, and CRT demonstrated here produces analytical results that none of the three methods could achieve alone. Close reading establishes the textual baseline without which the VDA findings would lack evidential grounding. VDA reveals the precise visual mechanisms through which racial identity is constructed or suppressed in ways that textual description cannot capture. And

CRT provides the structural explanatory framework without which both sets of findings would remain at the level of description rather than reaching the level of structural analysis. This methodological integration is itself a contribution to adaptation studies and to literary cultural studies more broadly, offering a transferable model for analyzing racial representation across the literary-to-cinematic adaptation process.

Wuthering Heights has undergone numerous film adaptations since 1920, yet the casting of Heathcliff has consistently deviated from Brontë's textual characterization. A close reading of the novel reveals that Heathcliff is described using racially marked language throughout the text. He is repeatedly referred to as "Dark-Skinned gipsy" in chapter one, "a little Lascar" in chapter six, and also "an American or Spanish castaway" in the same chapter, language that anchors his identity as a racial outsider in Victorian England. These descriptions are not incidental; they are structurally linked to his social exclusion, the humiliation he endures within the Earnshaw household, and ultimately his motivation for revenge.

The significance of these textual markers extends beyond mere descriptive detail. Within the social context of Victorian England, terms such as "gipsy" and "Lascar" carried specific cultural and political weight, functioning as markers of racial and social inferiority. Brontë's deployment of this language serves a deliberate narrative purpose: it situates Heathcliff within a recognizable framework of racial otherness that a Victorian readership would have immediately understood. His foreignness is not an incidental attribute but a foundational aspect of his identity, shaping every dimension of his experience within the Earnshaw household and beyond. To read Heathcliff without attending to this racial dimension is to fundamentally misread the novel's central conflict.

Furthermore, scholars of Victorian literature have noted that Brontë's portrayal of Heathcliff resonates with the broader anxieties of nineteenth-century British imperialism. His ambiguous origins, possibly Irish, Romani, South Asian, or Caribbean, reflect the instability of racial categories within a colonial society that simultaneously depended upon and feared racial mixing. Heathcliff's darkness, both literal and figurative, positions him as the embodiment of what was excluded from normative English identity. His desire for social ascension and revenge can thus be read not merely as personal grievance but as a colonial counter-narrative embedded within the domestic realist genre. Any adaptation that strips this racial complexity from his characterization necessarily impoverishes the novel's thematic scope.

Despite this textual evidence, the majority of film adaptations have cast white actors in the role of Heathcliff. A review of adaptation history shows that across adaptations released between 1920 and 2026, only Andrea Arnold's 2011 film cast a Black actor, James Howson, in all the roles. All other major productions, including the 2026 adaptation directed by Emerald Fennell featuring Jacob Elordi, cast light-skinned actors, effectively erasing the racial conflict embedded in the source text.

The pattern of casting is consistent with what Abraham identifies as the tendency of film adaptations to reframe literary narratives to suit contemporary industrial and aesthetic preferences (Abraham, 2024). In the case of *Wuthering Heights*, this reframing has systematically removed Heathcliff's racial otherness from the visual text. The consequences, as Dowie-Chin argues in their analysis of whitewashing in Hollywood adaptations, are that the racial dimension of the original narrative is not simply minimized but actively replaced by a racially neutral or white-coded identity that does not carry the same cultural or historical weight (Dowie-Chin et al., 2020).

The 2026 adaptation is particularly notable in this regard. Casting Elordi, a conventionally attractive white Australian actor, in a role defined by racial marginalization not only departs from the novel's characterization but also removes the social conflict that drives the narrative. Heathcliff's transformation from an excluded child to a vengeful adult is inseparable from his racial identity; without it, the film's narrative logic is fundamentally altered.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the whitewashing of Heathcliff in film adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* constitutes a significant form of structural racial erasure that reshapes the ideological meaning of Emily Brontë's novel. Through the integration of close textual reading, Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA), and Critical Race Theory (CRT), the findings reveal that Heathcliff's racial identity is not a peripheral characteristic but a foundational element of the narrative. The novel explicitly constructs Heathcliff as a racially marked outsider whose experiences of exclusion, humiliation, and social marginalization are inseparable from the broader racial and colonial dynamics embedded within the text. Moreover, his eventual acquisition of both *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* can be interpreted as a symbolic reversal of racial dispossession, positioning the novel as a subtle challenge to dominant racial hierarchies. When adaptations replace this racialized figure with a white actor, they do more than alter a character's appearance; they erase a crucial dimension of the novel's social, historical, and political significance.

The historical review of major English-language adaptations further indicates that such erasure is neither incidental nor isolated. Across six of the seven adaptations examined between 1920 and 2026, Heathcliff has been portrayed by white actors, revealing a persistent pattern of racial exclusion that reflects broader institutional practices within the Anglo-American film industry. This continuity suggests that whitewashing should be understood as a structural phenomenon rather than a series of individual creative choices. The comparative analysis of Andrea Arnold's 2011 adaptation and Emerald Fennell's 2026 adaptation reinforces this conclusion by illustrating how racial representation is produced not only through casting decisions but also through visual discourse. Arnold's adaptation employs cinematography, framing, lighting, and representations of social exclusion to foreground Heathcliff's racial difference and translate the novel's racial politics into cinematic language. By contrast, Fennell's adaptation adopts a prestige-film aesthetic that reimagines Heathcliff as a racially unmarked romantic protagonist, thereby limiting the visual and interpretive conditions necessary for understanding the character through a racial lens. The existence of Arnold's critically acclaimed adaptation demonstrates that racially accurate representation is both artistically viable and commercially achievable, making the continued return to whitewashed portrayals a deliberate structural choice rather than a practical necessity.

The study contributes to Victorian literary studies, adaptation studies, and CRT-informed media scholarship by showing how racial meanings embedded within literary texts can be systematically diluted or erased through adaptation. It also highlights the methodological value of combining close reading, VDA, and CRT to investigate how racial ideologies operate across different media forms. At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. The visual analysis focused on four carefully selected scenes from each adaptation, chosen to provide maximum analytical coverage of the study's coding categories; however, a larger corpus of scenes would allow for a more comprehensive

examination of visual strategies throughout each film. Likewise, while earlier adaptations were incorporated into the historical analysis, they were not subjected to the same level of systematic visual discourse analysis, and future studies could strengthen the structural argument by undertaking a fuller visual examination of the adaptation record. The present research also concentrates primarily on textual and production-level evidence and therefore does not address how audiences interpret and respond to the racial representation of Heathcliff across different adaptations. Audience reception studies involving surveys, focus groups, or analyses of viewer commentary would provide valuable complementary perspectives. Furthermore, as Indonesian scholars examining a British Victorian text and contemporary Anglo-American film productions, the researchers' interpretations are inevitably mediated through available scholarly accounts of those cultural contexts, creating both analytical opportunities and limitations.

Despite these constraints, the findings provide compelling evidence that the persistence of whitewashing across more than a century of *Wuthering Heights* adaptations reflects the continuing influence of structural racism within cultural production. The repeated transformation of Heathcliff from a racially marked outsider into a white romantic hero demonstrates how adaptation can function as a mechanism through which dominant racial narratives are preserved and normalized. Recognizing this pattern is essential not only for a fuller understanding of *Wuthering Heights* and its adaptation history but also for broader efforts to challenge institutional practices that continue to privilege whiteness in film casting and representation. In this sense, the study underscores the importance of adaptation as a site of ideological struggle, where questions of race, power, and cultural memory remain actively contested.

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AUTONOMOUS LEARNING IN GRADUATE ENGLISH EDUCATION: INSIGHTS FROM INDONESIA AND THAILAND

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Abstract

Autonomous learning is widely recognized as essential for graduate students, empowering them to take responsibility for their learning. However, practical understanding of how autonomous learning is sustained in higher education contexts remains limited, particularly at the graduate level. This study explored autonomous learning among graduate students enrolled in English language education programs in Indonesia and Thailand. The study involved 25 graduate students, comprising 17 students from Indonesia and 8 students from Thailand. Data were collected using an adapted Autonomous Learning Scale (ALS) and open-ended questions to examine students' learning experiences, strategies, and challenges. Questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis. The findings revealed relatively moderate levels of autonomous learning, with an overall mean score of 3.11, indicating developing responsibility, learning independence, and intrinsic motivation. However, challenges persisted in learning habits, particularly in time management and overcoming procrastination. Students also adopted diverse learning strategies, including utilizing digital resources, participating in peer discussions, and engaging in self-directed learning practices. The findings suggest that learner autonomy should be understood as a dynamic and continuously developing process requiring not only cognitive independence but also sustained behavioral regulation and motivational consistency in higher education contexts. This study enriches scholarship on learner autonomy by offering cross-contextual insights and underscoring the importance of sustained development in higher education.

Keywords: *autonomous learning; learner autonomy; graduate students; Indonesia; Thailand*

1. Introduction

Autonomous learning is a key element of adult education and has become increasingly significant in higher education as students assume responsibility for their learning (Saleh, 2025). Learner autonomy is crucial in English language education, empowering students to engage in meaningful independent learning beyond the classroom. In recent years, the development of digital technology has further supported autonomous learning, enabling students to engage in self-directed learning beyond the classroom (Ahmed et al., 2020; Pratiwi & Waluyo, 2023; Ubaedillah & Pratiwi, 2021). Digital technologies enhance performance and language proficiency while fostering student-centered learning

environments (Cripps, 2020; Mahmud & Nur, 2018; Pratiwi et al., 2021). However, although digital environments provide greater flexibility and access to learning resources, several studies also suggest that excessive reliance on digital platforms may contribute to distraction, procrastination, and inconsistent self-regulation among students. This indicates that technology may simultaneously support and challenge the development of autonomous learning practices. Especially at the graduate level, where learning requirements are more demanding, students are increasingly required to exhibit higher levels of independence, critical thinking, and self-directed learning.

Despite the emphasis on autonomy, many students continue to face challenges in developing and sustaining independent learning practices, particularly when it comes to setting their own learning goals. At the graduate level, where independence is highly expected, students often struggle with issues such as procrastination, lack of consistency in study habits, and difficulty managing their time effectively. These challenges indicate that the development of autonomous learning is not always fully realized in practice, even among higher education students.

Extensive scholarship has examined learner autonomy, with foundational definitions provided by Holec (1981), Benson (2011), and Littlewood (1996). Holec (1981) defined learner autonomy as the ability to take control of one's own learning. Furthering this definition, Benson (2011) emphasized that autonomy involves various dimensions, such as technical skills, psychological readiness, and learning strategies. Furthermore, Littlewood (1996) asserts that autonomy encompasses both the ability and the willingness to act independently. These perspectives suggest that autonomous learning extends beyond independent study practices and is closely related to students' motivation, self-regulation, and behavioral consistency in sustaining learning activities over time. Previous studies have shown that although students recognize the importance of autonomous learning, they often struggle to consistently apply learning strategies, particularly regarding self-regulation and study habits. This indicates that learner autonomy should not be understood as a fixed individual ability, but rather as a dynamic process influenced by cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and contextual factors.

Despite growing interest, gaps remain in the literature, particularly regarding diverse educational contexts and graduate-level autonomy. Previous studies on learner autonomy have predominantly focused on undergraduate students and frequently relied on quantitative approaches within single educational contexts. A scoping review of 61 empirical studies on EFL learner autonomy found that over half employed a quantitative survey design, while only four studies utilized qualitative research methods (Chong & Reinders, 2022). Empirical evaluation of how student autonomy progresses has been largely confined to undergraduate populations, with limited attention to how autonomy develops across different stages of higher education (Henri et al., 2018). Consequently, limited attention has been given to how graduate students experience and negotiate autonomous learning practices across different sociocultural and higher education settings. This issue is important because graduate students are generally expected to demonstrate higher levels of independence, self-regulation, and responsibility in managing academic learning demands. In addition, the Autonomous Learning Scale (ALS) is widely used to assess autonomy in higher education, and when combined with qualitative data, it provides a comprehensive view of students' behaviors and challenges. Such efforts capture the complexity of autonomous learning in authentic educational contexts.

This study therefore aims to explore autonomous learning among graduate students in an English language education program by examining their level of autonomy, learning strategies, and the challenges they face. Adopting an exploratory mixed-method approach integrating the Autonomous Learning Scale (ALS) and open-ended responses, this study provides insights into the students' learning practices. Furthermore, by involving participants from Indonesia and Thailand, this study provides a cross-contextual perspective based on a small sample, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of how autonomous learning is experienced in different educational contexts. While not designed for direct comparison, the study offers exploratory insights into autonomy across two contexts.

To guide this study, the following research questions are formulated:

- a. What levels of autonomous learning do graduate students demonstrate, as measured by the ALS?
- b. What strategies and behaviors characterize their autonomous learning practices?
- c. What strategies and behaviors characterize their autonomous learning practices?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Learner Autonomy

Building on the importance of autonomous learning in higher education, this section reviews key theoretical perspectives and empirical studies related to learner autonomy and the Autonomous Learning Scale (ALS). Learner autonomy is broadly understood as the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981), with autonomous learners reflectively engaging in their learning process (Benson, 2001; Little, 1995). This definition underscores that learning extends beyond teacher guidance, requiring active student engagement and decision-making.

In terms of graduate education, learner autonomy is growing in importance. Students are expected to engage in self-directed learning, manage complex academic tasks, and develop their understanding beyond the classroom. As such, learner autonomy is closely linked to the development of critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and lifelong learning.

Learner autonomy also acknowledges individual differences in learning styles, capacities, and needs. Holec (1981) emphasized that students need to be given the opportunity to make decisions based on their individual learning styles, capacities, and needs. This suggests that the effectiveness of learning depends heavily on students' ability to understand and manage their own learning process.

Viewed from a broader perspective, learning can be understood as a process of constructing meaning, not merely receiving information. Students are encouraged to engage with meaningful issues and develop their own understanding, rather than simply memorizing or repeating information (Dilnoza et al., 2019). When students are involved in making decisions related to learning—such as determining the pace, sequence, and content—the learning process becomes more purposeful and meaningful (Dilnoza et al., 2019; Little, 1995).

Nevertheless, learner autonomy cannot be understood as learning in isolation. Benson (2011) explains that autonomy encompasses not only technical skills but also psychological and social aspects. This multidimensional view situates autonomy within broader frameworks of learner identity and social interaction. Recent perspectives also emphasize that learner autonomy entails both behavioral involvement and cognitive control in overseeing the learning process (Saad & Abdullah, 2025). Additionally, learner autonomy

can also be understood in terms of how effectively students maximize their learning process by utilizing both their own resources and those available through others. In this sense, the degree to which learners are able to make strategic use of personal efforts, external resources, and social support reflects their level of functional learner autonomy (Ng et al., 2011). Functional autonomy refers to learners' ability to strategically combine personal effort, external resources, and social support. These perspectives collectively suggest that learner autonomy involves not only independent decision-making, but also sustained behavioral regulation, metacognitive monitoring, and strategic engagement with learning environments.

Autonomous students are able to manage their learning process, make informed decisions, and utilize available learning resources, including interactions with others. In addition, the integration of digital technology further supports the development of learner autonomy by reshaping the role of teachers in the learning process. While digital tools provide flexible access to resources, scholars caution that technology alone does not guarantee autonomy; it must be integrated with pedagogical support. Rather than acting solely as knowledge transmitters, teachers increasingly function as facilitators who guide and support students' independent learning. In this context, digital technology is considered one of the most effective tools for fostering autonomous learning, as it provides flexible access to resources and encourages learners to take greater responsibility for their learning (Ling et al., 2020; Sadaghian & Marandi, 2020). However, recent studies also indicate that digital learning environments may contribute to distraction, fragmented concentration, and inconsistent self-regulation when students struggle to manage digital engagement effectively. This suggests that digital autonomy involves both opportunities and challenges within self-directed learning processes.

Moreover, Littlewood (1996) draws a distinction between the ability and the willingness to act autonomously. Although students possess the skills to learn independently, they are not always able to apply them consistently. This indicates that autonomy is influenced not only by competence but also by motivation and learning habits. This perspective further reinforces the view that learner autonomy should be understood as a dynamic and continuously developing process rather than as a fixed individual trait.

The development of learner autonomy is also influenced by contextual factors, such as educational culture and prior learning experiences. In many Asian contexts, including Indonesia, teacher-centered learning approaches are still commonly used, which can limit students' opportunities to develop autonomy (Lengkanawati, 2017). In Indonesia, teacher-centered traditions constrain autonomy, while Thailand's educational reforms emphasize collaborative learning, creating different challenges for graduate students. Contextual and cultural factors also have an impact on the development of learner autonomy, suggesting that autonomy is shaped by particular educational environments rather than being experienced uniformly (Kharroubi & Mediouni, 2024). Consequently, students may demonstrate only partial autonomy and still face challenges in maintaining consistency in their learning behaviors.

2.2 Autonomous Learning Scale (ALS)

The Autonomous Learning Scale (ALS), developed by Macaskill & Taylor (2010), is a widely used and reliable instrument for measuring learning autonomy in higher education. The ALS focuses on two main dimensions—learning independence and learning habits—

which reflect both students' capacity to learn independently and their ability to maintain consistent learning practices.

The independence dimension reflects students' ability to initiate learning and make decisions regarding their learning strategies, which is closely related to the concept of autonomous learning proposed by Holec (1981) and further developed by Benson, (2011). Meanwhile, learning habits include aspects such as time management, organization, and persistence, which are closely related to regular, self-directed learning (Zimmerman, 2002). The ALS dimensions of independence and learning habits align with Holec's (1981) notion of control and Benson's (2011) multidimensional framework. These dimensions also reflect important aspects of self-regulated learning, particularly students' ability to monitor, organize, and sustain learning behaviors over time.

Previous research on learning autonomy indicates that college students generally exhibit moderate to high levels of autonomy (Boonma & Swatevacharkul, 2020; Tuan, 2021). Empirical studies report autonomy scores ranging from moderate to high, though consistency in study habits remains problematic. However, challenges often arise in maintaining consistent study habits, particularly regarding time management and self-regulation. This suggests that although students possess the necessary skills for independent learning, they still struggle to apply them consistently in practice. A similar pattern has also been observed in the Indonesian context, where students demonstrate developing autonomy but still face challenges in self-regulation (Lengkanawati, 2017), underscoring the influence of contextual factors on the development of learning autonomy.

Overall, previous studies suggest that learner autonomy is shaped not only by students' cognitive abilities, but also by motivation, self-regulation, behavioral consistency, and sociocultural learning environments. However, limited research has explored how graduate students experience autonomous learning across different educational contexts by integrating quantitative autonomy measures with qualitative exploration of learning behaviors and challenges. Therefore, the present study extends previous research by combining ALS findings with qualitative insights to examine graduate students' autonomous learning experiences in Indonesia and Thailand.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted an exploratory mixed-method design to explore graduate students' autonomous learning in depth (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Quantitative data obtained from the Autonomous Learning Scale (ALS) were used to provide an overview of students' autonomy levels, while qualitative data from open-ended questions were used to explore students' learning behaviors, strategies, and challenges in greater depth. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data enabled a more comprehensive understanding of autonomous learning by combining descriptive patterns with participants' lived learning experiences. This approach also supported methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

3.2 Participants

The study involved 25 graduate students enrolled in English Language Education programs, consisting of 17 students from Indonesia and 8 students from Thailand. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, determined by accessibility and voluntary participation. All participants had completed a minimum of one semester of

graduate study, ensuring prior exposure to independent learning practices in higher education contexts.

The inclusion of participants from Indonesia and Thailand was intended to provide broader contextual insights into autonomous learning practices across different educational environments. However, the study did not aim to conduct direct cross-national comparisons, but rather to explore students' experiences of autonomous learning within a small-scale cross-contextual perspective.

3.3 Instruments

The study utilized two instruments. The first instrument was the Autonomous Learning Scale (ALS) developed by Macaskill and Taylor (2010), which was used to obtain an overview of students' levels of autonomous learning. The ALS consists of 12 items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The ALS measures two dimensions: learning independence and study habits, reflecting both decision-making capacity and behavioral consistency.

The ALS was selected because it has been widely used in higher education contexts and demonstrates satisfactory psychometric properties. Macaskill and Taylor (2010) reported an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .81, indicating acceptable internal consistency of the instrument. In the present study, reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency. The analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .71$, indicating acceptable reliability within the current study context. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded prior to reliability analysis.

The second instrument consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore students' autonomous learning experiences in greater depth. Open-ended items probed students' experiences with time management, procrastination, motivation, learning strategies, and independent learning practices. The open-ended questions were reviewed through consultation with the research supervisor to ensure clarity and relevance to the research objectives. The open-ended responses enabled participants to explain their learning experiences, challenges, and strategies in their own words, providing richer contextual insights into autonomous learning practices.

3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire comprised ALS items and open-ended questions distributed through online platforms. Responses were collected voluntarily and organized for descriptive statistical analysis and thematic coding. Prior to participation, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the ALS were analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide an overview of students' autonomous learning levels. Descriptive statistics were computed at item, subscale, and overall levels to assess autonomy scores. The results were interpreted using three categories: low (1.00–2.49), moderate (2.50–3.49), and high (3.50–5.00). These categories were developed based on common Likert scale interpretation ranges and reviewed through consultation with the research supervisor.

Qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions were analyzed following Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The analysis involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, and interpretation of patterns related to the research questions. Codes and themes were reviewed repeatedly to ensure consistency and alignment with participants' responses. Themes were organized into two overarching categories, learning strategies and learning challenges, providing a structured account of autonomous learning practices. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a more comprehensive interpretation of students' autonomous learning experiences.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 The Level of Autonomous Learning

The result of the Autonomous Learning Scale (ALS) provided a comprehensive overview of the level of Autonomous Learning demonstrated by graduate students. Overall, the findings indicated that the students show a moderate to high level of autonomous learning, with an overall mean of 3.11, which falls within the moderate category based on the predefined classification.

Table 1.

Overall Autonomous Learning Score

Dimension	Mean	Category
Independence of Learning	3.17	Moderate
Study Habits	3.04	Moderate
Overall	3.11	Moderate

The overall score indicates a moderate level of autonomous learning among graduate students. The Independence of Learning dimension ($M = 3.17$) suggests that students generally demonstrate the ability to take responsibility for their learning, make learning decisions, and engage in self-directed learning practices. However, the score remains within the moderate category, indicating that students' independence in learning may still be developing rather than fully established.

Similarly, the Study Habits dimension ($M = 3.04$) also falls within the moderate category, suggesting that students experience difficulties in maintaining consistent learning routines and regulating their study behaviors. This finding indicates that, although students demonstrate awareness of effective learning practices, sustaining these practices consistently over time remains challenging. In particular, difficulties related to time management, consistency, and procrastination suggest that students' behavioral regulation may not yet fully support their cognitive and motivational readiness for autonomous learning. Overall, these findings suggest that students demonstrate emerging autonomous learning characterized by responsibility, motivation, and independent learning engagement, yet they continue to experience challenges in sustaining consistent self-regulated learning behaviors.

Table 2.
Item-Level Autonomous Learning Scores

Dimension	Item	Mean
Perseverance & Responsibility	I tend to be motivated to work by assessment deadlines.	3.76
	I take responsibility for my learning experiences.	4.12
	Even when tasks are difficult, I try to stick with them	3.8
Motivation	I enjoy being set a challenge	3.88
	I enjoy finding information about new topics on my own	4.12
Openness to Learning	I am open to new ways of doing familiar things	3.48
	I enjoy new learning experiences	3.72
Time Management	I plan my study time effectively.	2.8
	My time management is good.	2.68
	I am good at meeting deadlines.	3.64
Procrastination	I frequently find excuses for not getting down to work.	2.68
Ability to work alone	I am happy working on my own.	4.08

At the item level, several important patterns emerged. Items related to responsibility and motivation showed relatively high mean scores. For example, students reported high agreement with statements such as “I take responsibility for my learning experiences” ($M = 4.12$) and “I enjoy finding information about new topics on my own” ($M = 4.12$). These findings indicate that students demonstrate strong motivational engagement and a willingness to participate actively in their learning process. Similarly, students also reported perseverance when facing learning difficulties, as reflected in the item “Even when tasks are difficult, I try to stick with them” ($M = 3.80$). These findings suggest that students possess positive attitudes toward independent learning and demonstrate readiness to engage in self-directed academic activities.

However, lower mean scores were observed in items related to time management and behavioral regulation. The items “I plan my study time effectively” ($M = 2.80$) and “My time management is good” ($M = 2.68$) indicate continuing difficulties in organizing study routines and maintaining learning consistency. In addition, the procrastination-related item ($M = 2.68$) suggests that students still experience challenges in initiating and sustaining academic tasks consistently.

These findings reveal an important contrast between students’ motivational autonomy and their behavioral regulation. Although students demonstrated responsibility, initiative, and openness toward learning, they continued to experience difficulties in sustaining consistent study habits and regulating their learning behaviors over time. This suggests that autonomous learning among graduate students should not be understood solely as the ability or willingness to learn independently, but also as the capacity to

maintain consistent self-regulated learning practices. In this study, students appeared to demonstrate stronger cognitive and motivational autonomy than behavioral consistency, indicating that the development of autonomous learning remains an ongoing and dynamic process rather than a fully established condition.

4.1.2 Strategies and Behavior in Autonomous Learning

The students' responses to the open-ended questions provided deeper insights into how autonomous learning was practiced in daily academic activities. The findings revealed that students employed multiple learning strategies rather than relying on a single approach. Through thematic analysis, recurring patterns were identified and grouped into several key themes, including time management, the use of learning resources, peer discussion, and problem-solving behaviors. These strategies are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Theme of Strategies in Autonomous Learning

Theme	Representative Behaviors
Time Management	Planning, scheduling, prioritizing tasks
Learning Resources	Use of digital tools and external materials
Peer Discussion	Learning through interaction with peers
Problem Solving	Strategies to overcome learning difficulties

4.1.2.1 Time Management Strategies

Time management emerged as one of the strategies most frequently reported by students in organizing their learning activities. Many students described conscious efforts to manage their academic responsibilities through planning, prioritization, and scheduling. For example, some students stated that they "make a to-do list and try to complete tasks based on priority" or "arrange study time based on deadlines and assignments." These responses indicate that students recognize the importance of organizing their learning activities and demonstrate awareness of basic time management strategies.

However, deeper analysis suggests that this awareness does not always translate into consistent practice. Several students acknowledged that their learning behavior was strongly influenced by external pressures, particularly assignment deadlines. This tendency is reflected in statements such as "I only study seriously when the deadline is close," suggesting that learning activities are often delayed until they become urgent. Such findings indicate a pattern of reactive learning, in which students respond to immediate academic demands rather than maintaining stable and proactive study routines.

The presence of planned strategies and reactive behavior suggests that students possess knowledge of effective learning management but continue to struggle with sustaining these practices consistently over time. This gap between strategic awareness and actual practice indicates that students' autonomous learning may still be developing, particularly in terms of behavioral regulation and consistency.

4.1.2.2 The Use of Learning Resources

Another important strategy identified in students' responses was the use of learning resources, particularly digital tools and online materials. Students frequently reported seeking additional information beyond classroom instruction to deepen their understanding of academic content. For instance, students mentioned that they "search Google or watch YouTube to better understand the material" and "read journals or look for additional materials online." These responses indicate that students actively expanded their learning beyond formal instructional settings and demonstrated initiative in addressing gaps in their understanding independently.

The use of various learning resources reflects a shift from passive to active learning behavior. Rather than depending solely on lecturers or assigned materials, students engaged in self-directed exploration by selecting and utilizing resources that supported their individual learning needs. This behavior reflects an important aspect of autonomous learning, in which learners take responsibility for expanding and deepening their knowledge through independent effort.

At the same time, the extensive use of digital resources also reflects the complex nature of autonomous learning in contemporary educational contexts. While digital environments provide flexible access to information and support independent learning opportunities, they may also contribute to fragmented learning patterns and inconsistent concentration, particularly when students struggle to regulate their engagement effectively. This suggests that digital learning environments may simultaneously support and challenge the development of autonomous learning practices.

4.1.2.3 Peer Discussions

In addition to individual learning strategies, students also reported frequent engagement in peer discussions as part of their learning process. Students stated that they "discuss with peers when they do not understand the material" and "ask classmates to explain concepts in simpler terms." These responses suggest that students actively seek support from peers to clarify concepts, confirm understanding, and gain alternative perspectives.

These findings indicate that autonomous learning does not necessarily occur in isolation. Instead, students integrate social interaction into their learning strategies as a means of supporting their understanding and problem-solving processes. Through peer discussions, students are able to negotiate meaning, exchange ideas, and construct shared understanding, which may strengthen their overall learning experiences.

Furthermore, students' reliance on peer support suggests that autonomous learners are capable of making strategic decisions regarding when and from whom to seek assistance. This indicates that learner autonomy involves not only independence in learning but also the ability to effectively utilize available social resources to support academic development. This aligns with social constructivist perspectives, which view peer interaction as integral to autonomy development.

4.1.2.4 Problem-Solving Behaviors

Another important theme emerging from the findings was students' engagement in problem-solving behaviors when encountering learning difficulties. Rather than avoiding academic challenges, students reported actively attempting to overcome them through various strategies. For example, some students explained that they "tried reading the

material again and looking for other sources” or “repeated the lesson until they understood it.” These responses demonstrate persistence and effort in addressing learning problems independently.

The findings also indicate that students engaged in reflective learning processes by monitoring their understanding and adjusting their learning strategies when difficulties occurred. When students recognized gaps in their understanding, they attempted corrective actions such as reviewing materials, seeking alternative explanations, or repeating learning activities. Such behaviors reflect active engagement in self-monitoring and self-evaluation, which are important characteristics of autonomous learners. Students employ persistence strategies such as re-reading, consulting alternative sources, and repetition, reflecting self-monitoring and evaluation.

Overall, the strategies identified in this study indicate that students actively attempted to regulate their learning through cognitive, technological, and social approaches. However, the effectiveness of these strategies appeared to depend largely on students’ ability to apply them consistently over time. These findings suggest that autonomous learning among graduate students involves not only the use of learning strategies but also the ongoing regulation of learning behaviors in response to academic demands and learning challenges.

4.1.3 Challenges in Autonomous Learning

The students’ responses to the open-ended questions indicated that, despite employing various strategies to support their learning process, they continued to experience several challenges in sustaining autonomous learning practices. These challenges were often interconnected and influenced students’ ability to maintain consistent engagement in academic activities. Through thematic analysis, recurring patterns were identified and organized into four major themes: procrastination, time management difficulties, distractions, and motivation fluctuation. These challenges are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4.
Theme of Autonomous Learning Challenges

Theme	Representative Challenges
Procrastination	Tendency to delay tasks and rely on deadlines
Time Management Difficulties	Difficulty organizing and balancing time
Distractions	Interference from digital and environmental factors
Motivation Fluctuation	Inconsistent motivation affecting engagement

4.1.3.1 Procrastinations

Procrastination emerged as one of the most frequently reported challenges affecting students’ autonomous learning practices. Many students acknowledged delaying academic tasks until deadlines became urgent, despite being aware of their academic responsibilities. This tendency is reflected in statements such as “I often delay assignments until the last minute” and “sometimes I feel lazy and only start working on assignments when the deadline is near.”

Findings reveal a clear gap between students' intentions and their actual learning behaviors. Although students demonstrated awareness of effective study practices and expressed responsibility toward their academic work, sustaining consistent engagement remained difficult. This suggests that autonomous learning does not automatically guarantee effective behavioral regulation. Instead, students may possess cognitive awareness and learning strategies while continuing to struggle with maintaining consistent self-regulated learning behaviors over time.

It also shows that procrastination appears to be influenced by both internal and external factors. Some students attributed procrastination with tiredness, fluctuating motivation, or feelings of laziness, while others related it to academic workload and perceived task difficulty. This indicates that procrastination should be understood as a multifaceted challenge involving motivational, emotional, and behavioral dimensions rather than merely poor study habits.

4.1.3.2 Time Management Difficulties

Difficulties in time management also emerged as a major challenge in sustaining autonomous learning. Students frequently reported problems organizing study schedules and balancing academic responsibilities with personal or social commitments. For example, several students reported difficulty balancing assignments with other activities, suggesting that competing priorities often disrupt their learning routines.

Although many students attempted to plan and organize their study activities, these plans were not always implemented consistently. This finding suggests that effective time management involves not only planning but also maintaining discipline and behavioral consistency over time. The inconsistency between planned schedules and actual learning behavior further reinforces the idea that students may understand effective learning strategies without being fully able to sustain them in practice.

The findings also reflect broader challenges in self-regulated learning. Students may intend to follow structured learning routines; however, academic demands, personal responsibilities, and environmental factors frequently interfere with their ability to maintain consistent engagement. As a result, learning activities may become reactive and disorganized rather than proactive and systematically regulated.

4.1.3.3 Distractions

Another significant challenge identified in students' responses was the presence of distractions, particularly those related to digital devices and the surrounding environment. The students frequently mentioned that they were "distracted by cell phones and social media," which reduced their concentration during study sessions. These distractions can reduce concentration and make it difficult for students to maintain focus on academic tasks. Even when students make time for studying, external distractions can limit the effectiveness of that time.

These findings highlight the dual role of digital environments in autonomous learning. While digital tools and online platforms support flexible access to learning resources and independent exploration, they may simultaneously increase the risk of distraction and fragmented concentration. This suggests that autonomous learning in contemporary educational contexts involves not only access to learning opportunities but also the ability to regulate attention and manage environmental influences effectively.

Digital distractions highlight the paradox of technology as both a facilitator and inhibitor of autonomy

Moreover, the influence of distractions indicates that autonomous learning should not be understood solely as an internal individual process. External learning environments and technological conditions also play an important role in shaping students' ability to maintain consistent academic engagement.

4.1.3.4 Motivation Fluctuation

Fluctuations in motivation are another major challenge that affects students' independent learning. Some students report experiencing changes in their motivation levels, as seen in statements such as "sometimes I feel motivated, but sometimes I don't want to study." Variations in motivation produced irregular learning patterns, undermining sustained autonomy.

These findings suggest that motivation plays a crucial role in sustaining autonomous learning. Even when students possess effective strategies and adequate resources, a lack of motivation can limit their ability to consistently apply those strategies. This highlights the importance of psychological factors in either supporting or limiting autonomous learning practices.

In addition, these findings suggest that learner autonomy should be understood as a dynamic and continuously negotiated process rather than as a stable individual characteristic. Students may demonstrate autonomy in certain situations while simultaneously experiencing motivational and behavioral difficulties in others. This highlights the complex relationship between cognitive awareness, behavioral regulation, emotional conditions, and environmental influences in sustaining autonomous learning practices.

Overall, the challenges identified in this study indicate that autonomous learning among graduate students involves more than the ability to learn independently or utilize learning strategies effectively. Although students demonstrated responsibility, initiative, and awareness of effective learning practices, maintaining behavioral consistency remained a significant challenge. These findings suggest that autonomous learning should be understood as an ongoing process requiring continuous self-regulation, behavioral management, and adaptation to internal and external learning conditions.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that graduate students demonstrated relatively moderate levels of autonomous learning, particularly in terms of motivation, responsibility, and willingness to engage in independent learning activities. Students actively utilized various learning strategies, including time management planning, digital learning resources, peer discussion, and problem-solving behaviors, which reflect important characteristics of autonomous learners. These findings support previous studies suggesting that autonomous learners tend to demonstrate initiative, active engagement, and responsibility in managing their own learning processes (Benson, 2011; Holec, 1981).

However, the findings also reveal that autonomous learning among graduate students is more complex and dynamic than simply possessing the willingness to learn independently. Although students demonstrated relatively high levels of motivational and cognitive autonomy, they continued to experience difficulties in maintaining consistent behavioral regulation, particularly in relation to procrastination, time management, distractions, and fluctuating motivation. Findings reveal a gap between awareness of

effective learning and consistent application, reflecting the challenge of sustaining autonomy. Similar tendencies have also been identified in EFL contexts, where students demonstrate growing independence while still relying on external structures such as teacher direction and academic deadlines (Rahmasari et al., 2025). This finding reflects the ongoing negotiation between students' independent learning intentions and the practical realities of managing academic demands within higher education contexts.

The contrast between students' motivational independence and their behavioral inconsistency highlights an important dimension of learner autonomy. Students generally understood the importance of planning, responsibility, and independent learning, yet many still depended heavily on deadlines and external pressures to maintain academic engagement. These findings reinforce the argument that learner autonomy should not be understood as a fixed individual characteristic, but rather as an ongoing and dynamic process influenced by cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and environmental factors. This interpretation is consistent with Littlewood's (1996) perspective that learner autonomy involves both the ability and willingness to act independently. Similarly, Benson (2011) emphasized that autonomy involves control over learning management and decision-making processes. In this study, students appeared to possess the willingness and awareness necessary for autonomous learning; however, their ability to sustain consistent self-regulated behaviors remained less stable.

Furthermore, recent studies reinforce this interpretation by showing that students may possess knowledge of learning strategies while still experiencing difficulties in consistently maintaining self-regulated learning behaviors within higher education contexts (Hailikari et al., 2021). This suggests that the development of autonomous learning is not simply a matter of acquiring learning skills or strategies, but also involves continuous behavioral regulation in response to academic demands and environmental conditions. Similar findings have also been identified in self-regulated learning research, which suggests that students often struggle to apply effective learning strategies consistently in practice despite understanding their importance (Calonia et al., 2023; Mares-Ruiz et al., 2023).

The findings also indicate that students actively attempted to regulate their learning processes through a variety of learning strategies. Time management appeared as one of the most frequently reported strategies, as students attempted to organize their learning activities through planning, scheduling, and prioritization. However, deeper analysis revealed that these strategies were frequently applied reactively rather than proactively. Many students reported taking academic tasks more seriously only when deadlines approached, suggesting that their learning behaviors remained strongly influenced by external pressures rather than fully sustained through internal regulation. Similar patterns have been identified in previous studies showing that students frequently depend on extrinsic structures such as deadlines to maintain academic engagement (Tuan, 2021). This further supports broader findings in self-regulated learning research suggesting that students may possess effective strategies while continuing to experience difficulties in applying them consistently over time (Calonia et al., 2023; Hailikari et al., 2021).

Another important finding concerns the use of digital learning resources in supporting autonomous learning practices. Students actively utilized online materials, digital platforms, journals, and external learning resources to deepen their understanding beyond classroom instruction. These findings reflect students' initiative in independently expanding their learning experiences and demonstrate the increasing importance of technology in supporting self-directed learning in higher education contexts. Previous studies similarly

highlight that technology-enhanced learning environments can facilitate learner autonomy by enabling flexible, self-paced, and student-centered learning experiences (Achuthan, 2025; Ahmed et al., 2020; Pratiwi & Waluyo, 2023; Ubaedillah & Pratiwi, 2021). Technology has also been shown to contribute positively to students' engagement and learning performance while encouraging more learner-centered educational practices (Cripps, 2020; Mahmud & Nur, 2018; Pratiwi et al., 2021). This suggests that reflective problem-solving behaviors alone may not fully guarantee sustained autonomous learning unless accompanied by stable behavioral regulation and consistent learning engagement.

At the same time, the findings also suggest that digital learning environments may create additional challenges for sustaining autonomous learning behaviors. Although technology supported flexible access to learning opportunities, students also reported experiencing distractions caused by social media and digital devices. This highlights the dual role of digital environments within autonomous learning processes, functioning simultaneously as facilitators of independent learning and as sources of fragmented concentration and reduced engagement. Similar complexities regarding digital learning environments have also been discussed in recent studies emphasizing the interconnected relationship between autonomous learning, self-regulated learning, and technology-mediated educational experiences (Robles Mucho et al., 2026). These findings highlight that digital autonomy requires not only access to technological resources, but also the ability to regulate attention, manage distractions, and maintain behavioral consistency within increasingly technology-mediated learning environments.

The findings further indicate that autonomous learning should not be interpreted as complete independence from others. Students frequently relied on peer discussions and collaborative learning interactions to clarify concepts, exchange ideas, and strengthen understanding. These findings support the perspective that learner autonomy can coexist with social interaction and collaborative learning processes rather than requiring complete isolation from others. In this context, students demonstrated autonomy by strategically utilizing available social and academic resources to support their learning goals. This interpretation aligns with previous studies emphasizing that autonomy involves the ability to effectively use social resources as part of the learning process (Everhard & Murphy, 2015; Jehanghir et al., 2024). These findings reflect that autonomous learning among graduate students in Indonesian and Thai higher education contexts is not characterized by isolated individual learning, but rather by the strategic combination of independent learning and collaborative academic interaction. The findings also underscore the influence of sociocultural learning environments in which peer support and collective interaction remain important aspects of academic learning practices.

Another important finding concerns students' problem-solving behaviors when facing learning difficulties. Rather than avoiding challenges, students attempted to overcome learning problems through reviewing materials, seeking alternative resources, and repeating learning activities until understanding was achieved. These behaviors indicate that students engaged in reflective learning processes involving self-monitoring and adjustment of learning strategies. However, similar to other autonomous learning strategies identified in this study, these efforts often appeared situational rather than consistently sustained over time.

The challenges experienced by students further reinforce the complexity of sustaining autonomous learning practices. Procrastination emerged as one of the most significant challenges affecting students' ability to maintain consistent engagement in

academic activities. Although students demonstrated awareness of their academic responsibilities, many still delayed initiating tasks until deadlines became urgent. These findings support previous research indicating that procrastination is closely associated with difficulties in self-regulation and behavioral control (Derakhshan et al., 2020). Similarly, recent studies suggest that students may understand effective learning strategies while continuing to struggle with their practical implementation due to motivational and behavioral barriers (Mares-Ruiz et al., 2023).

Difficulties in time management further highlight the importance of behavioral consistency in autonomous learning. Although students attempted to organize study schedules and manage academic responsibilities, maintaining stable learning routines remained difficult. This aligns with self-regulated learning perspectives emphasizing continuous monitoring, regulation, and adjustment of learning behaviors (Hailikari et al., 2021; Zimmerman, 2002). In addition, fluctuating motivation indicates that autonomous learning is strongly influenced by students' emotional and psychological conditions. Students reported inconsistent motivation levels that directly affected their academic engagement and learning consistency. These findings support research emphasizing the important role of motivation in sustaining self-regulated learning and academic persistence (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Overall, the findings suggest that learner autonomy among graduate students should be understood as a developing and continuously negotiated process rather than as a fully achieved condition. Although students demonstrated important characteristics of autonomous learners, including initiative, responsibility, active engagement, and strategic learning behaviors, sustaining consistent behavioral regulation remained a significant challenge. This implies that the development of learner autonomy in graduate education requires support not only for cognitive independence, but also for behavioral regulation, motivational consistency, and effective management of learning environments. These findings contribute to broader discussions on learner autonomy and self-regulated learning by highlighting that autonomous learning among graduate students is shaped not only by cognitive awareness and motivation, but also by behavioral consistency, sociocultural learning practices, and the ability to regulate learning within complex higher education environments.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated graduate students' engagement in autonomous learning, focusing on autonomy levels, strategies, and challenges. Students demonstrated a moderate level of autonomous learning, particularly in developing responsibility, learning independence, and intrinsic motivation. This autonomy was not consistently reflected in daily learning practices. In particular, maintaining consistent study habits, especially in relation to time management and self-regulation, remains a challenge.

The results also indicated that students employed strategies such as organizing study activities, utilizing digital resources, engaging in peer discussions, and problem-solving. These strategies, however, were frequently applied reactively in response to deadlines rather than as part of sustained learning routines. At the same time, students faced persistent challenges in sustaining autonomy, including procrastination, poor time management, distractions, and fluctuating motivation. These challenges underscore the gap between students' intentions and enacted learning behaviors. This suggests that the key

issue is not a lack of awareness or strategies, but the difficulty in applying them consistently over time.

Taken together, autonomous learning should be conceptualized as a dynamic process, shaped by internal and external factors, rather than a fixed ability. The study highlights that autonomous learning among graduate students is closely related to behavioral consistency, self-regulation, and learning environments within higher education contexts. Future research should examine interventions that enhance self-regulation, sustain motivation, and reduce procrastination. Expanding research across diverse educational contexts will deepen understanding of how autonomy develops in varied settings. This study contributes to learner autonomy scholarship by integrating quantitative and qualitative perspectives, offering cross-contextual insights from Indonesia and Thailand, and emphasizing the dynamic relationship between learning independence, behavioral regulation, and self-directed learning practices among graduate students. This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study involved a relatively small number of participants from Indonesia and Thailand. Although this participant size was appropriate for exploratory qualitative-dominant research, the findings may not be generalized broadly to all graduate students or educational contexts.

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RACISM, TRAUMA, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SURVIVAL IN WARSAN SHIRE'S *HOME*

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of psychological trauma, systemic racism, and survival in Warsan Shire's poem *Home*. Using qualitative textual analysis, the study is grounded in psychological literary criticism and trauma theory, with close reading used to identify patterns within the text. The primary data consist of the poem *Home*, while secondary data include relevant academic sources on trauma, racism, and migration. The findings reveal that displacement in the poem is portrayed as a condition driven by survival rather than choice. Shire represents trauma through fragmented imagery and symbolic language, reflecting the psychological instability experienced by refugees. The poem also highlights the loss of identity, where individuals are forced to renegotiate their sense of self in unfamiliar and often hostile environments. In addition, systemic racism is depicted through dehumanizing language and social hostility, which contribute to ongoing psychological distress. The study shows that trauma in *Home* is not only an individual experience but is closely linked to broader socio-political structures. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on migration and identity, this study emphasizes the intersection between systemic racism and psychological trauma within poetic representations of displacement. Survival is presented as a complex process that involves both endurance and adaptation under conditions of displacement and marginalization. This study contributes to the understanding of literary representations of trauma by demonstrating how poetry can articulate the psychological and structural dimensions of refugee experiences.

Keywords: *migration, psychological survival, racism, trauma, warsan shire.*

1. Introduction

Warsan Shire (b. 1988), a Somali-British poet, is widely recognized for her exploration of trauma, displacement, and identity. This study examines Shire's psychological perspective, focusing on how her poetry portrays psychological trauma and resilience. Through literary techniques such as metaphor, imagery, and fragmentation, Shire constructs a poetic space in which personal and collective suffering can be expressed and examined. This aligns with trauma theory and psychological literary criticism, which emphasize how literature represents fragmented and affective experiences of suffering that often resist direct expression. Despite the growing scholarly attention to migration and identity in Shire's

poetry, the intersection between systemic racism and psychological trauma remains underexplored, particularly in relation to how poetic form articulates these experiences.

This study also relates to contemporary immigration contexts, highlighting the psychological challenges of adaptation and the unspoken struggles of migrants. By situating Shire's work within broader socio-political realities, this research emphasizes how poetry functions as a medium for expressing experiences shaped by systemic racism and structural oppression, which are often silenced in dominant discourse.

Previous studies on Warsan Shire have primarily focused on themes of identity, feminism, exile, and migration. However, relatively limited attention has been given to how psychological trauma and systemic racism intersect within refugee narratives, particularly in her poem *Home*. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the psychological dimensions of racialized displacement and survival as represented in the poem. In recent years, anti-immigrant discourse has increasingly emerged within political, media, and public narratives across various countries. Immigrants and refugees are frequently portrayed as economic burdens, security threats, or sources of social instability, contributing to the normalization of racial hostility and exclusion. In this context, refugee literature has become increasingly relevant as a form of cultural testimony that reveals the human consequences of displacement and systemic discrimination. Through emotional and symbolic representation, literary works such as Warsan Shire's *Home* provide insight into the psychological realities of migration that are often ignored within dominant public discourse.

This study investigates how Warsan Shire's *Home* represents systemic racism, psychological trauma, and survival through poetic language and fragmented imagery. This study contributes to literary psychology by highlighting how *Home* portrays systemic racism as both a psychological burden and a site of resilience. By integrating trauma theory and psychological literary criticism, this research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how poetic form represents trauma, survival, and identity within oppressive socio-political contexts.

2. Literature Review

Literary representations of racism and displacement have become central concerns in contemporary literary studies, particularly in relation to marginalized and refugee communities. These representations not only reflect social realities but also function as critical sites for examining the psychological consequences of systemic oppression. In this context, literature, particularly poetry, functions as a vital medium through which individuals articulate experiences of trauma, identity fragmentation, and survival within broader socio-political structures. The convergence of racism, forced migration, and psychological suffering highlights how individuals negotiate complex emotional realities shaped by both personal and structural forces.

2.1 Trauma Theory and Psychological Literary Criticism

Trauma theory provides a crucial framework for understanding the psychological impact of extreme experiences, particularly in contexts of violence, displacement, and systemic oppression. Cathy Caruth (1996) conceptualizes trauma as an "unclaimed experience," referring to an event that cannot be fully processed at the moment it occurs. Instead, trauma re-emerges belatedly through repetitive memories, emotional disturbances,

and fragmented recollections. This notion of belatedness highlights the temporal disruption inherent in traumatic experience.

Furthermore, Caruth emphasizes the unrepresentability of trauma, suggesting that language often fails to adequately capture its full intensity. This limitation positions literature "particularly poetry" as a significant medium for expressing what exceeds conventional discourse. Through figurative language, fragmentation, and symbolism, poetry becomes a space where the unspeakable aspects of trauma can be articulated indirectly, allowing deeply personal and often silenced experiences to emerge in alternative forms.

In addition, Judith Herman (1992) argues that recovery from trauma involves the reconstruction of narrative and the process of bearing witness. According to Herman, articulating traumatic experience is essential for psychological survival, as it enables individuals to reclaim agency and restore coherence to disrupted identities. In literary contexts, this process is reflected in the act of writing itself, which can function as both testimony and resistance, particularly for individuals navigating displacement and marginalization.

Recent studies have further expanded trauma theory by emphasizing the socio-political dimensions of trauma rather than viewing it solely as an individual psychological condition. For example, Furtado and Auchter (2025) critique the traditional understanding of trauma as merely an incomprehensible shock, arguing that trauma must also be understood within broader political and collective contexts. Similarly, Al Azmeh and Baert (2024) examine how "trauma work" operates within political movements, suggesting that trauma is deeply connected to systems of power, memory, and collective identity. These perspectives highlight that trauma is not only experienced internally but is also shaped by external structures that influence how suffering is produced, perceived, and articulated.

Within this framework, psychological literary criticism provides a complementary approach by examining how literary texts represent psychological experiences such as trauma, identity fragmentation, and emotional survival. Rather than treating trauma as solely a clinical condition, this approach focuses on how it is narrated, symbolized, and embodied within literary forms. In this sense, poetry becomes a particularly powerful medium for capturing the fragmented and affective dimensions of traumatic experience, especially in contexts of forced migration and racialized displacement, where conventional modes of expression often prove insufficient.

2.2 Racism and Psychological Trauma

The psychological dimensions of trauma are further intensified when examined in relation to racism. Frantz Fanon (1963) argues that racial oppression produces profound psychic alienation. Individuals subjected to systemic racism often internalize feelings of inferiority, resulting in long-term psychological damage that affects identity, self-perception, and emotional stability.

This internalized oppression contributes to complex forms of trauma that extend beyond singular events, becoming embedded in everyday experience. In literary representations, these psychological wounds are frequently conveyed through fragmented narratives, emotional intensity, and symbolic language. Such stylistic features mirror the disrupted nature of traumatic memory, reinforcing the connection between form and psychological condition.

Contemporary studies increasingly suggest that racial trauma among refugees is shaped not only by forced displacement but also by persistent experiences of exclusion within host societies. Racism frequently intersects with colonial legacies, gender discrimination, and social marginalization, creating layered forms of psychological distress that influence identity formation, emotional resilience, and belonging (Hatoss, 2024; Samnick & Michelis, 2024). These findings indicate that racial trauma should be understood as a multidimensional experience produced by interconnected structural forces rather than isolated acts of discrimination.

Furthermore, recent research on refugee trauma emphasizes that racism and displacement are deeply interconnected, where stigma, discrimination, hostile social environments, and anti-immigrant discourse continuously reproduce psychological distress beyond the initial experience of migration (Salim, 2024; Wypych & Bilewicz, 2024; Samnick & Michelis, 2024). These studies collectively suggest that discriminatory language and racial hostility function not merely as expressions of prejudice but as mechanisms that intensify acculturation stress, reinforce fear and alienation, and contribute to long-term emotional vulnerability among displaced populations.

Recent studies further indicate that misinformation, public misperceptions, and media narratives contribute significantly to the normalization of exclusionary attitudes toward refugees and migrants. Refugees are frequently portrayed as threats to national security, economic stability, or cultural cohesion, reinforcing social prejudice and psychological marginalization within host societies (Komendantova et al., 2023; Thorson & Abdelaaty, 2022). These findings demonstrate that racial trauma is sustained not only through direct discrimination but also through broader discursive environments that legitimize exclusion. However, many of these studies tend to prioritize socio-political analysis over close examination of literary form, leaving the role of poetic structure in representing trauma and racism relatively underexplored.

In this sense, poetry serves as a particularly effective medium for expressing racial trauma, as it allows for non-linear, affective, and fragmented modes of representation that reflect the lived realities of marginalized individuals.

2.3 Discourse, Power, and the Construction of the Other

To understand the structural origins of racial trauma, it is essential to examine the role of discourse and power in shaping social realities. Edward Said, in *Orientalism* (1978), introduces the concept of "the Other" to describe how dominant groups construct marginalized populations through biased and reductive representations. These representations often depict minorities as inferior, exotic, or threatening, thereby legitimizing systems of discrimination and exclusion. In the context of refugee narratives, such discursive constructions contribute to processes of dehumanization that intensify psychological suffering.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly suggests that media, political, institutional, and digital discourses play a crucial role in shaping refugee experiences and public perceptions of migration. Refugees are frequently represented as threats, burdens, or dependent subjects, contributing to identity conflict, psychological distress, and social exclusion within host societies (Harding et al., 2025; Ahmed et al., 2024). Research further demonstrates that these representations are embedded within broader racial and colonial structures that influence who is considered worthy of protection, recognition, and belonging.

(Astolfo & Allsopp, 2025; Stavropoulou, 2024). Collectively, these studies indicate that discourse functions as a powerful mechanism through which racialized exclusion is produced, normalized, and sustained.

Thus, trauma should not be understood solely as an individual psychological response, but also as a condition produced and reinforced by broader socio-political structures embedded in language, representation, and institutional practices.

2.4 Migration, Refugees, and Structural Oppression in Previous Studies

Previous studies on migration and refugee experiences consistently emphasize the role of structural inequalities in shaping both the social and psychological realities of displacement. Immigration policies, institutional systems, and public attitudes often reproduce discriminatory practices that limit belonging, recognition, and access to protection for displaced populations (Laupman et al., 2022; Al Hashmi, 2025; Ruhs, 2022). At the same time, experiences of discrimination and exclusion significantly affect refugees' emotional stability, sense of belonging, and identity formation within host societies (Damen et al., 2024; Knausenberger et al., 2024). Survival in such conditions is increasingly understood as an active process of adaptation, resistance, and agency rather than mere endurance (Ernawati et al., 2025). These findings suggest that displacement involves not only physical relocation but also a continuous negotiation with acceptance, recognition, and the meaning of home. This perspective aligns with literary representations that portray survival not merely as endurance, but as a dynamic and transformative process.

Recent literary and cultural studies further suggest that poetry, narrative expression, and social recognition play important roles in representing refugee experiences and resisting processes of dehumanization. Literary expression provides a space through which displaced individuals can articulate vulnerability, negotiate identity, and reclaim agency under conditions of marginalization (McAllister, 2024; Sharp, 2025). Together with broader studies on discrimination and public perception, these findings demonstrate that refugee experiences are shaped by the interaction of structural oppression, psychological struggle, and acts of resilience. Their findings indicate that these perceptions are deeply influenced by entrenched assumptions that contribute to ongoing marginalization.

Recent studies suggest that discrimination within immigration systems is closely connected to broader public attitudes toward refugees. Racism, social perceptions, and political narratives often influence both migration policies and humanitarian responses, shaping how refugees are received and treated within host societies (Al Hashmi, 2025; Ruhs, 2022). These findings demonstrate that systemic exclusion operates not only through formal institutions but also through societal attitudes that legitimize unequal treatment and marginalization. Collectively, these studies provide empirical support for the themes represented in literary texts, particularly the persistence of systemic racism and its psychological consequences for migrant communities.

2.5 Research Gap

Despite extensive research on trauma, racism, migration, discourse, and refugee experiences, these themes are often examined separately or within predominantly socio-political frameworks. Existing studies have demonstrated how discrimination, exclusionary discourse, public attitudes, and institutional structures contribute to the marginalization of

refugees and migrants. Other studies have explored trauma, belonging, resilience, and recognition as psychological consequences of displacement. However, relatively limited attention has been given to how these dimensions intersect within literary texts, particularly through poetic representations.

Moreover, although several studies acknowledge the importance of narrative and poetry in expressing refugee experiences, limited research has specifically examined how poetic form represents the relationship between systemic racism, psychological trauma, and survival. As a result, the role of literary techniques such as imagery, symbolism, repetition, and fragmentation in articulating racialized trauma remains underexplored.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining how systemic racism, psychological trauma, and psychological survival are represented in Warsan Shire's *Home* through the combined perspectives of trauma theory and psychological literary criticism.

3. Research Method

This study employs qualitative textual analysis to examine the representation of psychological trauma, systemic racism, and survival in Warsan Shire's *Home*. The primary data consist of the poem *Home* (2011), while secondary data include scholarly books and journal articles related to trauma theory, psychological literary criticism, racism, and migration studies. Data were collected through close reading of the poem, focusing on words, phrases, imagery, symbolism, and fragmented expressions associated with trauma, displacement, and survival. The analysis is guided by trauma theory and psychological literary criticism to interpret how literary elements construct experiences of racialized displacement, psychological suffering, and resilience. Through an interpretative reading of the text, the study explores the relationship between poetic form and the psychological dimensions of refugee experience.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Thematic Representation of Trauma, Racism, and Psychological Survival in *Home*

This section analyzes how psychological trauma, racism, and survival are represented through thematic patterns in the poem.

4.1.1 Forced Displacement and Survival

Warsan Shire's poem *Home* begins by challenging the assumption that migration is a voluntary act. Instead, the poem frames displacement as a condition of survival, where leaving is driven not by desire but by necessity.

*no one leaves home
unless home is the mouth of a shark*
(Shire, 2011)

The metaphor "mouth of a shark" does not merely represent danger. The image of being swallowed by a predator suggests a process of symbolic consumption in which the nation itself becomes a devouring force. Rather than functioning as a site of protection, home is transformed into a structure that consumes the identities of its own citizens. The shark imagery also evokes embodied fear, positioning survival as a visceral response to predatory violence. In this sense, Shire reconceptualizes nationalism not as belonging but as a form of violent containment from which escape becomes necessary. This reversal

establishes the central tension of the poem: survival requires departure, even when that departure means abandoning familiarity and identity.

*Until blade burnt threats into
your neck
And even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
(Shire, 2011)*

The image of threats being “burnt” into the neck suggests that violence is not temporary but inscribed onto the body. Trauma appears as an embodied condition, transforming the refugee’s body into a living archive of political terror. The neck functions symbolically as the site of voice and identity, implying that oppression seeks not only to wound the body but also to regulate speech, agency, and selfhood. While “carried the anthem” suggests a continued emotional attachment to homeland and identity. Although the speaker is forced to flee, the sense of belonging remains psychologically present. Shire’s poem complicates Caruth’s notion of belated trauma by demonstrating that trauma in *Home* is not just a memory, but an active force disrupting an individual’s safety and stability.

4.1.2 Psychological Trauma and Identity Loss

As the poem progresses, displacement is portrayed not only as physical movement but also as a psychological rupture that reshapes identity.

*only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn’t be going back
(Shire, 2011)*

The act of tearing the passport functions as a ritual of self-erasure. The passport represents legal identity, national belonging, and historical continuity. It reflects the painful recognition that return is no longer possible. The emotional intensity conveyed through “sobbing” reinforces the psychological impact of this moment, marking a transition from belonging to permanent displacement. By framing trauma as an immediate disruption of safety, Shire’s poem complicates Caruth’s belatedness and instead instantiates Judith Herman’s (1992) argument on the loss of agency. The speaker in *Home* cannot simply process trauma as a past memory; rather, the ongoing survival crisis demands the erasure of both homeland and identity, stripping them of any control over their trajectory.

*I don’t know what I’ve become
but I know that anywhere
is safer than here
(Shire, 2011)*

These lines reveal identity fragmentation caused by prolonged fear and instability. The speaker’s uncertainty about “what I’ve become” reflects the disruption of a coherent sense of self. Trauma, therefore, is not limited to physical suffering, but also affects psychological identity and emotional stability. Safety is no longer understood as a permanent condition, but as a fragile comparison shaped by violence and displacement.

Caruth (1996) notes that trauma splinters self-narrative continuity; similarly, Shire depicts displacement as an existential crisis where identity must be painstakingly reconstructed amid ongoing fear and survival.

4.1.3 Violence and Survival in Conditions of Displacement

Shire further depicts displacement as a condition marked by vulnerability and ongoing violence.

no one chooses refugee camps
(Shire, 2011)

Shire's stark syntax in the line 'no one chooses refugee camps' strips the refugee experience of any romanticized agency. By isolating this absolute declaration through a deliberate line break, the poem visually mirrors the fragmentation of the displaced subject, transforming the geographical isolation of the camp into a formal element of textual rupture. This line suggests that refugee camps, although intended as spaces of protection, are experienced as sites of prolonged hardship. They function as paradoxical environments where safety is limited and uncertainty persists.

than fourteen men between your legs
(Shire, 2011)

This line confronts sexual violence as part of the lived reality of displacement. Rather than presenting it as an isolated incident, Shire situates it within broader conditions of vulnerability shaped by displacement and structural inequality. In this context, survival involves enduring forms of exploitation that reflect unequal power relations. This representation aligns with Judith Herman's (1992) argument that prolonged exposure to violence, particularly in conditions of instability, produces complex trauma characterized by powerlessness and loss of control. Similarly, Cathy Caruth (1996) emphasizes that trauma is not only an individual psychological wound but also a response to overwhelming events that exceed ordinary experience. Through this lens, Shire's portrayal suggests that sexual violence is embedded within the broader traumatic conditions of forced displacement.

4.1.4 Systemic Racism and Dehumanization

The poem culminates in a portrayal of racism and social hostility faced by immigrants.

go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
(Shire, 2011)

These expressions demonstrate how language functions as a mechanism of exclusion and dehumanization. The progression from racial designation ("blacks") to legal classification ("asylum seekers") reveals how racism operates across multiple levels of social power. Identity is reduced to categories that define refugees primarily through difference, dependency, and perceived threat. The final accusation, "sucking our country dry," frames migrants as parasitic figures who consume national resources without belonging to the

nation itself. Through this rhetoric, the poem exposes a discourse of predatory nationalism in which the imagined purity and security of the nation are protected by casting refugees as dangerous outsiders. Racism in *Home* therefore extends beyond interpersonal hostility and emerges as a structural system of representation that legitimizes exclusion while denying refugees full social and human recognition. Systems of racial power construct marginalized individuals as inferior and socially undesirable through symbolic and linguistic violence, while distinctions between “refugees” and “economic migrants” are often politically constructed through exclusionary discourse (Fanon, 1963; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). In this context, discriminatory language becomes a tool that reinforces exclusion while denying the humanity of immigrants and refugees, shaping public perceptions by portraying immigrants as burdens rather than individuals escaping violence and trauma.

Repeated exposure to racial hostility may also produce internalized oppression, where marginalized individuals gradually accept negative social labels as unavoidable realities (Dumitru, 2023). Media narratives and political discourse frequently reinforce stereotypes that associate immigrants with criminality, danger, or social instability (Thorson & Abdelaaty, 2022; Wypych & Bilewicz, 2024).

Through these representations, Shire’s *Home* functions not only as a testimony of displacement, but also as a critique of systemic racism that intensifies the psychological suffering of refugees and immigrants.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study show that displacement in Warsan Shire’s *Home* is not merely a physical movement, but a deeply psychological experience shaped by trauma, systemic racism, and ongoing struggle for survival. The poem illustrates how forced migration disrupts identity, emotional stability, and the sense of belonging, aligning with key perspectives in trauma theory and psychological literary criticism.

While Caruth conceptualizes trauma as an “unclaimed experience” that returns belatedly through fragmented memories, *Home* suggests that trauma is not confined to the aftermath of violence. Instead, trauma persists as an ongoing condition continuously reproduced through displacement, social exclusion, and racial hostility. Shire therefore expands trauma beyond a singular past event and represents it as a continuing social reality. Trauma is not fully processed at the moment it occurs, but instead re-emerges through fragmented expressions and emotional intensity. This is evident in Shire’s use of disjointed imagery and abrupt narrative shifts, which mirror the instability of traumatic memory. The inability to articulate trauma directly is represented through symbolic language, reinforcing the idea that poetry becomes a medium for expressing what cannot be said explicitly.

Although Herman emphasizes narrative reconstruction as an important stage of recovery, *Home* presents a more uncertain process. The poem offers no stable resolution or restored sense of self. Instead, survival appears to depend on the ability to endure fragmentation and instability. Shire thus complicates the assumption that trauma necessarily moves toward coherence or recovery. In *Home*, the refugee figure experiences a loss of identity as displacement forces a separation from homeland, culture, and self-definition. The act of leaving home is not only geographical but also psychological, resulting in fragmentation and uncertainty. Survival, therefore, involves not only physical endurance but also the attempt to reconstruct meaning under conditions of instability.

Beyond thematic content, the poem's formal features play a crucial role in representing trauma. Repetition, fragmentation, enjambment, and second-person narration contribute to a reading experience characterized by instability and urgency. The recurring phrase "no one" functions as a collective testimony that resists dominant narratives about voluntary migration, while fragmented lineation mirrors the disruption of traumatic memory. Through these formal strategies, trauma is not only described but also structurally enacted within the poem.

The analysis also demonstrates that trauma in the poem is inseparable from systemic structures of racism and oppression. This aligns with the perspective that trauma should not be understood solely as an individual psychological condition, but as a socio-political phenomenon shaped by external forces. The dehumanizing language directed at immigrants in the poem reflects broader discursive practices that construct refugees as "the Other," a concept associated with Edward Said. Through such representations, marginalized groups are positioned as inferior or threatening, which legitimizes exclusion and discrimination.

In addition, the psychological effects of racism depicted in the poem are consistent with Frantz Fanon's theory of internalized oppression. However, Shire extends this framework by showing how racialization operates not only through colonial hierarchies but also through contemporary immigration systems, public discourse, and bureaucratic classifications. Categories such as "refugee" and "asylum seeker" become mechanisms through which exclusion is normalized and reproduced. Continuous exposure to racial hostility can lead individuals to internalize negative perceptions imposed by society, resulting in feelings of inferiority, alienation, and psychological distress. In *Home*, this is reflected in the erosion of identity and the normalization of suffering, where discrimination becomes part of everyday experience.

The findings further support contemporary studies that emphasize the intersection between racism, migration, and psychological trauma. As discussed in the literature, displacement often places individuals in environments where they face not only material hardship but also social exclusion and stigma. Biases such as the perception of immigrants as economic threats or security risks contribute to hostile social attitudes, which intensify the psychological burden of displacement. In this context, trauma becomes cumulative, shaped by both past experiences of violence and present conditions of marginalization.

Moreover, the poem illustrates that survival is not a simple or linear process. Instead, it involves navigating conditions of vulnerability, uncertainty, and limited agency. This aligns with recent perspectives that view survival as a form of resistance, where individuals continue to exist and adapt despite structural oppression. In *Home*, survival is portrayed as a complex negotiation between endurance and loss, where individuals must constantly adjust to unstable and often hostile environments.

Ultimately, this study contributes to literary psychology by demonstrating how Shire's poetic representation of displacement connects individual trauma with systemic racism. The poem functions not only as a reflection of lived experience but also as a form of resistance that challenges dominant narratives about migration. By integrating thematic analysis with psychological literary criticism, this study highlights how literature can reveal the emotional and structural dimensions of displacement, offering a deeper understanding of the refugee experience.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined how Warsan Shire's *Home* represents psychological trauma, systemic racism, and survival through poetic language and form. The findings demonstrate that displacement in the poem is not portrayed as a voluntary act of migration but as a necessary response to violence, fear, and insecurity. Through metaphor, symbolism, repetition, fragmentation, and emotionally charged imagery, Shire depicts trauma as a multidimensional experience that affects both psychological identity and social belonging. The poem further reveals how systemic racism intensifies the refugee experience by reducing individuals to racialized and bureaucratic categories that reinforce exclusion and dehumanization.

The study also shows that trauma in *Home* extends beyond individual suffering. While trauma theory often emphasizes the aftermath of overwhelming events, Shire portrays trauma as an ongoing condition continuously reproduced through displacement, social hostility, and racialized exclusion. Survival therefore emerges not as recovery from trauma, but as a continual negotiation with uncertainty, vulnerability, and identity disruption. Through its use of repetition, fragmentation, enjambment, and second-person narration, the poem formally enacts the instability it describes, demonstrating how poetic structure itself becomes a medium for representing traumatic experience.

Academically, these findings contribute to literary trauma studies by illustrating how trauma can be represented not only as a psychological wound but also as a socially and politically sustained condition. The study further contributes to refugee literature by highlighting the relationship between displacement, identity fragmentation, and racialized belonging. In the context of postcolonial studies, the findings reveal how contemporary migration discourse continues to reproduce forms of Othering and exclusion that extend beyond traditional colonial frameworks. Moreover, the study strengthens the field of literary psychology by demonstrating how poetic form can articulate complex emotional experiences that are often difficult to express through conventional language.

Future research may expand this discussion through comparative analyses of refugee poetry across different cultural and geopolitical contexts. Further studies could also investigate intersectional dimensions of refugee experience, particularly the relationship between trauma, gender, race, and postcolonial identity. Additionally, as migration narratives increasingly circulate through digital platforms, future scholarship may explore how digital storytelling and online media reshape the representation of displacement, belonging, and psychological survival.

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CODE-MIXING IN MERRY RIANA AND REZA RAHADIAN'S YOUTUBE DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study investigates code-mixing practices in the YouTube discourse of Merry Riana and Reza Rahadian, particularly in the episode "Speaking Out About Politics, Family, and Identity." Drawing on Suandi's sociolinguistic framework, the study examines the types of code-mixing and the factors influencing their occurrence in digital communication. Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the data were collected through transcription, observation, and note-taking techniques from a podcast video uploaded on YouTube. The findings reveal 287 instances of code-mixing consisting of clause-level (155), word-level (75), and phrase-level (57) insertions, with clause-level code-mixing appearing most frequently. All identified forms are categorized as outward code-mixing due to the insertion of English elements into Indonesian discourse. The dominant influencing factors include the use of popular terms, bilingual identity, communicative efficiency, and speakers' linguistic habits. The study demonstrates that code-mixing functions not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a strategic communicative practice for constructing professional identity and audience engagement in digital media discourse.

Keywords: *bilingualism; code mixing; communication; sociolinguistics; YouTube.*

1. Introduction

In bilingual and multilingual societies, the use of more than one language within a single interaction has become a common sociolinguistic phenomenon. Speakers frequently alternate between languages to achieve communicative goals, negotiate meaning, and express social identity. Mackey and Fishman, as cited in Chaer and Agustina (2010), define bilingualism as the use of two languages by an individual in social interaction. Such linguistic conditions contribute to the emergence of various language contact phenomena, one of which is code-mixing. Code-mixing refers to the insertion of linguistic elements from one language into another language being used in an utterance. These insertions may occur at the level of words, phrases, or clauses. According to Chaer and Agustina (2010), code-mixing occurs without changes in the conversational situation or topic. In contemporary digital communication, this phenomenon increasingly appears not only in face-to-face interaction but also across digital media platforms such as podcasts, interviews, and YouTube video content.

The rapid growth of digital podcasts has transformed public communication into a more interactive and dialogic form of discourse. Unlike scripted monologic content, podcasts provide spontaneous conversational settings in which speakers negotiate identity, professionalism, and audience engagement simultaneously. From a sociolinguistic perspective, digital podcasts represent a significant site for examining how bilingual speakers strategically employ language in public discourse. In this context, code-mixing is not merely a reflection of bilingual competence but also a communicative resource for constructing professional identity and maintaining interactional dynamics with audiences. Moreover, clause-level code-mixing deserves particular attention because it reflects a higher degree of bilingual fluency and syntactic integration compared to word- or phrase-level insertions. The use of clauses from another language may indicate deliberate rhetorical choices, communicative efficiency, or identity performance in digital interaction.

Theoretically, Suandi (2014) classifies code-mixing based on linguistic level and the origin of borrowed elements. Based on linguistic level, code-mixing includes insertions at the word, phrase, and clause levels. Meanwhile, based on the origin of linguistic elements, code-mixing is categorized into inward code-mixing and outward code-mixing. Suandi (2014) further explains that the occurrence of code-mixing is influenced by several factors, including speakers' linguistic habits, limited vocabulary, the use of popular terminology, communicative goals, and bilingual background. This framework enables a systematic analysis of both the structural forms and sociolinguistic motivations underlying code-mixing practices in digital discourse.

One example of this phenomenon can be found in the YouTube podcast hosted by Merry Riana featuring Reza Rahadian in the episode entitled "Speaking Out About Politics, Family, and Identity." In the conversation, both speakers predominantly use Indonesian while frequently inserting English elements into their utterances. The interaction demonstrates how bilingual public figures strategically integrate two languages within professional digital communication. The use of code-mixing in this context functions not only to convey information efficiently but also to create relatability, emphasize particular meanings, and project a modern professional image before audiences. Previous studies have shown that code-mixing may enhance communicative effectiveness in multilingual interaction (Fathir et al., 2026), express social identity in digital communication (Purba et al., 2024), and strengthen interpersonal engagement with audiences (Hikmarezki & Widayati, 2024). These findings indicate that code-mixing carries both linguistic and sociocultural significance within contemporary media discourse.

Several previous studies have investigated code-mixing in digital media contexts. Umifa et al. (2022) found that code-mixing in Maudy Ayunda's YouTube videos was influenced by bilingual background, limited terminology, and the use of popular expressions. Nasution et al., (2023) demonstrated that bilingual competence significantly influenced the use of code-mixing in Nessie Judge's content. Wardani and Wahyono (2026) further revealed that code-mixing on the Keluarga Bacil YouTube channel reflected linguistic identity and audience adaptation. In addition, Aprillia et al. (2022) and Arika et al. (2025) emphasized that code-mixing has become a widespread phenomenon within bilingual communities and digital communication practices. However, previous studies predominantly focus on entertainment-oriented content creators and monologic discourse, while limited attention has been paid to dialogic podcast interactions involving professional public figures. Moreover, the strategic role of code-mixing in constructing professional identity within

Indonesian digital discourse remains underexplored. Existing studies also tend to emphasize lexical insertions, whereas clause-level code-mixing as a more complex bilingual structure has not been sufficiently analyzed.

Based on these gaps, this study offers a different perspective by positioning code-mixing not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a strategic communicative practice within digital podcast discourse. This study specifically examines the types of code-mixing based on the origin of borrowed elements and linguistic levels, as well as the factors influencing their occurrence, using Suandi's (2014) sociolinguistic framework. Therefore, this study aims to (1) identify the types of code-mixing based on the origin of borrowed elements, (2) describe the forms of code-mixing based on linguistic levels, and (3) analyze the factors influencing the use of code-mixing in the YouTube conversation between Merry Riana and Reza Rahadian.

2. Literature Review

Research on code-mixing in the YouTube interview between Merry Riana and Reza Rahadian requires a comprehensive theoretical framework to explain how bilingual speakers strategically employ multiple languages in digital communication. In contemporary sociolinguistic studies, language is no longer viewed merely as a neutral communication tool but as a social practice closely related to identity construction, audience positioning, and communicative negotiation within specific contexts. The increasing expansion of digital media platforms, particularly YouTube podcasts, has intensified multilingual interaction and created new spaces where bilingual speakers dynamically combine linguistic resources during public discourse.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language use is strongly influenced by social context, communicative purposes, and speakers' identities. Suandi (2014) explains that sociolinguistics examines language variation and language choice within particular social situations. Similarly, Chaer and Agustina (2010) argue that language use reflects speakers' relationships with their social environment and communication settings. However, contemporary sociolinguistic scholarship has moved beyond viewing bilingual practices merely as language alternation. Blommaert (2010) emphasizes that language practices in globalization are closely connected to mobility, identity performance, and digital interaction. In digital discourse, bilingual speakers often use multiple linguistic codes strategically to negotiate professionalism, modernity, and audience engagement.

The phenomenon of code-mixing has also been widely discussed within international sociolinguistic scholarship. Gumperz (1982) conceptualizes bilingual language practices as contextualization cues that help speakers construct social meaning during interaction. Myers-Scotton (1993) further argues that bilingual speakers consciously select linguistic codes to index social identity and communicative intentions. Meanwhile, Muysken (2000) conceptualizes code-mixing as a complex bilingual speech phenomenon involving insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization. This perspective broadens the understanding of code-mixing beyond simple lexical insertion by emphasizing the structural and interactional complexity of bilingual discourse.

Recent developments in digital sociolinguistics also highlight the relevance of translanguaging practices in online communication. Wei (2018) argues that translanguaging in digital communication reflects dynamic multilingual identity construction and flexible

meaning-making practices among bilingual speakers. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of YouTube podcasts, where speakers frequently combine linguistic resources to maintain interactional flow, establish relatability, and strengthen audience connection. Therefore, code-mixing in digital podcasts should not be understood solely as a linguistic deviation or casual bilingual habit, but also as a strategic communicative practice shaped by social and technological contexts.

In multilingual societies such as Indonesia, bilingualism becomes an important sociolinguistic foundation for understanding code-mixing practices. Ma'arif and Lailia (2022) explain that bilingual speakers frequently alternate between languages depending on communicative needs and interactional settings. Chaer and Agustina (2010) further note that bilingual proficiency does not necessarily indicate equal mastery of both languages, as speakers may demonstrate dominance in one language while strategically employing another for specific communicative functions. In digital communication contexts, bilingual ability allows speakers to combine linguistic elements flexibly in order to create modern, professional, and audience-oriented discourse.

The emergence of code-mixing is also inseparable from language contact phenomena. Language contact occurs when two or more languages interact within social communication, leading to linguistic influence and hybrid language practices. According to Chaer and Agustina (2010), language contact may produce phenomena such as code-switching, code-mixing, interference, and borrowing. In the digital era, language contact becomes increasingly intensive due to global media exposure, social networking platforms, and transnational communication practices. Adnyana (2023) explains that digital communication environments intensify multilingual interaction and shape speakers' communicative habits and cultural identities. Consequently, the integration of English elements into Indonesian discourse on social media reflects broader sociolinguistic transformations in contemporary communication.

Within this study, code-mixing is understood as both a linguistic phenomenon and a strategic communication practice. Suandi (2014) classifies code-mixing based on the origin of borrowed elements and linguistic levels. Based on linguistic origin, code-mixing includes inner code-mixing, outer code-mixing, and hybrid code-mixing. Based on linguistic level, code-mixing may occur at the word, phrase, and clause levels. Clause-level code-mixing is particularly significant because it demonstrates a more complex level of bilingual competence involving syntactic integration and communicative fluency. This form often reflects speakers' deliberate rhetorical strategies and stronger bilingual control compared to simple lexical insertion.

Several factors influence the occurrence of code-mixing in communication. Suandi (2014) identifies factors such as communicative goals, speaker background, use of popular terminology, prestige orientation, conversational setting, and audience adaptation. Maharani et al. (2025) further explain that code-mixing reflects speakers' social identity, communication style, and interactional preferences. In digital public discourse, code-mixing is frequently used by public figures to project professionalism, modernity, and cosmopolitan identity while simultaneously maintaining communicative intimacy with audiences. Therefore, code-mixing functions not only as linguistic variation but also as a symbolic strategy for identity construction in digital public spaces.

Research on code-mixing in digital media has been widely conducted, particularly on YouTube platforms. Umifa et al. (2022) found that code-mixing in Maudy Ayunda's YouTube

videos was influenced by bilingual background, popular terminology, and communication style. Nasution et al. (2023) demonstrated that bilingual competence and audience orientation significantly influenced code-mixing practices in Nessie Judge's digital content. Septiaresmi et al. (2024) further revealed that bilingual family identity shaped code-mixing practices on the Kimbab Family YouTube channel. Other studies by Putri (2022), Wardani and Suwandi (2021), and Setyaningrum (2019) also emphasize the relationship between code-mixing, bilingual identity, and audience engagement in digital communication.

Nevertheless, previous studies predominantly focus on entertainment-oriented content creators, monologic communication, and lexical-level code-mixing. Limited attention has been given to dialogic podcast interactions involving professional public figures in Indonesian digital discourse. Furthermore, the strategic role of clause-level code-mixing in constructing professional identity and interactional positioning remains underexplored. This theoretical and empirical gap highlights the need for further investigation into how bilingual public figures strategically employ code-mixing within professional digital communication.

Therefore, this study offers a novel perspective by analyzing code-mixing not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a strategic communicative practice in digital podcast discourse. This study focuses on the types of code-mixing based on the origin of borrowed elements and linguistic levels, as well as the factors influencing their occurrence in the YouTube conversation between Merry Riana and Reza Rahadian. By integrating local sociolinguistic frameworks with contemporary international scholarship, this study aims to contribute to broader discussions on bilingual communication, digital discourse, and identity construction in multilingual societies.

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using content analysis to investigate code-mixing practices in the YouTube podcast conversation between Merry Riana and Reza Rahadian entitled "Speaking Out About Politics, Family, and His Identity." A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to explore the sociolinguistic meanings, communicative functions, and contextual factors underlying code-mixing practices in digital discourse. Sugiyono (2023) explains that qualitative research focuses on understanding meanings, interpretations, and social phenomena within their natural contexts rather than emphasizing numerical measurement. Content analysis was used as the primary analytical method because it enables the systematic identification, classification, and interpretation of linguistic phenomena within communication data. According to Bungin (2018), content analysis is a research technique used to produce valid and replicable interpretations by considering communication contexts.

The selection of the podcast episode was based on several considerations. First, the episode presents a dialogic interaction between two professional public figures with bilingual communication backgrounds. Second, the discussion topics concerning politics, family, and identity create a natural conversational setting that encourages spontaneous language use and code-mixing practices. Third, the podcast format allows extended interactional exchanges, making it suitable for examining clause-level code-mixing and communicative strategies in digital discourse. Therefore, the selected episode provides rich sociolinguistic data relevant to the objectives of this study.

The data in this study consist of utterances containing code-mixing produced by Merry Riana and Reza Rahadian throughout the podcast conversation. The data source was obtained from a video uploaded on Merry Riana's official YouTube channel with a duration of 1 hour, 3 minutes, and 15 seconds. Data collection was conducted through documentation, listening, and note-taking techniques. The researcher downloaded the video, repeatedly listened to the conversation, transcribed the utterances, and identified segments containing code-mixing. Repeated observation was conducted to ensure data accuracy and contextual understanding.

To strengthen analytical rigor, the study employed a coding system based on Suandi's (2014) sociolinguistic framework. The coding process was conducted in several stages. First, all utterances containing code-mixing were identified and transcribed. Second, the utterances were coded according to the origin of borrowed linguistic elements, namely inner code-mixing, outer code-mixing, and hybrid code-mixing. Third, the data were classified based on linguistic levels, including word-level, phrase-level, and clause-level code-mixing. Finally, the researcher analyzed the sociolinguistic factors influencing code-mixing practices, such as communicative goals, bilingual identity, use of popular terminology, prestige orientation, and audience adaptation.

The analytical framework used in this study is presented in the following table.

Table 1.

Analytical Framework of Code-Mixing

Analytical Aspect	Category	Theoretical Reference
Origin of borrowed elements	Inner, outer, hybrid code-mixing	Suandi (2014)
Linguistic level	Word, phrase, clause	Suandi (2014)
Influencing factors	Identity, communicative goals, prestige, audience adaptation, popular terms	Suandi (2014); Chaer & Agustina (2010)

To ensure coding reliability and analytical validity, the study applied peer checking and inter-rater validation procedures. The coding results were reviewed and discussed with academic peers familiar with sociolinguistic analysis to minimize subjective interpretation and improve consistency in data classification. In addition, coding validation was conducted by repeatedly reviewing the transcription data and comparing the identified categories with the theoretical framework employed in the study.

Data validity was further strengthened through triangulation techniques, including source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and temporal triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing code-mixing data across different segments of the conversation. Methodological triangulation involved the use of multiple data collection techniques, namely documentation, listening, transcription, and note-taking. Temporal triangulation was conducted by reviewing the data repeatedly at different times to ensure consistency in interpretation. Furthermore, persistent observation was applied throughout the analysis process to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the communicative context.

This study also considered ethical aspects of digital research. The podcast analyzed in this study was publicly accessible on YouTube, and the data were used solely for academic purposes. The researcher maintained the authenticity of the utterances without altering the original conversational context to ensure research integrity and accurate interpretation.

4. Results and Discussion

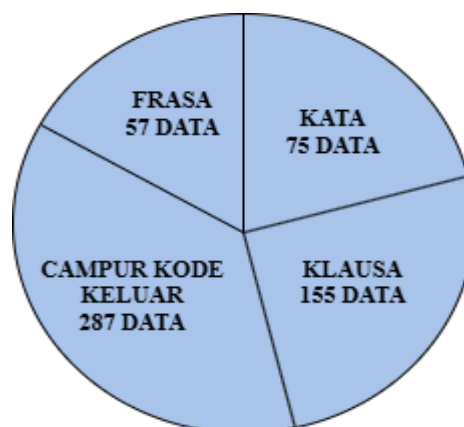
Based on the research findings, the use of code-mixing in the conversation between Merry Riana and Reza Rahadian demonstrates significant linguistic variation at the word, phrase, and clause levels. These findings support Suandi's (2014) theory that code-mixing may occur across multiple linguistic structures in bilingual communication. However, beyond merely identifying linguistic forms, the findings also reveal how bilingual public figures strategically employ English elements as part of identity construction, audience positioning, and communicative negotiation within Indonesian digital discourse.

The analysis process was conducted systematically through transcription, identification of code-mixing utterances, coding procedures, classification of linguistic forms, analysis of sociolinguistic factors, and interpretative analysis. Through this process, 287 instances of code-mixing were identified, consisting of word-level, phrase-level, and clause-level insertions. All identified data were categorized as outward code-mixing because the speakers inserted English elements into Indonesian discourse.

The distribution of code-mixing data is presented in the following diagram.

Figure 1.

Distribution of Code-Mixing Forms in Merry Riana and Reza Rahadian's YouTube Conversation



Based on Figure 1, code-mixing was identified at the word, phrase, and clause levels. Among the three categories, clause-level code-mixing emerged as the most dominant form with 155 data, followed by word-level code-mixing with 75 data and phrase-level code-mixing with 57 data. The dominance of clause-level code-mixing indicates that the speakers do not merely insert isolated English vocabulary but also employ more complex grammatical structures involving complete subject-predicate constructions.

This finding suggests a relatively high degree of bilingual fluency and reflects the normalization of English as symbolic capital within Indonesian digital media discourse. Unlike word- or phrase-level insertions, clause-level code-mixing requires more advanced linguistic competence because speakers must maintain grammatical coherence while shifting between

languages. In this context, English functions not only as a supplementary linguistic resource but also as a marker of professionalism, modernity, and global orientation in public digital communication.

Meanwhile, word-level and phrase-level code-mixing continue to function as communicative strategies for efficiency, emphasis, and audience relatability. Frequently used English expressions such as “audition,” “casting,” “single parent,” and “privilege” have become increasingly normalized in Indonesian urban discourse, particularly in entertainment and social media contexts. The use of these expressions demonstrates how English lexical items are socially perceived as more practical, expressive, and culturally relevant in contemporary communication.

4.1 Word-Level Code-Mixing

The use of word-level code-mixing demonstrates the integration of globally recognizable English terminology into Indonesian communication practices. In Data D1, the word “audition” is inserted into Indonesian discourse. Rather than functioning merely as lexical borrowing, the use of “audition” reflects the dominance of entertainment-industry terminology that has become socially normalized among Indonesian audiences. The speaker's choice to maintain the English term instead of using its Indonesian equivalent positions the interaction within a professional entertainment context familiar to digital audiences.

Similarly, in Data D2, the use of the word “relate” demonstrates how contemporary bilingual speakers strategically employ English vocabulary to express emotional connection more naturally and efficiently. In Indonesian digital discourse, the expression “can relate” has become part of popular online interaction and youth communication culture. Therefore, the use of this term not only reflects bilingual competence but also constructs audience intimacy through expressions widely recognized within digital communities.

The use of “casting” in Data D3 further reinforces the influence of professional and entertainment discourse on bilingual communication practices. The term carries industrial and cultural associations that may not be fully represented through direct Indonesian translation. Consequently, code-mixing functions not only for communicative convenience but also for maintaining discourse authenticity in professional media interaction.

Likewise, the insertion of the word “privilege” in Data D4 reflects the growing influence of global digital discourse on Indonesian sociolinguistic practices. In contemporary Indonesian online communication, “privilege” is strongly associated with discussions of social class, opportunity, and identity politics. Its use in the conversation demonstrates how English terminology may carry stronger sociocultural implications and symbolic meanings than equivalent Indonesian expressions.

4.2 Phrase-Level Code-Mixing

Phrase-level code-mixing demonstrates a more complex integration of English structures into Indonesian discourse. In Data D5, the phrase “single parent” is employed without translation despite the availability of Indonesian equivalents. This finding suggests that the English phrase has become socially institutionalized within Indonesian public discourse, particularly in media narratives and discussions concerning family identity. The

use of the phrase also contributes to audience positioning by employing terminology widely recognized within urban and digital communication contexts.

In Data D6, the phrase “financial support” reflects communicative efficiency and professional discourse orientation. English phrases related to finance, business, and professional life are frequently maintained in bilingual discourse because they are perceived as more formal, modern, and internationally oriented. This demonstrates how code-mixing symbolically constructs professional identity and intellectual credibility in public communication.

Meanwhile, the phrase “maybe more” in Data D7 illustrates the informal and conversational function of phrase-level code-mixing. The insertion of short English phrases contributes to conversational fluidity and reflects the naturalized use of bilingual expressions in spontaneous digital interaction. This phenomenon supports Wei’s (2018) argument that multilingual speakers dynamically combine linguistic resources to negotiate meaning and interactional relationships in digital communication.

4.3 Clause-Level Code-Mixing

Clause-level code-mixing represents the most linguistically complex form identified in this study. In Data D8, clauses such as “I have some salt” and “Okay, let’s eat” demonstrate complete grammatical integration involving subject-predicate structures. The use of full English clauses indicates a higher degree of bilingual competence compared to simple lexical insertion. More importantly, these clauses contribute to conversational spontaneity and interactional engagement, creating a relaxed and globally oriented communication style commonly associated with digital podcast discourse.

Similarly, the clause “It’s interesting” in Data D9 functions not only as a linguistic insertion but also as a discourse marker expressing evaluation and interpersonal positioning. The use of English evaluative clauses in Indonesian discourse reflects how bilingual speakers strategically employ English to create emphasis, sophistication, and conversational dynamism in public communication.

In Data D10, the utterance “Reza Rahadian is very versatile” was identified as clause-level code-mixing because it contains a complete grammatical structure consisting of a subject (“Reza Rahadian”) and predicate (“is very versatile”). This corrected transcription fulfills the grammatical requirements of an English clause. The use of the adjective “versatile” reflects professional evaluation discourse commonly associated with global entertainment industries. Sociolinguistically, the clause constructs Reza Rahadian’s public identity as a flexible, accomplished, and internationally recognized actor. The insertion of English evaluative language therefore functions not merely as bilingual practice but also as symbolic prestige performance within Indonesian digital media discourse.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that code-mixing in the conversation between Merry Riana and Reza Rahadian functions beyond linguistic variation alone. The use of English elements reflects communicative strategies associated with professionalism, prestige construction, audience engagement, and bilingual identity performance within contemporary digital public discourse. The dominance of clause-level code-mixing particularly indicates that English has become increasingly normalized as symbolic capital among Indonesian public figures operating within digital media environments.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that code-mixing in the conversation between Merry Riana and Reza Rahadian functions not merely as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a strategic communicative practice within Indonesian digital podcast discourse. The occurrence of code-mixing at the word, phrase, and clause levels demonstrates the speakers' bilingual flexibility in utilizing English and Indonesian simultaneously to achieve communicative effectiveness, audience engagement, and interactional fluidity. The dominance of clause-level code-mixing further indicates a relatively high degree of bilingual competence and reflects the increasing normalization of English as symbolic capital in Indonesian digital media communication.

The findings also reveal that outward code-mixing, particularly the insertion of English elements into Indonesian discourse, is closely associated with the construction of professionalism, modernity, and global identity in public communication. Factors such as the use of popular terminology, bilingual background, communicative goals, and speakers' linguistic habits significantly influence the emergence of code-mixing practices. In this context, English is not only employed as an additional linguistic resource but also functions symbolically to position speakers as educated, globally connected, and socially relevant public figures within digital media environments.

Theoretically, this study contributes to sociolinguistic scholarship by extending the discussion of code-mixing beyond structural linguistic classification toward its role as a communicative and identity-construction strategy in digital discourse. The study also strengthens contemporary perspectives on bilingual communication by demonstrating how clause-level code-mixing operates as a marker of interactional competence and symbolic prestige in Indonesian podcast communication. Furthermore, the integration of local sociolinguistic frameworks with contemporary international perspectives provides a broader understanding of bilingual practices in digital public spaces.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, the research relies on a single data source, namely one podcast episode from Merry Riana's YouTube channel, which may limit the generalizability of the findings across broader digital communication contexts. Second, the analysis primarily focuses on verbal linguistic elements and does not comprehensively examine multimodal aspects such as gestures, facial expressions, intonation, visual presentation, and audience interaction, which may also contribute to meaning construction in digital discourse.

Therefore, future studies are recommended to conduct multimodal discourse analysis in order to explore the interaction between verbal and non-verbal communication in bilingual digital media practices. Future research may also expand the scope of investigation through cross-platform studies involving podcasts, Instagram, TikTok, and other social media platforms to examine how code-mixing practices vary across digital communication environments. In addition, comparative studies involving different public figures, professional backgrounds, or audience communities would provide a deeper understanding of bilingual identity construction and communicative strategies in contemporary multilingual societies.

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SITUATIONAL FACTORS SHAPING VIETNAMESE STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN EFL SPEAKING CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Students' reluctance to speak in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes poses a major challenge for teachers. This issue may stem from either learner-related characteristics (e.g., anxiety, confidence) or environmental factors (e.g., classroom climate, peer support). The current study explores Vietnamese students' perceptions of situational variables affecting their willingness to communicate (WTC) in EFL speaking classrooms. Employing a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten third-year Vietnamese English-major students and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that students' WTC is influenced by multiple situational factors that can be categorized into task type, peer characteristics, and teacher practices. Specifically, students show greater WTC during interactive tasks such as games, videos, pair work, or small-group discussions on engaging topics. A supportive classroom climate and cooperative peers further enhance communicative readiness. Furthermore, teachers play a crucial role in fostering WTC through openness, approachability, and flexible pedagogy. The current study contributes to contextual understandings of WTC in EFL by highlighting situational factors specific to Vietnamese classrooms, thereby extending existing research beyond individual psychological variables. Pedagogical implications for designing interactive, supportive classroom environments that foster participation and communicative confidence are also offered.

Keywords: *classroom interaction; EFL; situational factors; speaking classes; willingness to communicate, Vietnamese learners.*

1. Introduction

Modern language pedagogy emphasizes equipping learners with the ability to use the target language effectively in authentic communicative contexts. Communicative language teaching requires students to actively engage in meaningful interaction. In this regard, the concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) has become central to second language acquisition research. MacIntyre et al. (1998) define WTC as learners' readiness to initiate discourse in a second or foreign language. Later, MacIntyre et al. (2003) argue that fostering WTC should be a primary objective of L2 instruction, as greater willingness to communicate increases learners' exposure to authentic language use and expands opportunities for meaningful practice.

Although opportunities to speak are provided, learners vary considerably in their communicative behavior: some readily participate, while others remain silent. Explaining this variation is complex, as communicative behavior is influenced by an interplay of individual, social, linguistic, and situational factors (MacIntyre, 2007). This interplay renders classroom silence a complex pedagogical challenge. Nevertheless, understanding the variables that enhance or inhibit learners' readiness to speak is essential for improving classroom practice and maximizing learning opportunities. Identifying the causes of communicative reluctance is especially critical in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where exposure to the target language is largely restricted to the classroom and participation becomes the primary avenue for practicing speaking skills. Reluctance to participate, therefore, reduces opportunities for linguistic development and may negatively affect progress and motivation.

Although numerous studies have examined factors affecting WTC in various EFL contexts, relatively few studies have explored situational influences on WTC among Vietnamese English-major students in tertiary education using qualitative inquiry. Existing research has predominantly relied on survey-based approaches, providing limited insight into learners' subjective experiences and perceptions. Therefore, further qualitative investigation is needed to understand how classroom-specific factors shape learners' willingness to communicate in this context. In light of these concerns, the present study aims to explore Vietnamese EFL learners' perceptions of the contextual factors that shape their willingness to speak English in language classrooms. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do task types shape English majors' WTC?
2. How do peer-related factors influence WTC?
3. How do teacher-related factors contribute to WTC?

2. Literature review

2.1 Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

L2 WTC is a complex construct shaped by communicative competence and psychological readiness. According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), L2 WTC is an individual's readiness to initiate discourse at a specific moment with particular interlocutors using L2. To clarify the factors shaping L2 communication, MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed a model integrating linguistic competence, communicative processes, and social-psychological influences that collectively contribute to an individual's readiness to use L2. Structurally, the model is represented as a six-layer pyramid comprising twelve interrelated variables, which are grouped into two broad categories and reflect linguistic, communicative, and psychological dimensions (see *Figure 1*). In this model, Layers I–III represent situation-specific influences, whereas Layers IV–VI reflect more stable determinants of WTC. The model posits that progression upward increases the likelihood of L2 use, although the influence of variables—particularly from Layer III to Layer I—remains context-sensitive.

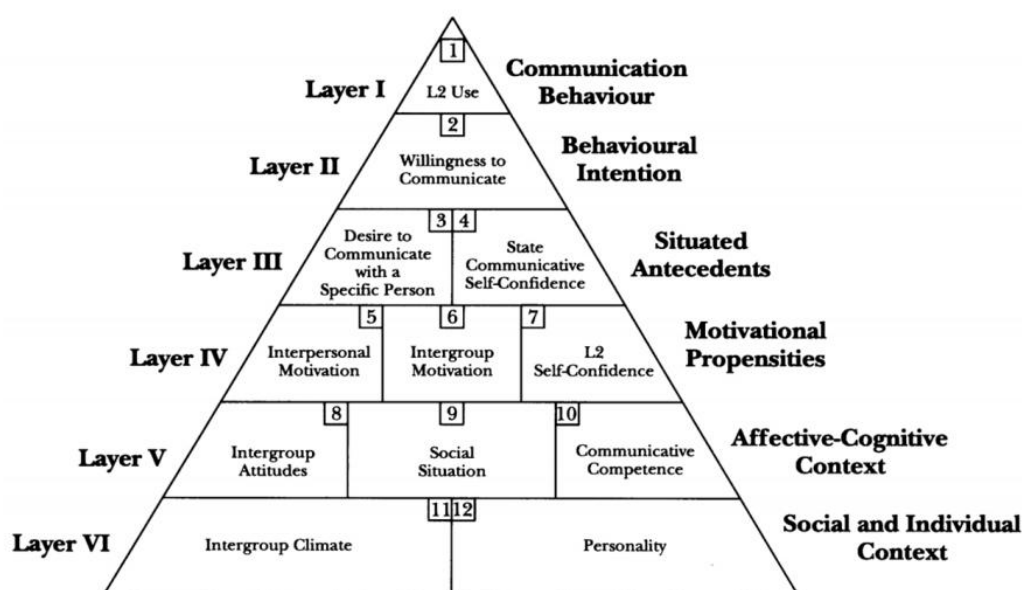
L2 WTC has proved its importance in language education as it can influence learners' engagement in meaningful communication that is necessary for their growth of L2 competency. WTC emphasizes psychological preparedness rather than solely linguistic competence (MacIntyre et al., 1998). As commented by Henry and MacIntyre (2024), fostering WTC can enhance learner autonomy and support language retention, making it a crucial factor of effective language instruction. Because language acquisition is built upon interaction, fostering WTC increases opportunities for meaningful communication and supports fluency and accuracy (Szyszka & Lintunen, 2025). Moreover, improving learners'

WTC enables them to use the target language more naturally and flexibly, particularly within diverse social and cultural contexts (Yashima, 2002).

Subsequent research has increasingly emphasized the situational and fluctuating nature of WTC. Rather than being a fixed tendency, WTC is now widely understood as varying across contexts, tasks, and interactional settings. This “dynamic turn” in WTC research has prompted closer examination of classroom-level influences on learners’ communicative decisions.

Figure 1.

Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (Adapted from MacIntyre et al., 1998)



2.2 Situational Factors Affecting WTC

In EFL classrooms, contextual and situational variables have consistently been identified as significant determinants of students’ WTC (Basoz & Erten, 2019; Hoang & Bui, 2023; Riasati, 2012; Zahra & Mina, 2021; Afifah, 2025, Alam et al. 2022). Rather than being a fixed learner trait, WTC appears to rely on classroom conditions, including task design, topics of discussion, interlocutor variables, and teacher practices.

Task type has repeatedly emerged as a particularly influential factor. Classroom activities perceived as meaningful, engaging, and cognitively appropriate tend to foster greater communicative participation. For instance, visual aids, games, and songs increased students’ readiness to speak, as these techniques create a stimulating and supportive learning atmosphere (Hoang & Bui, 2023). Narrative tasks and descriptive activities are also found to motivate students’ participation (Afifah, 2025) because they were perceived as engaging, familiar, and manageable. Narrative tasks allowed learners to draw on personal experiences and express their identities, thereby increasing emotional involvement and motivation to participate. Descriptive tasks, on the other hand, provided concrete visual or experiential support, reducing cognitive and linguistic demands. As a result, students felt more confident and were more willing to contribute to classroom interaction. Regarding collaborative modes, Riasati (2012) found that pair and group work were generally preferred over whole-class presentations, suggesting that interactional format significantly shapes communicative comfort. In contrast, highly form-focused grammar tasks and rote style

learning were perceived as limiting opportunities for authentic communication (Alam et al., 2022). Task difficulty regulates WTC, with overly demanding or insufficiently challenging tasks reducing engagement (Zahra & Mina, 2021).

The topic of discussion is another important situational factor influencing learners' WTC. Research suggests that students are more inclined to participate when they are familiar with the topic, find it personally relevant, and have adequate opportunities for preparation. Familiarity and prior knowledge can enhance learners' perceived communicative competence, while personal interest increases motivation and engagement, both of which contribute to greater communicative readiness (Riasati, 2012; Basoz & Erten, 2019; Zahra & Mina, 2021). Conversely, unfamiliar or uninteresting topics may discourage participation by reducing learners' confidence and investment in the interaction. Building on these findings, Hoang and Bui (2023) argue that teachers can foster WTC by adapting textbook content, providing preparatory materials, and incorporating controversial or thought-provoking topics that encourage meaningful discussion. Taken together, the literature indicates that topic-related factors influence WTC through both cognitive mechanisms (e.g., background knowledge and perceived competence) and affective mechanisms (e.g., interest and engagement).

In addition to task-related influences, the qualities and behaviors of interlocutors have been found to substantially affect learners' readiness to engage in communication. Existing research suggests that students are more likely to engage in classroom interaction when they perceive their partners as supportive, familiar, and communicatively active. Familiarity with speaking partners can foster a sense of comfort and reduce concerns about negative evaluation, thereby enhancing communicative confidence (Riasati, 2012; Zahra & Mina, 2021). In addition, peers' English proficiency, willingness to participate, and attitudes toward communication have been found to shape learners' readiness to contribute to discussions (Basoz & Erten, 2019; Alam et al., 2022; Afifah, 2025). Interacting with cooperative and competent peers may encourage participation by creating a supportive communicative environment, whereas less supportive peer dynamics can heighten anxiety and reluctance to speak. Overall, the literature suggests that interlocutor-related factors influence WTC by shaping learners' perceptions of psychological safety, social support, and the potential risks associated with classroom communication.

Beyond task and peer influences, teachers contribute substantially to students' readiness to engage in classroom communication. Through studies, teachers appear to influence WTC primarily through their ability to create a supportive, engaging, and low-anxiety learning environment. Positive instructional practices, such as fostering a dynamic classroom atmosphere, providing constructive feedback, and developing strong teacher–student rapport, have been shown to encourage greater participation by enhancing learners' motivation and confidence (Hoang & Bui, 2023). Similarly, exposure to foreign teachers may stimulate students' willingness to speak by increasing the authenticity and perceived value of classroom communication (Basoz & Erten, 2019). In contrast, teacher characteristics and practices that undermine learners' confidence—such as limited pedagogical expertise, inadequate language proficiency, or overly authoritarian classroom management—can discourage participation and heighten communication apprehension (Riasati, 2012; Zahra & Mina, 2021; Afifah, 2025). Collectively, the literature suggests that teachers shape WTC not only through instructional decisions but also through the interpersonal climate they establish, which can either facilitate or constrain students' readiness to engage in classroom interaction. Unlike task- and interlocutor-related factors, which primarily influence the

immediate conditions of interaction, teacher-related factors exert a more pervasive influence by shaping the classroom climate within which communication occurs. Through their instructional practices and interpersonal relationships with students, teachers can create conditions that foster confidence, reduce anxiety, and promote active participation.

Overall, these studies underscore that WTC is highly interrelated to classroom variables. Task characteristics, topic features, peer relationships, and teacher behavior operate interactively to shape students' communicative engagement. This body of research reinforces the view that WTC in EFL contexts is a context-dependent and dynamically constructed phenomenon rather than a stable, trait-like disposition, highlighting the need for further research in Southeast Asian EFL contexts, particularly Vietnam.

3. Research Method

3.1 Participants and Settings

The current study was conducted at the Faculty of Legal Foreign Languages, Hanoi Law University. The participants were third-year undergraduates who studied English as their major. At this stage, students were expected to reach C1 proficiency.

At the moment the study was conducted, the students had just completed a compulsory course named "Advanced Listening & Speaking Skill" aiming to support and strengthen students' knowledge of IELTS test-taking skills – the standard graduation requirement for students majoring in English. The course covers a variety of topics such as: everyday life, the world, art, social qualifications, technology, and nature; as well as provides learners with vocabulary, grammar, structures, and pronunciation skills relevant to these topics. This course is preceded by previous Listening and Speaking skills courses at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels.

The researcher also served as the instructor for this course. To minimize potential researcher bias, interviews were conducted after the completion of the course and students were informed that participation or responses would not affect their academic evaluation. Participants were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process. To ensure the inclusion of students representing varying levels of willingness to communicate (WTC), a criterion sampling strategy was employed. Specifically, participants were selected to include those who self-identified as both more and less willing to communicate in English. In the final week of the course, ten out of thirty students voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams. Of these participants, six rated themselves as having a high level of willingness to communicate, whereas four reported a low level of willingness.

3.2 Research Instruments

Qualitative research is defined by Maxwell (2013) as "research that is intended to help you better understand (1) the meanings and perspectives of the people you study, seeing the world from their point of view, rather than simply your own; (2) how these perspectives are shaped by, and shape, their physical, social, and cultural contexts; and (3) the specific processes that are involved in maintaining or altering these phenomena and relationships." In the current research, the author aimed to seek for situational factors that influence EFL learner's communicative willingness. Thus, a qualitative research design would effectively align with the author's objectives.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to prevent misinterpretations between the researcher and participants. The questions of interview were

designed by the researcher in the light of the literature on situational factors that influence WTC.

The validity of the questions was ensured after they were reviewed by another senior teacher who co-taught the course with the researcher. The questions were reviewed based on the feedback received from her. They were then piloted with three learners different from those who participated in the main interviews in order to see how well the instrument worked in practice so that any potential practical problems in the research procedure could be identified. During the pilot interviews, it appeared that the interview questions were well formulated, but that there were some questions stating similar things. Those questions were omitted from the list, and the interview questions were redesigned for the main study.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The participants were guaranteed of the privacy of their answers and the protection of their identities. The interviewees were assigned numerical codes to protect their identities. The researcher followed a semi-structured interview guide including a series of open-ended questions and follow-up questions. Each participant's interview lasted between 15-20 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

As the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the responses were translated into English for analysis. Thematic analysis by following the steps from Creswell (2012) was used to examine the data. In relation to this, from the transcriptions of interviews, the researcher started to code the data and presented the theme, then produced the report. Initial open coding was first conducted, followed by grouping similar codes into broader categories. These categories were subsequently refined into overarching themes representing situational influences on WTC. Finally, the researcher made the explanations of the results about the factors determining the participants' willingness to communicate in English classrooms.

To ensure the accuracy of the qualitative data analysis, validation procedures were implemented. According to Creswell (2012), validating qualitative findings involves ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the interpretations. In this study, member checking was employed by inviting participants to review the reports and findings to verify their accuracy. Any feedback from participants was incorporated where necessary to ensure faithful representation of their views.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Task-related Factors

Task type was identified as a prominent situational factor influencing participants' WTC in English. The findings indicate three interrelated sub-factors shaping students' communicative readiness: game-based and video-based activities, topics of discussion, and collaborative work formats.

First, participants consistently emphasized the motivational value of engaging and game-integrated activities. When tasks incorporated elements such as competition, point calculation, or group division, students reported greater enthusiasm and readiness to speak. As one participant noted, *"Game-combined activities make me and my classmates more enthusiastic about speaking English."* (Student 3). Similarly, Student 5 stated, *"I am more willing to speak when an activity involves calculating points or dividing class members into*

groups to determine a winner and loser." Another participant highlighted multimedia engagement: *"I find it more enjoyable to practice shadowing or watch movies."* (Student 4). These responses suggest that tasks involving competition, enjoyment, and multimodal input may stimulate active participation.

The topic of discussion played a vital role in shaping students' WTC. Topics perceived as entertaining, relevant, or personally meaningful were associated with higher communicative engagement. For instance, student 8 explained, *"Entertaining topics will make us more interested to speak because they are related to our hobbies such as music, movies, or personal experiences."* Besides familiarity, intellectual stimulation also influenced participation, as student 5 observed, *"When a topic sparks my curiosity, I will be more interested to speak."* However, it was also reported that unnecessarily private or sensitive topics would reduce willingness, as students felt uncomfortable sharing this kind of information. These findings indicate that both emotional safety and cognitive engagement are central to situational WTC.

In addition, interactional modes significantly affected students' communicative behavior. Collaborative formats such as pair work and small-group discussions were consistently perceived as less stressful and more supportive than whole-class speaking. As student 10 observed, *"Activities involving speaking in pairs or small groups make me more willing to speak English because it's less stressful when I can exchange ideas with my friends."* Likewise, student 1 remarked, *"Each of my classmates has their own vocabulary and way of thinking, so when we work in pairs or groups, this allows us to improve our speaking skills."* Students specifically mentioned discussions, talk shows, or debates as formats that encouraged participation. In contrast, public speaking activities, including formal presentations or speaking in front of the whole class, were reported as the least preferred task types. Participants described such tasks as making them feel *"embarrassed," "scared,"* or *"unconfident."* This finding is in line with findings in Zahra and Mina (2021) where whole-class interaction was perceived by students as anxiety-provoking due to peer pressure; that is, they felt anxious and uncomfortable giving incorrect answers in front of their classmates. Less-WTC participants mainly preferred to talk in pairs and small groups because there would be less competition in turn-taking.

4.1.2 Peer-related Factors

The classroom environment was also reported as a significant situational influence on students' communicative desire in English. Participants' responses indicate that this influence operates through two primary sub-factors: their classmates and the overall classroom atmosphere.

With regard to peer influence, participants consistently emphasized the importance of familiarity and interpersonal comfort. Students reported greater WTC when working with close friends or long-term classmates, as such relationships foster a sense of psychological safety. When paired with familiar peers, they felt easier sharing ideas and providing corrective feedback. *"Working with a partner or partners I am close to and have a long-term relationship with makes me want to talk more than being paired with others"* (student 3). *"My level of willingness to speak largely depends on who I am paired with. If my partner and I get along well, I'll talk a lot and work more effectively"* (student 6). In contrast, being assigned to unfamiliar partners often generated anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. *"When I am paired with someone I've never spoken to before or someone I don't have a good impression of, it makes me feel awkward and uncomfortable, so talking to each other*

becomes difficult." (student 7). In addition to familiarity, perceived partner competence was revealed as an influential factor. Some students described feeling encouraged when working with peers who demonstrated strong speaking skills, as these partners provided linguistic support and motivation. Conversely, a partner with limited participation or lower proficiency sometimes reduced their own communicative willingness. *"My partner has a very positive influence on me. His good speaking skill encourages me to speak more"* (student 2). *"I am less willing when the other person doesn't want to talk or doesn't understand what I'm saying"* (student 8). Interestingly, one participant also mentioned gender as a factor affecting communicative comfort, noting that *"same-sex partners make it easier for me to talk"* (student 10).

Beyond peer-related factors, the general classroom atmosphere became evident as another important determinant of WTC. A supportive, dynamic, and engaging environment was associated with greater communicative readiness, whereas a passive or unresponsive atmosphere tended to inhibit participation. *"When the atmosphere in the class is relaxing and supportive, and everyone is friendly, I am more ready to join the conversation"* (student 2). *"Generally, my class atmosphere is more dynamic and inspiring in speaking lessons, helping me want to practice my speaking skills more"* (student 7). *"I am not willing to speak when there's no sense of initiative in the surrounding atmosphere"* (student 9).

These findings suggest that students' WTC is strongly shaped by peer-related factors. Peer relationships and collective classroom energy jointly create either a facilitative or inhibiting communicative environment. When learners interact with supportive peers who share similar interests and demonstrate active engagement, they are more likely to participate confidently in communicative activities.

4.1.3 Teacher-related Factors

Finally, participants highlighted the significant role of teachers in shaping their WTC in the English classroom. Teacher-related influences were categorized into teachers' attitudes and instructional practices.

Regarding teachers' attitudes, participants emphasized the importance of approachability, encouragement, and emotional support. A positive and supportive teacher was associated with increased communicative confidence, whereas a strict or distant one was perceived as discouraging participation. As one student explained, *"The way teachers are approachable and encouraging will make me feel more willing to speak up"* (student 1). Similarly, student 3 remarked, *"With an active instructor, we would have a more comfortable learning environment compared to a strict one"*. These responses suggest that teachers' interpersonal behavior contributes to learners' emotional security, which in turn enhances their readiness to speak.

In addition to attitude, teaching methodology was found to significantly influence students' communicative engagement. As student 4 noted, *"The lecturer is the one who directly organizes and motivates the students, so if the lecturer's teaching style is engaging, even students who are weak in communication will want to participate."* This highlights the teacher's role not only as a facilitator of tasks but also as a motivational stimulus within the classroom. Several specific pedagogical strategies were identified as supportive of students' WTC. Pre-speaking activities and adequate preparation time were perceived as particularly beneficial, as they helped students organize ideas and prepare relevant vocabulary before speaking. For instance, student 6 stated, *"I am eager to speak when the teacher combines both listening and speaking, so I can prepare for words and ideas before saying."* In contrast,

insufficient preparation time was reported as stress-provoking: *"I am less ready if the teachers called on us unexpectedly, without any preparation."* (student 7).

Participants also emphasized the value of methodological variety. A flexible combination of speaking activities was described as stimulating and engaging, whereas repetitive or overly rigid instructional patterns reduced motivation. As student 9 expressed, *"When students are forced to follow a rigid framework, specifically a method favored by a particular teacher, and they pressure students to conform to their wishes."* Such boredom appears to limit students' sense of autonomy, potentially constraining communicative willingness.

Corrective feedback was another notable theme. Students generally welcomed feedback from their teachers, particularly when it was constructive, supportive, and delivered in a non-threatening manner. Student 1 commented, *"I think I would really appreciate it if the teacher corrected my pronunciation and other mistakes honestly because it would help me improve."* Similarly, student 7 reflected, *"When the instructor corrects my mistakes gently and constructively, I feel supported and motivated to speak English better."* However, timing was considered crucial. Participants preferred feedback after completing their speech rather than immediate interruption, as interruptions could disrupt fluency and increase hesitation: *"I like it when the teachers wait for me to finish speaking and correct my mistakes, suggest ways to express myself. If the lecturer interrupts me, it makes me hesitant to communicate."* (student 10)

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that students' WTC in EFL classrooms is shaped by a dynamic interplay of task-related, peer-related, and teacher-related factors. Task types, particularly game-based activities, video integration, stimulating topics, and collaborative work appeared to foster greater engagement and communicative readiness. These activities not only stimulated interest but also enhanced students' perceived competence and reduced performance pressure. In addition, students reported greater communicative ease when interacting with familiar or supportive classmates, suggesting that relational closeness promotes psychological safety and reduce evaluative concerns. Teacher-related factors likewise functioned as powerful stimulus. Supportive attitudes, an approachable manner, constructive feedback, and flexible pedagogical practices were perceived as enhancing learners' confidence while softening communication anxiety.

The present findings partially support MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) heuristic model of WTC, particularly its emphasis on the role of social and affective contexts in shaping situational WTC. Several factors identified in this study correspond closely to the model's conceptualization of situational influences. However, some classroom-specific factors emerging from the data (e.g., preparation time, task structure, corrective feedback timing) are not explicitly articulated in MacIntyre et al.'s framework, which was developed to explain WTC across broader L2 communicative contexts. This suggests that while the model remains theoretically robust, it may benefit from contextual refinement when applied to EFL instructional environments. The present study therefore contributes to extending the ecological validity of the WTC framework within classroom-based settings.

The findings are also consistent with previous empirical studies conducted in EFL contexts. For example, Riasati (2012), Afifah (2025) and Zahra & Mina (2021) found that Iranian and Indonesian tertiary EFL learners' readiness to communicate was influenced by task type, discussion topic, interlocutor characteristics, teacher behavior, and classroom

atmosphere. Similarly, Tutku & Ismail (2019) and Alam et al. (2022) reported that Turkish and Bangladesh undergraduate learners' in-class WTC was shaped by contextual variables such as classmates, instructional methods, topic familiarity, and classroom climate. Regarding teacher-related influences, the results align with Hoang and Bui (2023), who found that Vietnamese students perceived grouping strategies, task variation, visual aids, topic adaptation, positive feedback, and game-based activities as effective in enhancing classroom WTC.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the view that WTC is a context-sensitive and dynamically constructed phenomenon. Students' communicative behavior appears to be co-regulated by task design, peer relationships, and teacher practices. By revealing these variables, the study contributes to the growing body of research that conceptualizes WTC as a phenomenon that develops through context-based classroom interaction.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated situational classroom factors shaping EFL students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in English. The findings reveal that WTC is shaped by a dynamic interplay of task-related, peer-related, and teacher-related variables. WTC emerged not as a fixed trait but as a context-sensitive state fluctuating with task design, peer relations, and instructional practices. The study contributes to WTC research by contextualizing the construct within Vietnamese EFL classrooms, highlighting classroom-specific variables absent from broader theoretical models. While the findings partially align with established theoretical models of WTC, they also point to the importance of classroom-specific variables typically found in EFL contexts. This study is among the few to examine WTC situationally in Vietnamese higher education, extending the ecological validity of WTC theory to Southeast Asian EFL contexts.

Pedagogically, the findings suggest that teachers can enhance students' WTC by designing engaging tasks that stimulate enjoyment, such as incorporating games or video-based activities. Speaking topics should be adapted to match with learners' interests and cognitive levels. In addition, organizing pair and small-group work can help create a sense of emotional safety, thereby encouraging students to speak more confidently. Furthermore, EFL learners should be provided with greater autonomy, including opportunities to choose their partners when appropriate. Nurturing a supportive classroom climate is also equally essential so that students can interact in constructive and encouraging ways. Also, teachers should model communicative willingness by demonstrating openness and enthusiasm. Methodologically, instructors should integrate pre-speaking input, diversify while-speaking strategies, and deliver constructive post-speaking feedback. Overall, the findings highlight that not only what is taught but also how it is taught plays a crucial role, as a psychologically safe and interaction-rich classroom environment appears central to fostering communicative engagement.

While offering valuable insights, the study is not without limitations. As the research was conducted within a single institutional context, this may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies are suggested to examine how situational factors influencing WTC may vary across diverse EFL settings and educational contexts. Also, the study adopted a purely qualitative design relying on students' self-reported perceptions. Other research designs should be employed to explore this issue from more dimensions, such as longitudinal designs to explore how these situational factors influences students' WTC over time, quantitative approaches to determine the relative strength of different situational factors, or

experimental designs to establish clearer causal relationships between specific classroom-based interventions and learners' WTC.

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TRANSITIVITY AND MEANING CONSTRUCTION IN CHILD-PARENT SONG LYRICS ACROSS CULTURES

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Abstract

This study examines transitivity processes in English and Indonesian parent-child-themed song lyrics using Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. By analyzing six transitivity process types—material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioral, and existential—the study explores how linguistic choices construct emotional relationships, social roles, and family values across different cultural contexts. The data consisted of twenty song lyrics collected from YouTube channels. Data were gathered through listening and note-taking techniques and analyzed using an interactive qualitative model involving identification, classification, and interpretation of transitivity processes. The findings reveal that material processes are the most dominant (33.4%), indicating that song narratives primarily rely on concrete actions to express emotions and interpersonal experiences. Mental processes (24.9%) and relational processes (22.4%) follow, contributing psychological and descriptive dimensions to the portrayal of parent-child relationships. Verbal, existential, and behavioral processes occur less frequently and serve complementary narrative functions. The predominance of material processes demonstrates that meaning construction in both English and Indonesian song lyrics is strongly grounded in physical actions and observable events. Common actions represented include giving, accompanying, caring for, and supporting, reflecting parental affection and responsibility. The findings suggest that, despite cultural differences, both groups of songs emphasize similar familial values through action-oriented representations. This study contributes to cross-cultural discourse research by demonstrating how song lyrics function as a medium for conveying emotional meaning and intergenerational social relationships across cultural communities.

Keywords: *cross-cultural communication; metafunction; song lyrics; systemic functional linguistics; transitivity system.*

1. Introduction

Songs are a medium of communication that are popular and effective in delivering emotional messages and human experiences. Songs function not only as a medium of

communication but also as a representation of social reality encoded in language. Within the lyrics of such songs, songwriters do not merely tell stories; they encode social experiences and emotional dynamics through specific linguistic choices. One of the most universal and emotional themes in the world of music is the relationship between child and parents. This theme is often raised to describe the affection, sacrifice, longing, and conflict that make up a person's identity.

Although song lyrics are often poetic and metaphorical, their meanings can be systematically analyzed through linguistic approaches. One way to uncover how meaning is constructed in song lyrics is through transitivity analysis within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed by Halliday (2014). This linguistic approach offers a relevant analytical tool, in particular the transitivity system. The transitivity system represents human experiences in clauses through six process types: material, mental, relational, verbal, and behavioral.

In the context of the relationship between child and parents in song lyrics, the choice of verbs is crucial. For example, whether relationships are more explained through tangible action (material process), through the depth of inner feelings (mental process), through the definition of identity and status (relational process) or through utterance of words (verbal process). These process patterns reveal how songwriters position the roles of children and parents within musical narratives. Thus, the analysis of transitivity in parental-themed song lyrics has the potential to reveal the power structure, emotional burden, and identity construction in child-parent relationships that are often considered natural and rarely subjected to critical analysis.

However, despite the proliferation of research on transitivity in song lyrics that has been done previously (Afifah, 2021; Liztiawati, 2021; Siahaan, 2021; Dita, 2024; Siahaan, 2024; Sitinjak, 2025; Simbolon, 2025), research that specifically examines child-parent relationships across two languages (English and Indonesian) still needs further exploration. Further, although the previous studies have investigated transitivity in song lyrics, most focus on a single language and primarily describe process distribution. Little attention has been paid to how transitivity choices reflect culturally specific representations of parent-child relationships across linguistic contexts. Often, there are differences and similarities in how Western and Eastern cultures linguistically construct family relationships in transitivity system. Transitivity system proposed by Halliday (2014), views song lyrics as representations of human experience that form ideational meanings through clause construction. From SFL's perspective, song lyrics are not huts an aesthetic wording, but a whole text that reflects the internal and external realities of the songwriter. Halliday (2014) dissects this construction into three main elements: process (action), participant (actor), and circumstance (background of events). Through the dominance of certain types of processes in song lyrics, such as dynamic material processes, reflective mental processes, or relational processes that identify status, the transitivity analysis is able to uncover the ideological message, emotional depth, and hidden world of experience that the songwriter wants to convey to the listeners.

Consequently, despite the abundance of transitivity research in formal discourses and in addressing the research void, the application of transitivity in comparing cross-cultural creative works like song lyrics remains limited. Therefore, this research aims to bridge this gap by examining how types of process (material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, behavioral) differ across cultures in family-oriented lyrics, thereby revealing the diverse ways experiential meanings are constructed and understood globally. Most studies

focus on a single language, overlooking how cultural ideologies shape the linguistic construction of emotional bonds. Then, unlike previous transitivity studies that primarily focus on single-language lyrical discourse, this study comparatively examines experiential meaning across English and Indonesian cultural contexts. The study contributes to cross-cultural discourse analysis by revealing how linguistic processes encode culturally specific representations of parent-child relationships. This present study aims to identify the most dominant types of process and how these processes build a deep meaning about family ties.

Therefore, this research has three research questions:

1. What types of transitivity process are used in child-parent relationship themed song lyrics in English and Indonesian?
2. How are these processes realized in the song lyrics?
3. How does the dominant use of transitivity processes construct meaning about child-parent relationships across cultures?

Building on this comparative framework, by uncovering the dominant processes used in both languages, this cross-cultural musical text study investigates whether parental love is portrayed universally or shaped by specific cultural codes. Ultimately, the findings of this research are expected not only to enrich in the realm of popular music, but also to provide practical implications for songwriters, translators, and educators in understanding and highlighting how language choices ideologically shape societal views on child-parent dynamics.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics

The theoretical foundation of this research is rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). It is a framework developed by Halliday (2014). Unlike traditional grammar, SFL views language not merely as a set of grammatical rules, but as a system of resources for creating meaning in social contexts (Halliday, 2014). From an SFL perspectives, language performs three main functions called metafunction: ideational, interpersonal, and textual.

Specifically, the ideational metafunction represents human experience, both external (physical) and internal (thought/feeling), through experiential and logical components. Thus, this ideational metafunction focuses on representing the experience of the real or abstract world through the language. Beyond the ideational metafunction, the interpersonal metafunction relates to social interaction, shaping relationships between speakers and listeners. The use of this interpersonal metafunction regulates the way human exchange information, attitudes, and opinions. Furthermore, textual metafunction is a metafunction of language that focuses on organizing how messages are assembled into cohesive, coherent, and contextual texts. This textual metafunction organizes the flow of information in a text through a theme-rheme structure and cohesion to ensure the text is functional and contextually appropriate. However, this research directs its focus toward

However, this research focuses on the ideational metafunction, specifically the experiential function, analyzed through the transitivity system. This transitivity analysis aims to uncover how the types of processes are constructed in texts to construct the meaning of experiences in clause units, particularly in song lyrics that are themed on the relationship between child and parent in two different languages.

2.2 Transitivity Studies in Song Lyrics

In the perspective of SFL, the experiential function and transitivity system have a close relationship, which complement each other in constructing meaning. The experiential function itself is a language function that encodes human experience, both in the real world and in the imaginary world. Meanwhile, the transitivity system is a grammatical tool to realize the experiential function in the clauses. Therefore, the transitivity system is the main analytical tool for understanding how actions, events, and circumstances are represented in a clause. According to Halliday (2014), the transitivity system consists of three components, namely: process (verbs), participants (entities involved), and circumstances (time, place, manner). In transitivity system, there are six types of process: (1) material, (2) mental, (3) verbal, (4) relational, (5) behavioral, (6) existential as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1.

Types of Transitivity Process

No.	Types of Process	Construing	Examples of Verbs
1.	material	creating, changing, doing, acting	go, run, walk
2.	mental	seeing, feeling	love, think, believe
3.	verbal	saying	say, talk, sing
4.	relational	attributing, identifying, symbolizing	to be, linking verbs, has/have
5.	behavioral	behaving	sleep, cough,
6.	existential	existing	there is, there are, there was

a. Material Process

Material process is a process represents an experiential function that encodes physical, tangible actions. It explicitly details the concrete events or activities taking place in reality. Within SFL perspective, material process is a process of 'doing/happening'. Functionally, material process is the driving force that brings abstract ideas into reality.

b. Mental Process

Mental process is a type of process that construes the inner world of human consciousness and experience. It involves processes of perception (e.g., see, hear, feel), cognition (e.g., think, know, understand), and affection or emotion (e.g., love, fear, worry). Unlike material processes, which represent actions and events in the physical world, mental processes depict how individuals perceive, think about, and emotionally respond to phenomena. Through these processes, reality is interpreted and given meaning, linking external experiences with internal states of consciousness. Consequently, mental processes reveal how individuals construct knowledge, form beliefs, and experience emotions in relation to the world around them.

c. Relational Process

Relational process is a process used to identify, classify, or characterize something. In contrast to material and mental process, this process does not describe actions or thoughts, but rather expresses a logical relationship between two entities. Relational process realized through two distinct modes: attributive (assigning qualities) and identifying (defining values).

This process heavily relies on relational verbs like ‘be, become, represent, or consist of’ to establish permanent states of being.

d. Verbal Process

Verbal process is a type of process that represents acts of saying and symbolic communication. It includes activities such as speaking, telling, asking, commanding, reporting, and discussing. In Systemic Functional Linguistics, verbal processes occupy an intermediate position between mental and material processes because they externalize internal thoughts, beliefs, and feelings through language. The central participant in a verbal process is the Sayer, who produces the verbal expression, while other participants may include the Receiver, the person to whom the message is directed, and the Verbiage, the content of what is said. Verbal processes play a crucial role in constructing social relationships, exchanging information, and expressing viewpoints within discourse.

e. Behavioral Process

Behavioral process is a process that shows physiological and psychological behavior. It represents typically human activities that manifest physically but are rooted in internal mental or bodily states. In the study of SFL, this process becomes an attractive bridge that manifests inner experience such as: sadness or thinking into tangible observable actions such as: crying or smiling. In the other words, this process is our body language where every breath, laughter, or eye look is a direct reflection of what is going on in our minds and organs.

f. Existential Process

Existential process is a process that states the existence of something. This process is a grammatical process used to assert that something exists, occurs, or is present within a specific space and time. In SFL perspective, it plays a vital role in the experiential function by mapping out how human perceive reality.

Song lyrics are emotional expressions conveyed through language. Etymologically, song lyrics have closeness to a short poem because both of them are the result of word and language processing that aims to create certain attractiveness and peculiarities. In this case, the use of English and Indonesian language in the song lyrics has its own characteristics in expressing the emotional expression of the songwriter with the child-parent relationship themed. As it is known, song lyrics function as a medium for conveying ideas or opinion from the songwriter to the audience. The message contained in the song lyrics can reflect various aspects, ranging from social issues, culture, or certain ideologies. Song lyrics, as a textual medium, embody ideological and emotional meanings that seek to engage listeners on both cognitive and affective levels. Therefore, examining transitivity processes in song lyrics allows researchers to investigate how songwriters construct and represent social realities through language. Specifically, this analysis reveals how the dynamics of child–parent relationships are discursively shaped through the selection of particular verbs and process types.

According to Santika (2023), the song lyrics are a short literary work written by a writer to convey a simple message to the readers. Furthermore, songwriters frequently

utilize poetic devices and figurative expressions to make the message more engaging and relatable to the audience. Meanwhile, according to Izu (2022), in understanding a song's cultural meaning requires the analyzing of its lyrics within their broader socio-cultural context. In SFL perspective, song lyrics serve as a social semiotic system where language choices and structural patterns are analyzed to reveal how songwriters convey lived experience, build relationships with listeners, and organize cohesive musical narratives. Song lyrics can be analyzed through transitivity systems to uncover how songwriters represent human experiences, actions, and inner emotions into concrete linguistic processes.

Transitivity studies in son lyrics is a language analysis that uses the SFL approach to study how songwriters convey meaning and emotion through word choice and clause structure. This approach dissects song lyrics based on processes, participant, and circumstances to uncover hidden messages. By unravelling these three components, researchers can see how songwriters represent reality, express ideologies, and build emotional closeness to their listeners based on objective linguistic data. In essence, the transitivity studies confirm that every choice of diction by songwriters is a deliberate step, serving as a bridge to express their emotions to the public.

The relationship between transitivity, ideology, emotions, and cultural representations in songs particularly in child-parent themed forms a network of interlocking meanings. The analysis of transitivity becomes a linguistic foundation that unpacks how roles and power are distributed in song lyrics. This linguistic choice process directly projects emotions and forms a unique cultural representation. In SFL initiated by Halliday (2014), transitivity dissects human experiences into six type processes, as shown in Table 1.

Transitivity determines the dominant ideology in the song. Does the song carry patriarchal ideology, authoritarian upbringings, or actually prioritize equal and emphatic relationships. Then, emotion in song lyrics is a form of realization of diction choices and mental processes. Lyrics that express regret, longing, or a sense of security are responses to how singers position themselves and their parents in the clause. Emotions become a bridge that makes listeners connect personally with the inner experience of the songwriter. The combination of the three elements (transitivity, ideology, emotions) forms a cultural representation of how a society defines the family. Therefore, songs are not just an arrangement of tones and words, but a complex cultural representation. Through transitivity, it can be seen how ideologies and emotions intertwine to shape the image of a socially and culturally accepted child-parent relationship.

2.3 Cross-Cultural Meaning Construction

Cross-cultural meaning construction is a psychological, social, and linguistic process in which individuals from different cultural backgrounds actively negotiate and agree on new understandings as they interact. This understanding is based on the idea that meaning is dynamic and shaped by the symbols and language of a community, not something universal. Referring to Samovar (2009), culture greatly influences the way a person views the world and conveys a message. Therefore, in order to build mutual understanding and avoid miscommunication, this intercultural meeting requires in-depth interaction to unite the differences in values and norms brought by each group. Conversely, cross cultural meaning constructions proves that language is not just a mechanical tool for transferring information, but a dynamic space in which human beings are constantly re-knitting the reality of their experiences in order to achieve global harmony.

Cross-cultural meaning construction based on the transitivity system examines how various linguistic communities encode real-world experiences into grammatical choices. By examining processes, participants, and circumstances within Halliday's SFL (2014), the researcher can uncover the unique cultural mindsets and ideologies within discourse. Within SFL, the experiential metafunction frames languages as a cognitive and communicative instrument that allows individuals to segment the chaotic flux of reality into structured, meaningful concepts.

Every culture unconsciously molds its worldview through its preferred transitivity patterns. When comparing Western (often individualistic) and Eastern (often collectivistic) discourses, stark grammatical differences emerge. Western discourse that tends to be individualistic is often dominated by material processes with dynamic and active actors to accentuate personal agency. Meanwhile, Eastern or collectivist discourse, such as in Indonesian or Javanese culture, more often utilizes relational processes or passive structures that prioritize the harmony of relationships, social contexts, and environmental situations rather than individual domination. Ultimately, this choice of transitivity system reveals how a culture views the main drivers in life, whether human beings are positioned as active actors in control of circumstances or as participants in harmony with destiny and the surrounding environment.

2.4 Research Gap

Studies on the construction of meaning across cultures are indeed widespread, but research linking the transitivity analysis within SFL framework to song lyrics about child-parent relationship is still rare. Generally, cross-cultural communication research focusses on direct interactions, business, or global news. Meanwhile, the study of family themed song lyrics is more often approached from a literary, psychological, or cultural point of view, thus ignoring the grammatical aspects of its function. This present study is here to fill this gap by dismantling how the reality of parents' relationships is constructed linguistically through song lyrics.

In the linguistic landscape, this embodiment of human experience is accurately reflected through of a transitivity system. Some researchers have used transitivity to dissect the construction of meaning in cross-cultural news text, political speech, and classroom discourse. Meanwhile, the study of parents' relationships in music is generally approach from a psychological standpoint to look at the emotional impact of melodies on family closeness. However, there is still a research gap where the transitivity system has not been optimized to dissect the lyrical text of songs with the theme of parental relationship in a cross-cultural perspective. Song lyrics are often thought of as static art products, when they are dynamic spaces where the cultural baggage of parenting values and norms is linguistically embedded. In addition, there has been no research that has mapped whether cultural differences affect the dominance of process choices in representing parent-child relationships.

Therefore, this research is crucial to be conducted to fill the research gap. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of micro-linguistic analysis (transitivity in SFL framework) with macro sociocultural phenomena (the construction of meaning of cross-cultural family relationships). The results of this present study are expected to unravel how

the reality of parenting is linguistically rewoven through music in various different cultural settings.

3. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to analyze a cross-linguistic corpus of song lyrics. This study applied adopted Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics, particularly on the transitivity system as the analytical lens. The researcher selected this approach to explore and uncover how the type of process is represented in the song lyrics in delivering the message. Processes were coded manually according to Halliday's transitivity categories (2014), with inter-rater checks to ensure reliability. The research data consists of 20 child-parent themed song lyrics from YouTube channel. The corpus data for this study was developed using a systematic selection framework, comprising an equal sample of 20 child-parent themed song lyrics (10 English, 10 Indonesian). Criteria strictly required verified textual lyrics, thematic focus on direct child-parent interaction, and cultural representation from English and Indonesian traditions to facilitate balanced transitivity analysis. Song lyrics were purposively selected based on their explicit child-parent themes and availability in both English and Indonesian. The analysis focused on verb elements in clauses across English and Indonesian song lyrics. Data were collected using a listening method combined with systematic note-taking. The data of English and Indonesian in child-parent song lyrics are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
English and Indonesian in Child-Parent Song Lyrics

No.	English	Indonesian
1.	Yusuf/Cat Stevens. 2018. <i>Father & Son</i> . YouTube.	Meimusic / Iwan Fals. 2025. <i>Nak</i> . YouTube.
2.	Ourlovestory2012 / Tim McGraw. 2012. <i>My Little Girl</i> . YouTube.	Meimusic / Iwan Fals. 2025. <i>Galang Rambu Anarki</i> . YouTube.
3.	Avicii. 2014. <i>The Nights</i> . YouTube.	Musisa Studios / Iwan Fals. 2020. <i>Ibu</i> . YouTube.
4.	Dudedudette3 / Heartland. 2012. <i>I Loved Her First</i> . YouTube.	GP Records / Seventeen. 2021. <i>Ayah</i> . YouTube.
5.	Sam Fender. 2021. <i>Spit of You</i> . YouTube.	Purnama Records / Rinto Harahap. 2020. <i>Ayah</i> . YouTube.
6.	Carrie Underwood. 2010. <i>Mama's Song</i> . YouTube.	Trinity Optima Production / Ungu. 2010. <i>Doa Untuk Ibu</i> . YouTube.
7.	Ed Sheera Music / Ed Sheeran. 2026. <i>May Daughter</i> . YouTube.	Soundera / Eddy Silitonga. 2026. <i>Mama</i> . YouTube.
8.	Alan Jackson. 2021. <i>You'll Always Be My Baby</i>). YouTube.	Vidi Aldiano. 2015. <i>Cinta Untuk Mama</i> . YouTube.
9.	Shane Mercury / ABBA. 2023. <i>Slipping Through My Fingers</i> . YouTube.	Vanny Vabiola. 2019. <i>Mama</i> . YouTube.
10.	Forever Country Lyrics / Morgan Wallen. 2026. <i>Mom I Miss You</i> . YouTube.	Virgoun. 2025. <i>Saat Kau Telah Mengerti</i> . YouTube.

Then, the data were analyzed using Miles (2014) interactive model of qualitative analysis. This model analysis involves four interconnected elements: data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion. This model enabled the integration of quantitative tendencies and qualitative elaborations to produce more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomena under study. This model also allowed the researcher to move beyond mere description into deeper interpretation in both sets of the song lyrics analyzed in this research. Ethical considerations were observed by using publicly available lyrics and acknowledging sources. To ensure analytical reliability, each clause in the song lyrics was independently classified based on Halliday's transitivity framework (2014) before being cross-checked for consistency. Then, this study applied the model of integrated quantitative frequency counts of processes with qualitative interpretation of meaning.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the research on the analysis of English and Indonesian song lyrics within the child-parent relationship themed show that verbs in the transitivity system function not only as grammatical choices but also as reflections of emotional depth in child-parent relationships. Based on the analysis that has been carried out, a total of 713 processes were identified across English and Indonesian song lyrics. In addition, the results of the study also showed that the six types of processes: material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral were found in both sets of the song lyrics. Table 3 below shows the results of the findings of the use of process types in English and Indonesian child-parent song lyrics.

Table 3.

Distribution of Process Types in English and Indonesian Child-Parent Song Lyrics

Process Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Material	242	33,94
Mental	176	24,68
Relational	155	21,74
Verbal	60	8,41
Existential	58	8,14
Behavioral	22	3,09
Total	713	100

Based on the distribution data on the types of processes showed in Table 3, this research shows that from 713 processes found in the song lyrics of English and Indonesian within the child-parent relationship themed, the distribution of process types is varied. From the results of this study, it shows that the clauses across the corpus are dominated by material, mental and relational processes, followed by another process types such as: verbal, existential and behavioral.

However, while material, mental, and relational processes were equally dominant in both songs categories in this research, the comparative data in Table 4 and Table 5 indicate that the specific distribution of process types still differed between the English and Indonesian versions.

Table 4.

Process Types in English Song Lyrics

Process Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Material	188	33,4
Mental	139	24,9
Relational	125	22,4
Verbal	52	9,3
Existential	41	7,3
Behavioral	14	2,5
Total	559	100

Referring to the data in Table 4, it was found 559 processes in English song lyrics with varied distributions. The results of the analysis showed the dominance of material process which reached 33.4% (188 frequencies), followed sequentially by mental processes of 24.9% (139 frequencies) and relational processes of 22.4% (125 frequencies). Meanwhile, other types of processes have a smaller proportion, namely: verbal process (9.3%; 52 frequencies), existential process (7.3%; 41 frequencies) and behavioral process (2.5%; 14 frequencies).

Conversely, to understand the process types in Indonesian song lyrics, Table 5 presents the distribution found in the data.

Table 5.

Process Types in Indonesian Song Lyrics

Process Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Material	54	35,1
Mental	37	24
Relational	30	19,5
Existential	17	11
Verbal	8	5,2
Behavioral	8	5,2
Total	154	100

The findings of this research based on Table 5 show that the song lyrics in Indonesian identify 154 processes with varying distributions. In line with the English song lyrics, material process still dominates with a proportion of 35.1% (54 frequencies), followed by mental process at 24% (37 frequencies) and relational process at 19.5% (30 frequencies). The other categories of processes have lower frequencies, including existential (11%; 17 frequencies), verbal process (5.2%; 8 frequencies) and behavioral process (5.2%; 8 frequencies).

The results of this research presented in Table 4 and Table 5 reveal significant quantitative differences. English song lyrics integrate 559 processes, while Indonesian song lyrics only include 154 processes. This substantial gap indicates that the length and word count of the lyrics directly dictate the volume of clauses available for transitivity analysis, which is supported by research showing that English song lyrics have a greater length compared to Indonesian song lyrics. The higher frequency in English song lyrics allows for a more complex and multilayered construction of experiential meaning, whereas the shorter Indonesian song lyrics reflect a more condensed syntactic structure that relies on fewer,

highly-selective process types to convey its message. Despite the difference in realizing process types in song lyrics, both sets of the song lyrics consistently show the dominance of material process in conveying the message. This indicates a tendency to prioritize concrete actions and physical activities carried out by actors (parent and child), in order to emphasize the direct impact of the manifestations of real actions in the narrative of the song.

In light of these findings, it is interpreted that, from the SFL perspective, the dominance of material processes in the two corpuses of songs confirms that the experiences of child-parent relationships are primarily represented through physical activity. This finding shows that the role of parents and children in the song lyrics is not only interpreted through static condition and feelings, but also through the dynamics of actions that shape the reality of relationship each other concretely.

Synthesizing these interpretations, the findings of this research indicate that all categories of processes according to Halliday's theoretical framework, including material, mental, relational, verbal, existential, and behavioral processes are identified in both of English and Indonesian song lyrics. To deepen the analysis, the following are some illustrations of selected data from song lyrics of English and Indonesian that represents each type of process.

a. Material Process

Material process is defined as the process of 'doing' or 'happening' (Halliday, 2014). This process describes a person's physical experience of the outside world, includes real actions, physical activities. This process serves to build a dynamic and concrete reality of experience. The samples of data of material process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6.
Material Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	'take' [material] it easy	<i>Jauh jalan yang harus kau 'tempuh' [material]</i> 'you have a long way to go'
(2)	when I 'do' [material]	<i>Engkau 'lewat' [material] dengan kaki tak bersepatu</i> 'you pass by with barefoot feet'
(3)	he 'turns away' [material] again	<i>Jangan kau 'ganggu' [material] ibumu</i> 'don't disturb your mother'
(4)	I let you 'go' [material]	<i>Galang rambu anarki anakku 'lahir' [material]</i> <i>awal Januari menjelang pemilu</i> 'my son was born in early January ahead of the election day'
(5)	'chase' [material] your dreams	<i>ribuan kilo jalan yang kau 'tempuh' [material]</i> 'thousands of miles of road you walk'
(6)	the animals inside 'came out' [material]	<i>Ibuku sayang masih terus 'berjalan' [material]</i> 'my dear mother is still walking'
(7)	he 'took' [material] me in his arms	<i>engkaulah nafasku yang 'menjaga' [material] di dalam hidupku</i> 'you are my breath that take care in my life'

(8)	I'll 'guide' [material] you home	<i>kau 'berikan' [material] aku semua yang terindah</i> 'you give me all the most beautiful'
(9)	I'm not gonna 'stand' [material] in your way	<i>'datanglah' [material] aku ingin 'bertemu' [material]</i> ' come on, I want to meet you'
(10)	you've 'given' [material] me everything	<i>kau 'memberikanku' [material] kasih sayang</i> 'you give me love'

Based on Table 6, the material process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs 'take, do, turns away, go, chase, came out, took, guide, stand, given'. Meanwhile, the material process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs '*tempuh, lewat, ganggu, lahir, berjalan, menjaga, berikan, datanglah, bertemu, memberi*'. All of these verbs represent material processes related to physical activity which indicates that the song lyrics both in English and Indonesian tend to describe real actions or events performed by actors against the goals in the context of child-parent relationship life. The use of material process emphasises the dynamic and concrete physical experience that the songwriter wants to deliver to the listeners.

b. Mental Process

In the framework of Halliday's transitivity (2014), mental process represents the inner world of human experience, such as what is perceived, thought, and perceived. In contrast to material process that focus on physical actions (doing), mental process focuses on awareness (sensing). In the context of song lyrics about the relationship between children and parents, mental processes are crucial to describe the emotional closeness and inner perception between the characters. The samples of data of mental process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7.
Mental Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	you have to 'know' [mental]	<i>Galang Rambu Anarki 'dengarlah' [mental]</i> 'Galang Rambu Anarki listens '
(2)	if you 'want' [mental]	<i>Galang Rambu Anarki 'ingatlah' [mental]</i> 'Galang Rambu Anarki remembers '
(3)	though you 'think' [mental]	<i>'maafkan' [mental] kedua orangtuamu</i> ' forgive your parents'
(4)	I 'remember' [mental]	<i>janganlah 'ragu' [mental]</i> 'don't be worry '
(5)	but always 'know' [mental] the road	<i>kau tak pernah 'lelah' [mental]</i> 'you are never tired '
(6)	I 'heard' [mental] him	<i>aku hanya 'mengingatmu' [mental] ayah</i> 'I just remember you, father'
(7)	'think' [mental] of everything	<i>hatiku selalu 'ingin' [mental] bertemu</i> 'my heart always wants to meet'
(8)	But I 'loved' [mental] her first	<i>aku 'ingin' [mental] berjumpa</i> 'I want to meet'

(9)	I 'knew' [mental] the love of a father	<i>takkan pernah 'terlupakan' [mental] 'never forgotten'</i>
(10)	that I will 'need' [mental]	<i>sebenarnya, 'kucayang' [mental] padamu mama 'really, I love you mother'</i>

Based on Table 7, mental process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs 'know, want, think, remember, know, heard, loved, knew, need'. Meanwhile, mental process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs '*dengarlah, ingatlah, maafkan, ragu, lelah, mengingat, ingin, terlupakan, kusayang*'. All of these verbs are mental processes related to the human inner world, which include perception, cognition, affection (feelings) and desires. This shows that in both English and Indonesian song lyrics, songwriters tend to use mental process to express deep emotions, thoughts, and subjective experiences, so that the listener can feel the inner atmosphere that is meant to be conveyed in the song. Based on the framework of SFL, the verb 'forgive' in English is categorized as a mental process. On the other hand, in Indonesian, this lexem '*memafkan*' can be realized as a material or behavioral process, depending on the context of its use. If the verb is associated with physical activity, the categorization shifts to material or behavioral processes. However, in this present study is in the form of song lyrics, the word '*memafkan*' is more accurately classified as mental process.

c. Relational Process

According to Halliday (2014), relational process is the process of 'being' and 'having'. In contrast to material (action) and mental (feeling) process, this process serves to connect one entity with another or with certain characteristics to provide a definition or description to the entities. The samples of data of relational process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8.
Relational Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	You 'are' [relational] still young	<i>Kelak kau kan 'jadi' [relational] orang tua 'Someday you will become parents'</i>
(2)	but I 'am' [relational] happy	<i>jika aku 'telah' [relational] jauh darimu 'if I have been far away from you'</i>
(3)	you 'have had' [relational] me	<i>aku 'menjadi' [relational] yang terbaik 'I become the best'</i>
(4)	you will 'be' [relational] always my little girl	<i>'hanya' [relational] dirimu harapanku, oh mama 'you are the only one I hope for, oh mama'</i>
(5)	these 'are' [relational] the nights	<i>'hanya' [relational] dirimu pelita hidupku 'you are the only light of my life'</i>
(6)	I 'was' [relational] enough for her not long ago	<i>tak 'kumiliki' [relational] sesuatu berharga untuk mama tercinta 'I don't have anything precious for my dear mama'</i>

(7)	I 'was' [relational] her number one	' <i>hanya</i> ' [relational] <i>sebuah lagu sederhana</i> 'it is just a simple song'
(8)	it 'was' [relational] only a matter of time	' <i>lagu cintaku</i> ' [relational] <i>untukmu mama</i> 'my love song is for you mom'
(9)	and they 'are' [relational] not wrong	' <i>segalanya</i> ' [relational] <i>untukmu mama</i> 'everything is for you mom'
(10)	he 'is' [relational] good, so good	' <i>badanmu</i> ' [relational] <i>kurus dan letih</i> 'your body is thin and tired'

Based on Table 8, the relational process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs 'to be (is, am, are, was), have had'. Meanwhile, the relational process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs '*naik, telah, menjadi, hanya dirimu*'. The whole of the verb is relational process that connects two entities whether it is as attribute or identity, thus creating a cohesive meaning in delivering the message of the song to the listener. The differences in verb markers show that there is a stylistic variation between English song lyrics that tend to use verbs 'to be' and 'have/has' to describe the situation, while Indonesian song lyrics use more dynamic verbs to connect the subject with the predicate.

d. Verbal Process

According to Halliday (2014), verbal process is the process of 'saying' or the process of exchanging information symbolically. The verbal process in this research is important to see how verbal communications is a means of strengthening the emotional relationship between children and parents in song lyrics. The samples of data of verbal process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in the following Table 9.

Table 9.
Verbal Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	From the moment I could 'talk' [verbal]	<i>aku hanya 'memanggilmu'</i> [verbal] <i>ayah</i> 'I just call you, father'
(2)	I try to 'explain' [verbal]	<i>untukmu aku 'bernyanyi'</i> [verbal] 'for you I sing '
(3)	he will 'say' [verbal]	<i>Oh ibu 'terima kasih'</i> [verbal] 'oh mother, I say thank you'
(4)	he 'told' [verbal] me	<i>hanya ini 'kunyanyikan'</i> [verbal] 'this only I sing '
(5)	I hear him 'say' [verbal]	<i>walau tak dapat selalu 'kuungkapkan'</i> [verbal] 'even though I can't always say it'
(6)	my father 'told' [verbal] me	<i>hatiku 'berkata'</i> [verbal] 'my hearts says '

Based on Table 9, the verbal process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs 'talk, explain, tell, say, told'. Meanwhile, the verbal process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs '*memanggil, bernyanyi, terimakasih, kuungkapkan, berkata*'. The wholeness of the verbs is a verbal process that represents the action of

'saying'. This difference in the use of verbs shows that there is a variation in language styles and cultural contexts in conveying emotions or messages, where English song lyrics tend to use more explicit and direct verbs, while Indonesian lyrics emphasize the expression of poetic and emotional feelings.

e. Existential Process

Existential process is a process that represents the existence of something or states that something "exists" (Halliday, 2014). The samples of data of existential process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10.
Existential Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	now 'there is' [existential] a way	<i>duduk 'sini' [existential] nak dekat pada bapak</i> 'sit here to be close to daddy'
(2)	'there is' [existential] so much you have to go through	<i>doa kami 'di' [existential] nadimu</i> ' there is our pryers in your veins'
(3)	like 'there is' [existential] nobody else	<i>walau air mata 'di' [existential] pipiku</i> 'although there is tears on my cheeeeks'
(4)	your alone 'in' [existential] this place	<i>hangat 'dalam' [existential] dekapanmu</i> ' there is a warm in your surroundings'
(5)	and a place 'in' [existential] my heart	<i>putih kasihmu kan abadi 'dalam' [existential] hidupku</i> 'your love will be eternal in my life'
(6)	mama, 'there is' no way [existential]	<i>tidurlah mama sayang 'di' [existential] sisiku</i> 'sleep on my side my beloved mother'
(7)	I hope tears of joy are 'in' [existential] your eyes	<i>aku masih 'ada' [existential] 'di' sisimu</i> 'I am still by your side '
(8)	Tiny hands wrapped around my thumb 'in' [existential] that quite hospital room	<i>berilah senyum yang indah 'di' [existential] bibirmu</i> 'give a beautiful smile on your lips '
(9)	and 'there is' [existential] a broken heart	<i>Ku 'ada di sini' [existential]</i> 'I am here '
(10)	I sit 'there' [existential] alone	<i>dan aku 'sudah tak ada' [existential] lagi</i> 'and there is no longer me'

Based on Table 10, the existential process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of 'there is, in, there'. Meanwhile, the existential process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of '*ada, sudah tidak ada, di, sini*'. The whole of the word is an existential process that states 'the existent' of something which closely related to the concept of existence in the study of SFL. Through the use of verbs such as 'there is/there' in English and '*ada*' in Indonesia, the song lyrics in both of the languages construct the presence of a particular entity without the need for active or complex possessive relationships. These findings suggest that both English and Indonesian song lyrics utilize existential processes to emphasize the presence, appearance, or existence of a person/thing in a particular space and time. Based on the framework of SFL, an existential process functions represent the existence or existence of an entity. However, in Indonesian, this

construction is often realized implicitly. For example, the phrase *'doa kami di nadimu'* semantically projects into *'ada doa di nadimu'*, and *'duduk sini nak dekat pada bapak'* implies *'ada anak yang duduk dekat pada bapaknya'*. Therefore, the identification of existential processes in Indonesian requires a deep understanding of the markers of existence, both explicit and implicit.

f. Behavioral Process

Behavioral process is a process that describes human's behaviour physiologically and psychologically (Halliday, 2014). This process is often thought as the 'gray area' or bridge because it is between material process (physical action) and mental process (consciousness/feeling). In contrast to material process that has 'actor' and mental process that has 'senser', behavioral process has a main participant called 'beholder'. Beholder is human consciousness in action, which reflects a combination of physical activity such as 'breathing, coughing, smiling' and physiological activity such as 'dreaming, contemplating, staring'. In linguistic analysis, this process often appears in clauses describing physical actions triggered by mental condition, such as *"dia tersenyum (he smiled)"* or *"mereka menangis (they cry)"*. Therefore, the behavioral process plays an important role in describing how human beings express their internal experiences through visible physical actions. The samples of data of behavioral process in English and Indonesian song lyrics can be seen in Table 11.

Table 11.
Behavioral Process in English and Indonesian Song Lyrics

No.	English Song Lyrics	Indonesian Song Lyrics
(1)	that I have 'cried' [behavioral]	<i>'menangis' [behavioral] yang keras</i> <i>'cry loudly'</i>
(2)	that crooked little 'smile' [behavioral]	<i>'menangis' [behavioral] janganlah ragu</i> <i>'cry loudly, don't be worry'</i>
(3)	From the first breath she 'breathed' [behavioral]	<i>sampai aku 'tertudur' [behavioral]</i> <i>'until I sleep'</i>
(4)	Every breath late night 'cries' [behavioral]	<i>'menangis' [behavioral] di pangkuanmu</i> <i>'cry in your lap'</i>
(5)	'sleep' [behavioral] in our eyes	<i>aku 'menangis' [behavioral] seorang diri</i> <i>'I cry alone'</i>
(6)	I 'wake up' [behavioral]	<i>'tidurlah' [behavioral] mama sayang</i> <i>'sleep my beloved mother'</i>
(7)	I 'cry' [behavioral] in every dream	<i>janganlah kudengar lagi engkau 'menangis' [behavioral]</i> <i>'I don't want listen you cry anymore'</i>

Based on Table 10, the behavioral process in English song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs 'cried, smile, breathed, cries, sleep, wake up, cry'. Meanwhile, the behavioral process in Indonesian song lyrics is characterized by the use of verbs *'menangis, tertidur, tidurlah'*. All of these words represent behavioral process that is a physical reflection of mental and physiological condition which shows the differences as well as similarities in the way the songwriters express the deepest human's emotions. The use of these verbs both in English and Indonesian song lyrics equally highlights how physical

reactions such as crying or smiling are used to describe specific mental condition such as sadness, joy, or calmness which often aim to reinforce the meaning of the song and establish a stronger emotional connection with the listener.

Based on the results, this study showed that material processes dominate quantitatively, mental and relational processes provide qualitative depth, showing how action, emotion, and identity intertwine in song narratives. This parallelism is reinforced by the finding that English and Indonesian song lyrics both prioritize material processes, which proves that cross-cultural lingual popular music narratives are always driven by real action to convey the emotional messages. The dominance of material processes in these two cultures shows that both in Western society (English representation) which is often considered individualistic, and in Eastern society (Indonesian representation) collectively, the expression of emotions is not solipsistic. Instead, emotions and identities must be manifested through tangible actions in order to be understood socially. In other words, the lyrics of a song are no longer merely a space of passive philosophical contemplation, but rather a dynamic space in which the identity of the subject is constructed through what they do (material), not just what they think (mental). This proves that culturally, people from different backgrounds rely on embodied experience to build empathy and social attachment through music.

The dominance of material processes in this study proves that both Western and Eastern cultures rely on tangible actions to convey emotional messages, but the way the two cultures construct them culturally different. In Western context (English), the emphasis on concrete actions and explicit verbal processes is in line with Afifah's (2021) findings on Lewi Capaldi's song that bluntly describe the reality of relationships to convey regret, and supported by Siahaan (2021) that material processes in the Western are closely related to universal social phenomenon that help listeners capture the true meaning of songs. On the other hand, in the Eastern context (Indonesia), the delivery of physical actions is strongly tied to existential nuances and the value of togetherness. The important role of cultural adaptation in these lyrics is validated by Siahaan (2024), who asserts that the use of specific material processes and cultural locations is vital for message communication to be effectively received by certain groups of people. Thus, although both cultures use real action (material) as a driving force for stories, Western (English) societies use them for transparent and dialogical communication, while Eastern (Indonesia) societies use them as a reflection of the harmony of social relations and the subtlety of cultural expression.

This present study also found that English songs rely more on explicit verbal and relational markers, while Indonesian songs highlight existential and behavioral nuances, reflecting cultural differences in expressing family ties. Culturally, these hierarchical differences in processes reflect unique characteristics in the way English and Indonesian societies construct meaning and express emotions. The greater use of verbal processes in English lyrics suggests that emotional intimacy is frequently constructed through explicit verbal interaction, whereas Indonesian lyrics tend to represent intimacy through presence and relational closeness. This finding indicates that linguistic representations of family relationships may be culturally mediated through different experiential resources.

The tendency of English song lyrics to prioritize explicit verbal processes shows a transparent, outspoken, and dialogical Western communication pattern. This characteristic is supported by the findings of Dita (2024) that verbal process is the predominant element because Western songs rely heavily on conversations and direct narrations to the listener for

conflict resolution. On the other hand, the lyrics of Indonesian songs that highlight existential and behavioral processes reflect Eastern cultural values that are more contemplative, poetic, and prioritize implicit emotional presence over verbal confrontation. These nuances of implicit behavior and emotions in Eastern societies are in line with the argument of Liztiawati (2021), who states that more complex and mature emotional expressions, such as in family relationships, do require a variation of real behavioral processes to describe deep relationship dynamics. This is in line with her findings that adult songs express love through complex behavioral processes, in contrast to children's songs that only focus on simple emotional reflections (mental process).

Further, although existential processes are prominent in the Indonesian song data in this present study to capture the essence of 'presence', this structure can vary greatly depending on the focus of the song theme. This can be seen from the contrast of the findings of Sitinjak (2025), stated that mental process actually dominates absolutely while the existential process is in the lowest position. Ultimately, this cross-cultural linguistic variation is validated by the systematic review of Simbolon (2025), which confirms that song lyrics use the structure of Systemic Functional Linguistics and figurative language not just as a textual tool, but as a medium to reflect broader sociocultural narratives, such as identity, power, and cultural heritage values in expressing life experiences.

5. Conclusion

Utilizing the transitivity model of SFL, this study investigated how songwriters employ process types to convey lyrical meaning. The findings reveal that all six process types are utilized to communicate the song's messages. Thus, this research shows that English and Indonesian song lyrics with the theme of child-parent relationships are built on three cores of meaning: actions (material processes), feelings (mental processes), and relationships (relational processes). The other three processes (verbal, existential, behavioral) serve as secondary elements that enrich the narrative. However, the cross-cultural corpora song lyrics differ in their stylistic approach to these secondary elements. English song lyrics favor verbal over existential processes to remain more direct. Conversely, Indonesian song lyrics prioritize existential over verbal processes, creating more poetic and reflective tone that highlights distinct cultural ways of creating meaning. This present study contributes to SFL and cross-cultural analysis by expanding transitivity process analysis into the modern, emotionally charged domain of popular music, while providing a comparative model to analyze how different language utilize core and secondary linguistic processes for similar thematic narratives. Furthermore, it offers valuable cultural insights by demonstrating how grammatical choices, such as English directness and Indonesian reflectiveness are deeply embedded within the structural choices of songwriters to reflect distinct cultural worldviews. In short, the transitivity system is not merely a grammatical framework but a blueprint for how humans construct and negotiate meaning across cultures.

In the context of cultural and music studies, this present study implies that child-parent themed song lyrics are not merely aesthetic entertainment, but vital cultural artifacts that record how societies uncover meaning and express intimate emotional bonds. For researchers, this study offers a new methodological lens to analyze music not just by 'what' is said literally, but 'how' meaning is structurally built, bridging, the gap between linguistics and local songwriting traditions in a globalized world. Furthermore, for the global creative industry, these insights underscore the necessity of cultural adaptation in cross-border music

production; to maintain authentic emotional resonance, international adaptations or translation must alter the narrative structure itself – shifting between direct verbal communication and reflective existential framing – to match the emotional habits of the target audience. Ultimately, this study is limited by the relatively small corpus and focus on only two linguistic traditions. Building upon these insights, future research directions should expand this comparative model into more than two linguistic studies, diverse musical genres such as hip-hop or traditional folk music, explore broader interpersonal themes like romantic love or social protest, and integrate multimodal analysis to investigate how these linguistic choices interact with musical elements like melody, tempo, and visual music videos to fully shape audience reception.

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INDIGENOUS PROVERBS AS PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION: EDUCATIONAL USES OF XITSONGA PROVERBS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HOME LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This study examined how Xitsonga proverbs can cultivate conflict resolution skills in the South African Home Language classroom. It addressed rising interpersonal conflicts among learners and the limited use of indigenous oral traditions in classrooms. The study noted that emphasis on academic performance reduced opportunities for developing learners' social and emotional competencies. Grounded in Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, the study emphasized integrating culturally familiar content to enhance engagement, moral development, and social cohesion. A qualitative design was employed, using classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and learner artefact analysis. The study was conducted in selected Further Education and Training (FET) Phase secondary schools offering Xitsonga Home Language and involved Xitsonga Home Language teachers and learners. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with direct experience relevant to the study. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the findings. Learners improved in interpreting figurative meanings of proverbs and applying them to peer conflict resolution. Teachers observed enhanced empathy, restorative dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, moral reasoning, respect, and participation when proverbs were integrated into teaching. The study concluded that Xitsonga proverbs are effective pedagogical tools for promoting conflict resolution and affirming cultural identity. Findings highlight the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge into formal education to support both academic achievement and social development. This study contributes to discourse on culturally relevant pedagogy by demonstrating how indigenous oral traditions can foster conflict resolution and social cohesion in classrooms.

Keywords: *conflict resolution skills; home language classroom; indigenous knowledge systems; learner behaviour; moral education; xitsonga proverbs.*

1. Introduction

FET school environments face increasing challenges related to learner behaviour, interpersonal conflict, and weakened social cohesion. Adolescence is characterised by identity formation, emotional intensity, and heightened peer influence, often contributing to

relational tensions in schools. Without structured support, these challenges undermine academic performance and learner well-being (Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004). More recent scholarship reinforces this concern, emphasising the importance of integrating social and emotional learning into education. Elias et al. (2015) argue that social and emotional learning is essential for developing responsible, caring, and engaged learners, while Durlak et al. (2011) found that structured social-emotional programmes significantly improve learners' behaviour and academic outcomes. These insights highlight the need to integrate social, emotional, and moral development into classroom practice. Conflict resolution is recognised as a critical life skill that requires deliberate pedagogical integration.

Moral reasoning plays a central role in shaping learners' behaviour and decision-making, involving cognitive and emotional processes through which individuals interpret ethical situations (Tangney & Dearing, 2004). Developmental theorists such as Piaget (1952) and Kohlberg (1969) emphasise that moral reasoning evolves through stages, progressing from rule-based thinking to principled judgement. Extending this perspective, Narvaez (2014) argues that moral development is socially situated and requires guided participation in ethical practices, underscoring the importance of creating classroom environments that foster reflection, empathy, and responsible decision-making.

South African Home Language classrooms in the FET Phase provide a strategic space for developing these competencies. The Language in Education Policy recognises the role of home language in supporting cognitive development, identity formation, and meaningful participation (Department of Education, 1997). Heugh (2015) further argues that sustained use of home language enhances both comprehension and academic achievement. In African contexts, proverbs have historically functioned as tools for moral education and conflict resolution (Finnegan, 2012; Mbiti, 1990). Xitsonga proverbs, rooted in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), promote values such as respect, cooperation, and social harmony (Chilisa, 2012; Dei, 2014). Supporting this view, Ramose (1999) emphasises that African ethical systems are grounded in Ubuntu, which foregrounds communal well-being and relational responsibility. Similarly, Metz (2011) explains that Ubuntu-based ethics prioritise harmonious relationships and moral interdependence.

Despite their pedagogical value, proverbs remain underutilised in FET classrooms, often reduced to linguistic analysis rather than moral instruction. Teaching practices frequently prioritise examination performance, limiting the use of oral traditions as tools for social and moral development (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016). This observation aligns with Dryden-Peterson (2016), who notes that curriculum pressures often marginalise culturally relevant pedagogies in favour of standardised assessment demands. Although CAPS encourages oral literature to promote critical thinking and values education (Department of Basic Education, 2011), a gap persists between policy and practice. Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, this study views language as a mediating tool for developing higher-order thinking. Proverb-based learning supports moral reasoning, communication, and conflict resolution. This perspective is reinforced by Ladson-Billings (1995), who argues that culturally relevant pedagogy enhances learner engagement by integrating learners' cultural knowledge into instruction. Likewise, Gay (2018) maintains that culturally responsive teaching uses learners' cultural knowledge and experiences to make learning more meaningful and effective.

Although previous studies have explored Indigenous oral traditions, moral education, and culturally relevant pedagogy within African educational contexts, limited empirical research has specifically examined how Xitsonga proverbs function pedagogically to cultivate

conflict resolution competencies among FET learners in South African Home Language classrooms. Existing studies have largely focused on the linguistic, literary, and cultural significance of proverbs, with limited attention to their practical application in fostering empathy, restorative dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and moral reasoning among learners. Furthermore, much of the available research is conceptual or descriptive in nature, providing insufficient classroom-based evidence on how teachers and learners engage with proverbs as tools for conflict resolution within the FET Phase. This methodological limitation highlights the need for qualitative, context-specific investigations that examine the lived experiences of teachers and learners in the use of Xitsonga proverbs for social and moral development.

Furthermore, language teaching in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase frequently remains examination-oriented and text-centred, thereby constraining the pedagogical potential of oral traditions as valuable educational resources (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016). Given that teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and experiences significantly influence classroom practices, understanding their perceptions is essential for the successful implementation of curriculum innovations. Borg (2011) emphasizes that teacher cognition plays a central role in shaping pedagogical decisions and instructional practices, highlighting the need to explore teachers' perspectives on the integration of Xitsonga proverbs into teaching and learning.

This study is motivated by the need to address learner conflict through culturally responsive and policy-aligned pedagogical approaches. It argues that the integration of Xitsonga proverbs into classroom instruction can enhance learners' conflict resolution abilities, strengthen moral reasoning, and promote social cohesion. By examining the educational value of proverbs, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into formal education and supports broader initiatives aimed at decolonising education in South Africa (Chilisa, 2012; Dei, 2014). Situated within contemporary discussions of social-emotional learning, moral development, and culturally relevant pedagogy, the study highlights the potential of Xitsonga proverbs as culturally grounded resources for fostering constructive conflict resolution among learners.

Against this backdrop, the study is guided by four interrelated questions: How are Xitsonga proverbs pedagogically integrated into South African Home Language classrooms? In what ways do they contribute to the development of learners' conflict resolution skills? What challenges influence the implementation of proverb-based pedagogy in South African Home Language classrooms? And how do teachers perceive and mediate the use of Xitsonga proverbs to promote conflict resolution, moral reasoning, and social cohesion among Further Education and Training (FET) learners?

To address these questions, the study pursues four corresponding objectives. First, it seeks to examine how Xitsonga proverbs are pedagogically integrated into South African Home Language classrooms. Second, it aims to investigate the contribution of Xitsonga proverbs to the development of learners' conflict resolution skills. Third, it endeavours to identify the challenges affecting the implementation of proverb-based pedagogy within the classroom context. Finally, it explores teachers' perceptions of, and roles in facilitating, the use of Xitsonga proverbs to foster conflict resolution, moral reasoning, and social cohesion among FET learners. Through these objectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational value of Xitsonga proverbs and their potential contribution to culturally responsive teaching and learning in South Africa.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Educational Value

Scholars consistently affirm that integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into formal schooling enhances academic engagement, cultural identity, and moral development. IKS conceptualises knowledge as communal, relational, and embedded within everyday social practices (Chilisa, 2012; Dei, 2014). Within African contexts, these knowledge systems provide culturally grounded frameworks that shape identity, behaviour, and social responsibility. Odora Hoppers (2002) argues that Indigenous knowledge should be recognised as a system of knowledge, while more recent scholarship emphasises its significance for curriculum transformation, epistemic justice, and decolonised education (Le Grange, 2016; Shizha & Abdi, 2020). Khupe and Keane (2017) further contend that integrating IKS promotes contextually relevant and meaningful learning experiences.

While scholars generally agree on the educational value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, debates persist regarding the extent to which Indigenous knowledge should be integrated into formal curricula. Some researchers advocate full epistemic inclusion as a means of achieving decolonial transformation (Shizha & Abdi, 2020; Chilisa, 2020), whereas others caution that institutional incorporation may unintentionally appropriate or dilute Indigenous knowledge systems when removed from their cultural contexts (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021). This tension highlights an unresolved question concerning how schools can authentically integrate Indigenous knowledge while preserving its cultural integrity and community ownership. Recent scholarship further demonstrates that Indigenous pedagogies contribute not only to cultural affirmation but also to learner wellbeing, resilience, and social-emotional development (McKinley & Smith, 2022; Battiste, 2023). These findings position Indigenous Knowledge Systems as essential resources for addressing contemporary educational challenges beyond academic achievement alone.

2.2 Proverbs as Pedagogical Tools in African Oral Traditions

In African contexts, proverbs have historically functioned as tools for moral education and conflict resolution. As a central component of oral literature, proverbs serve as repositories of communal ethics, social norms, and collective memory. They function not merely as artistic expressions but as pedagogical tools that transmit values through reflective dialogue (Finnegan, 2012). Mbiti (1990) explains that African societies are deeply communal and that moral teachings are embedded within everyday language practices. Proverbs encapsulate moral philosophies that regulate behaviour, encourage social responsibility, and promote harmonious relationships. Supporting this perspective, Yankah (1989) describes proverbs as “the palm oil with which words are eaten,” highlighting their role in guiding social interaction and decision-making.

Within the Xitsonga context, proverbs promote empathy, cooperation, respect, and moral reasoning, all of which are essential components of conflict resolution. Recent studies further indicate that oral traditions enhance critical thinking, ethical reflection, and learner engagement (Maphalala, 2021; Mokgoroane, 2022).

However, scholars differ regarding the contemporary relevance of oral traditions in modern schooling. While some argue that proverbs remain powerful pedagogical tools for developing ethical reasoning and social cohesion (Maphalala, 2021), others suggest that examination-oriented curricula and increasing digital influences have reduced learners’ engagement with traditional forms of knowledge (Meyiwa & Ndlovu, 2022). This debate

raises important questions regarding how oral traditions can be adapted to contemporary educational contexts without losing their cultural significance.

Internationally, similar findings have emerged from Indigenous educational contexts. Māori educators in New Zealand employ *whakataukī* (traditional proverbs) to promote cultural identity, collective responsibility, and restorative relationships within schools (Macfarlane et al., 2021). Native American storytelling traditions similarly function as pedagogical resources for moral education, conflict mediation, and community-based learning (Brayboy et al., 2020). In Aboriginal Australian education, storytelling and oral traditions have been used to strengthen learner engagement, cultural continuity, and social-emotional wellbeing (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2021). These international examples demonstrate that Indigenous oral traditions remain globally relevant as culturally responsive pedagogical tools.

2.3 Policy Frameworks Supporting Indigenous Knowledge Integration

South Africa's educational policy framework recognises the educational value of indigenous languages and oral traditions. The Language-in-Education Policy advocates additive multilingualism and promotes home language use as a foundation for cognitive development and identity formation (Department of Education, 1997). Similarly, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) encourage oral literature to promote critical thinking, values education, and holistic learner development (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Collectively, these policies position Indigenous Knowledge Systems as an important component of curriculum transformation and social inclusion. However, a gap persists between policy and practice. Heugh (2015) notes that although language policies support multilingualism, implementation remains inconsistent across schools.

Recent studies continue to identify persistent implementation challenges despite progressive policy frameworks. Research on African language education indicates that curriculum intentions frequently exceed classroom realities due to resource shortages, inadequate teacher preparation, and assessment pressures (Maseko & Mncube, 2022; Probyn, 2023). Consequently, policy endorsement alone does not guarantee meaningful integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. The policy-practice gap remains one of the most significant unresolved issues in Indigenous education research.

2.4 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Learner Development

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) emphasises the importance of affirming learners' linguistic and cultural identities to enhance engagement, participation, and social responsibility. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that effective teaching should empower learners intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically. Similarly, Gay (2018) maintains that culturally responsive teaching uses learners' cultural knowledge and experiences to make learning more appropriate and effective. These perspectives suggest that culturally grounded pedagogies create meaningful learning experiences while fostering learner confidence and belonging. Recent scholarship further demonstrates that culturally responsive approaches improve learner motivation, participation, and academic success (Hammond, 2015; Paris & Alim, 2017).

More recent research extends these arguments by linking culturally responsive pedagogy to social-emotional learning, restorative education, and learner wellbeing (Hammond, 2021; Khalifa et al., 2023). Scholars increasingly argue that culturally responsive teaching should move beyond academic achievement to include the development of

empathy, ethical reasoning, and social responsibility. Nevertheless, debates remain regarding the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. Some scholars view CRP as transformative and emancipatory, while others argue that superficial implementation risks reducing culture to symbolic classroom activities rather than meaningful pedagogical practice (Paris & Alim, 2017; Aronson & Laughter, 2020). This tension underscores the importance of examining how culturally relevant approaches are enacted in specific classroom contexts. The use of proverbs aligns closely with these principles because it draws upon learners' cultural experiences to support moral reasoning, communication, and conflict resolution. Consequently, proverb-based learning provides a strategic approach to integrating cultural knowledge with social and emotional development.

2.5 Implementation Challenges, Research Gap, and Theoretical Framing

Despite strong theoretical and policy support, the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in schools remains limited. Teaching in the FET Phase continues to be largely examination-driven, often marginalising Indigenous knowledge forms and oral traditions (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016). Evidence suggests that teacher beliefs, professional preparation, and resource availability significantly influence the extent to which culturally responsive practices are implemented. Borg (2011) argues that teacher cognition shapes classroom practice, while Le Grange (2016) identifies limited institutional support and resources as barriers to effective integration. Recent studies similarly indicate that inadequate professional development opportunities constrain the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogies (Maphalala, 2021; Khalifa et al., 2023).

Furthermore, emerging scholarship on restorative justice and social-emotional learning highlights the importance of culturally grounded approaches to conflict resolution (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Gregory & Evans, 2021). Although restorative education has gained prominence internationally, limited research has examined how Indigenous oral traditions can serve as pedagogical mechanisms for fostering restorative dialogue, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving within African classrooms.

A significant gap therefore remains in the literature. Although previous studies have examined Indigenous Knowledge Systems, oral traditions, culturally responsive pedagogy, and social-emotional learning separately, limited empirical research has specifically investigated how Xitsonga proverbs function pedagogically to cultivate conflict resolution competencies among FET learners in Home Language classrooms. Existing studies primarily focus on the linguistic, literary, and cultural dimensions of proverbs, with limited classroom-based evidence regarding their role in promoting empathy, restorative dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and moral reasoning. Moreover, few studies have employed qualitative classroom-based approaches that capture the lived experiences of both teachers and learners during proverb-based instruction.

The study is motivated by the need to address learner conflict through culturally grounded, policy-aligned pedagogy. By examining the educational use of Xitsonga proverbs, this study advances the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems into formal schooling and contributes to decolonised education in South Africa. The study is grounded in Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Social and Emotional Learning. These complementary frameworks explain how culturally grounded educational resources can foster moral reasoning, communication, conflict resolution, and social cohesion among learners (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias et al., 2015; Narvaez, 2014).

This study further contributes to international discussions on Indigenous pedagogies by demonstrating how African oral traditions can function as culturally responsive tools for conflict resolution, moral development, and social cohesion. In doing so, it connects South African educational experiences with broader global efforts to revitalise Indigenous knowledge within formal education. The literature review therefore situates the study within broader debates on social-emotional learning, moral development, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, culturally relevant pedagogy, restorative education, and decolonial curriculum transformation, highlighting the innovative role of Xitsonga proverbs in promoting conflict resolution within the FET Home Language classroom.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative case study design situated within the interpretivist paradigm. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring socially constructed meanings and experiences in natural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maree, 2020). This approach was particularly suitable for examining how Xitsonga proverbs are used pedagogically to develop conflict resolution competencies, as it prioritises context, culture, and lived experience. The interpretivist paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed and that knowledge emerges through interaction and interpretation (Maree, 2020). Interpretivist inquiry seeks to understand the meanings people ascribe to their experiences (Thanh & Thanh, 2015: 25), making it appropriate for studies grounded in Indigenous Knowledge Systems and culturally embedded practices. A case study design was employed to facilitate an in-depth and holistic investigation of the phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). This design enabled exploration of classroom practices, teacher decision-making, and learner engagement in relation to proverb-based instruction. Case studies provide rich, contextualised understanding of complex educational phenomena (Rule & John, 2015: 4). The design further aligned with the principles of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, which emphasise context-bound and culturally situated knowledge (Chilisa, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Participants included Xitsonga Home Language teachers and learners from selected secondary schools in the FET Phase (Grades 10–12). The study was conducted in Vhembe district, Limpopo province, South Africa, and involved two (2) secondary schools offering Xitsonga Home Language. A total of six (6) teachers and ten (10) learners participated in the study. The teacher participants consisted of three (3) females and three (3) males with teaching experience of ten (10) years. Learner participants were drawn from Grades 10–12 and ranged in age from 14–17 years. Teachers were selected because they play a central role in curriculum implementation and the integration of oral traditions into classroom practice. Learners were included to explore how proverb-based instruction influences conflict resolution skills, moral reasoning, and classroom behaviour. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with direct experience relevant to the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This sampling technique is appropriate in qualitative research because it enables the selection of participants capable of providing insightful and relevant information (Etikan et al., 2016). Schools were selected based on their offering of Xitsonga Home Language, evidence of incorporating oral literature, and willingness to participate. Additional selection criteria included teachers' experience in teaching Xitsonga Home Language and learners'

active participation in classroom activities involving oral literature. The participating schools represented rural and peri-urban contexts, enabling the study to capture diverse educational experiences and perspectives. This sampling strategy ensured depth, relevance, and contextual richness of the data collected.

3.3 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to ensure depth, credibility, and triangulation. Semi-structured interviews with teachers explored perceptions of proverbs, instructional strategies, and classroom experiences. An interview guide ensured alignment with policy frameworks and research objectives.

Semi-structured interviews are effective because they provide flexibility while ensuring that key issues are explored (Maree, 2020). Kallio et al. (2016) note that this method allows researchers to obtain rich and detailed data while maintaining focus on research objectives.

A total of six (6) teacher interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 30 minutes.

Classroom observations were conducted using a structured observation schedule to document teaching strategies, learner engagement, and interaction patterns related to empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Observation captured naturally occurring practices and behaviours within the classroom context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method provided direct insight into how proverbs were utilised in classroom teaching and learning.

A total of five (5) classroom observation sessions were conducted across the participating schools.

Document analysis reviewed lesson plans, teaching materials, learner work, and curriculum documents, including the Language-in-Education Policy (Department of Education, 1997) and CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Document analysis provides contextual and corroborative evidence that complements interview and observation data (Bowen, 2009). The use of multiple data sources strengthened the study through triangulation, thereby enhancing credibility and validity (Carter et al., 2014).

3.4 Research Procedure

This study sought ethical clearance approval from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee. Since the research was conducted in a school environment, formal permission was requested from the Limpopo Department of Education, in line with the recommendations of Pandey and Pandey (2021). Furthermore, permission was obtained from the principals of the two selected secondary schools in the Vhembe District, Malamulele Central Circuit, where the study was conducted. Ethical principles were adhered to throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from teachers, while assent was obtained from learners together with parental consent where required. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw. Data collection was conducted systematically and chronologically. Semi-structured interviews were conducted first, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. This was followed by non-participant classroom observations focusing on the pedagogical use of proverbs, particularly in addressing learner behaviour and interpersonal conflict. Document

analysis was subsequently undertaken to assess alignment between classroom practices and curriculum policy frameworks. This procedure aligned with qualitative case study protocols recommended by Yin (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018), ensuring methodological rigor and coherence.

3.5 Data Analysis, Trustworthiness, and Researcher Positionality

Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which identifies and interprets patterns within qualitative data. This approach was appropriate for examining relationships between teacher perspectives, classroom practices, and learner outcomes. The analysis followed a systematic process of transcription, coding, categorisation, and interpretation. The six phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) guided the analytical process: (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. Data were coded inductively to identify emerging themes and deductively according to the theoretical frameworks of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Data analysis was managed using [NVivo/ATLAS.ti/MAXQDA/manual coding], which facilitated systematic organisation, retrieval, and comparison of codes and themes. Where applicable, coding consistency was enhanced through peer review and discussion of emerging themes with academic supervisors and research colleagues. Themes were interpreted in relation to policy mandates and classroom practices to identify patterns, gaps, and pedagogical implications.

Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, audit trails, and reflexive journaling, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents (Carter et al., 2014). Member checking was used to validate interpretations with participants, while an audit trail enhanced transparency and dependability. Reflexive journaling supported researcher awareness of potential biases and strengthened confirmability. Confidentiality, anonymity, and secure data storage were upheld throughout.

Researcher positionality was explicitly considered throughout the study. As a researcher working within the Xitsonga linguistic and cultural context, I recognised that my familiarity with the community provided valuable cultural insight while also requiring continuous reflexivity to minimise subjective interpretation. Reflexive journaling was used to critically examine assumptions, positionality, and potential biases during data collection and analysis. Consistent with Indigenous and decolonial research approaches, the study sought to respect participants' voices and represent their lived experiences authentically (Chilisa, 2012). This methodological design ensured rigor, contextual relevance, and alignment with Indigenous Knowledge Systems and culturally responsive pedagogy.

4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of interview data and classroom observations revealed that Xitsonga proverbs play a multifaceted role in fostering conflict resolution, moral reasoning, and social cohesion within Further Education and Training (FET) Home Language classrooms. Rather than functioning solely as linguistic or literary resources, proverbs emerged as culturally embedded pedagogical tools through which learners interpreted social experiences, negotiated interpersonal relationships, and developed ethical understandings of appropriate behaviour. The findings further demonstrate that the educational value of proverbs is shaped by teachers' mediation practices and their beliefs regarding the legitimacy of

Indigenous Knowledge Systems within formal schooling. Three interconnected themes emerged from the data: (1) Xitsonga proverbs as tools for moral and conflict resolution education, (2) teachers as cultural mediators and agents of restorative pedagogy, and (3) the role of proverbs in strengthening cultural identity and holistic learner development. Together, these themes illustrate how Indigenous oral traditions can contribute to both academic and socio-emotional learning while supporting broader efforts to promote culturally responsive and decolonial pedagogies in South African education.

4.1 Xitsonga Proverbs as Tools for Moral and Conflict Resolution Education

The findings indicate that Xitsonga proverbs functioned as culturally grounded mediational tools that enabled learners to engage in moral reflection, conflict mediation, and social-emotional learning. Through classroom discussions, storytelling, role-play, and reflective activities, learners employed proverbs to analyse interpersonal conflicts, evaluate behavioural choices, and negotiate mutually acceptable solutions. These findings support Chilisa's (2012) conceptualisation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems as living knowledge embedded in everyday social practice. They also resonate with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which views language as a mediational tool through which cognitive development and higher-order thinking occur. Moreover, the findings align with Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) theory (Elias et al., 2015), demonstrating how culturally meaningful narratives can scaffold empathy, self-regulation, responsible decision-making, and relationship-building skills.

A prominent finding was the use of proverbs as dialogic resources that encouraged collaborative reflection and collective problem-solving. The proverb "*Ximanga xi tlula nambu loko xi ri ni vanghana*" was frequently used to promote cooperation and shared responsibility in addressing conflicts. Classroom observations revealed that learners moved beyond blaming one another and instead engaged in discussions aimed at identifying common goals and mutually beneficial solutions. In several observed group activities, learners who initially resisted cooperation became more willing to negotiate responsibilities and participate in collective decision-making after discussing the proverb. Observable behavioural indicators included reduced verbal confrontation, increased turn-taking, active listening, and more constructive engagement during conflict-related discussions. One teacher explained:

"When learners discuss this proverb, they become calmer and more willing to listen to each other. Instead of arguing, they start looking for solutions together." (Teacher 2)

This finding suggests that the proverb served not only as a linguistic expression but also as a cultural framework for reframing conflict as a shared challenge requiring collective action. Such a process reflects restorative justice principles (Morrison, 2007), which emphasise dialogue, understanding, and relationship repair rather than adversarial approaches to conflict management. The proverb thus functioned as a culturally familiar mediational resource that transformed conflict situations into opportunities for collaborative learning and social growth.

The findings further demonstrate the contribution of proverbs to the development of emotional intelligence and empathy. The proverb "*Ku twanana i ku rivalelana*" encouraged learners to consider the emotions, perspectives, and experiences of others before reacting to conflict situations. Classroom observations revealed that learners openly discussed their

feelings, acknowledged classmates' viewpoints, apologised voluntarily, and proposed compromise-based solutions. These behavioural indicators suggest that empathy was not merely discussed as a moral principle but actively enacted through classroom interaction. As one learner remarked:

"The proverb helped me understand why my classmate was upset. Instead of arguing, we talked about the problem." (Learner 4)

The significance of this finding extends beyond conflict resolution. It demonstrates how Indigenous oral traditions can cultivate relational awareness and emotional competence through culturally meaningful modes of learning. This aligns with Ubuntu philosophy (Ramose, 1999; Metz, 2011), which emphasises interconnectedness, mutual recognition, and collective well-being. It also supports findings from social-emotional learning research showing that empathy develops through guided interaction, perspective-taking, and reflective engagement (Durlak et al., 2011). By encouraging learners to recognise and value the experiences of others, proverbs facilitated the development of interpersonal competencies that are essential for both academic and social success.

A related finding concerns the development of perspective-taking and critical reflection. The proverb "*Loko mati ma ri na ndzhope, ku na xivangelo*" encouraged learners to explore the underlying causes of conflict rather than focusing solely on assigning blame. During classroom discussions, learners examined factors such as miscommunication, emotional distress, peer influence, and differing expectations when analysing conflict scenarios. This shift from judgment to inquiry reflects the development of critical reflection and contextual reasoning. One teacher observed:

"Learners started asking why the conflict happened instead of immediately deciding who was wrong." (Teacher 1)

This finding is particularly significant because it demonstrates how proverb-based learning can promote deeper cognitive engagement with social issues. In line with Vygotskian perspectives on mediated learning, the proverb functioned as a cognitive tool through which learners organised their thinking, interpreted complex social situations, and developed more nuanced understandings of human behaviour. Such reflective engagement is fundamental to both moral reasoning and effective conflict resolution, as it encourages learners to move beyond simplistic explanations and consider the broader contexts in which conflicts emerge.

4.2 Teachers as Cultural Mediators and Agents of Restorative Pedagogy

The findings reveal that teachers played a pivotal role in transforming Xitsonga proverbs from cultural artefacts into meaningful pedagogical resources. Their mediation practices determined how proverbs were interpreted, contextualised, and applied within classroom settings. Consistent with Borg's (2011) theory of teacher cognition, teachers' beliefs about Indigenous Knowledge Systems significantly influenced the depth and effectiveness of proverb integration. Educators who viewed proverbs as valuable sources of knowledge incorporated them into classroom dialogue, behavioural guidance, and conflict mediation practices. By contrast, teachers whose instructional priorities were largely examination-driven tended to confine proverbs to literary analysis, thereby limiting their broader educational potential.

One of the most significant findings within this theme concerns the use of proverbs to facilitate restorative forms of discipline. The proverb *"Ku tshinya ku ri ni rirhandzu"* was used to encourage learners to reflect on their actions, recognise their impact on others, and participate in finding constructive solutions. Rather than relying solely on punishment, teachers facilitated dialogue aimed at fostering accountability and behavioural change. As one teacher explained:

"The proverb helps learners reflect on what they did and why it affected others. They correct themselves instead of simply fearing punishment."
(Teacher 3)

This finding suggests that proverb-based pedagogy can support a transition from punitive disciplinary approaches toward restorative educational practices. Consistent with restorative justice literature, sustainable behavioural change was achieved through reflection, empathy, accountability, and relationship repair rather than through fear of sanctions. Teachers therefore acted not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as facilitators of ethical learning and social reconciliation. Their role highlights the importance of teacher agency in operationalising Indigenous pedagogies and translating policy aspirations into meaningful classroom practice.

4.3 Proverbs, Cultural Identity, and Holistic Learner Development

The findings further demonstrate that proverb-based instruction contributed significantly to learners' cultural affirmation, linguistic confidence, and holistic development. By engaging with proverbs in their home language, learners were able to connect classroom learning with their cultural experiences and community values. Proverbs provided a culturally meaningful framework through which learners could express opinions, negotiate meanings, and participate actively in learning activities.

The proverb *"Xihlovo a xi dungiwi"* emerged as a powerful symbol of cultural affirmation and linguistic pride. Learners expressed greater confidence when discussing moral issues and conflict situations in Xitsonga, and increased participation was observed during storytelling, classroom discussions, and reflective activities. One learner explained:

"When we use proverbs in Xitsonga, I feel proud because it connects us with our culture." (Learner 7)

This finding supports Ladson-Billings' (1995) conception of culturally relevant pedagogy, which emphasises the importance of drawing on learners' cultural backgrounds as assets for learning. It also aligns with decolonial scholarship (Shizha & Abdi, 2020), which advocates for the recognition and validation of Indigenous languages and knowledge systems within formal educational contexts. By creating opportunities for learners to engage with culturally familiar forms of knowledge, proverb-based instruction fostered both academic participation and a stronger sense of cultural belonging.

Despite these positive outcomes, the findings also revealed a persistent gap between policy intentions and classroom realities. The proverb *"Rito ri nge heteleli loko ri nga endliwi"* aptly captured participants' concerns regarding the inconsistent implementation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in schools. Although educational policies recognise the importance of Indigenous knowledge, participants identified several structural barriers that limited sustained implementation, including assessment pressures, time constraints, inadequate instructional resources, and limited professional development opportunities. As

a result, the successful integration of proverbs often depended on individual teacher commitment rather than systematic institutional support.

This finding highlights an important tension within curriculum transformation efforts. While policy frameworks increasingly advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, meaningful implementation requires sustained investment in teacher training, curriculum resources, and pedagogical support structures. Without such support, the transformative potential of Indigenous pedagogies may remain largely symbolic rather than substantive.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Xitsonga proverbs function as powerful mediational tools that promote empathy, moral reasoning, restorative dialogue, cooperative problem-solving, cultural affirmation, and social cohesion. The study extends Indigenous Knowledge Systems scholarship (Chilisa, 2012; Dei, 2014) by illustrating how Indigenous oral traditions can serve as practical pedagogical resources for addressing contemporary educational challenges. The findings further support Vygotsky's (1978) concept of mediated learning, align with Ubuntu ethics (Ramose, 1999; Metz, 2011), and reinforce Social and Emotional Learning frameworks (Elias et al., 2015). By demonstrating how culturally embedded knowledge can foster conflict resolution, ethical development, and holistic learner growth, the study contributes to ongoing debates on culturally relevant pedagogy, decolonial education, and the meaningful integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems within South African schooling.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the pedagogical use of Xitsonga proverbs in Further Education and Training (FET) Home Language classrooms as a means of fostering conflict resolution, moral reasoning, and social cohesion among learners. The findings demonstrate that Xitsonga proverbs function as culturally grounded mediational tools that support learners' emotional, cognitive, social, and ethical development. Through their metaphorical and dialogic nature, proverbs enabled learners to engage in collaborative problem-solving, perspective-taking, empathy development, and restorative dialogue. Classroom activities such as discussion, role-play, storytelling, and reflective engagement provided opportunities for learners to interpret conflict situations critically and develop constructive strategies for resolving interpersonal challenges.

The study further revealed that Xitsonga proverbs play a significant role in moral and social education by reinforcing values such as forgiveness, patience, respect, communal responsibility, and social harmony. In this regard, proverbs served as vehicles for transmitting Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Ubuntu-based values, enabling learners to develop culturally relevant ethical frameworks for understanding and addressing conflict. The findings also highlight the central role of teachers as cultural mediators and epistemic guides. Teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and pedagogical orientations significantly influenced the extent to which proverbs were used as transformative educational resources rather than merely as linguistic content. Where teachers consciously integrated proverbs into classroom practice, learners experienced richer opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and social learning.

In addition, the use of Xitsonga proverbs contributed to cultural affirmation and linguistic pride by encouraging learners to express values and experiences through their mother tongue. This strengthened learners' sense of identity, belonging, and participation within the classroom community while reinforcing communal ethics embedded in

Indigenous knowledge traditions. The findings further indicate that proverb-based pedagogy supports key social and emotional learning competencies, including empathy, responsible decision-making, relationship management, self-awareness, and cooperative problem-solving. Through sustained engagement with culturally meaningful narratives and reflective discussions, learners were able to internalise these competencies in ways that connected directly to their lived experiences.

Beyond its empirical contributions, the study advances scholarship on Indigenous Knowledge Systems, culturally relevant pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and decolonial education. The findings demonstrate that Xitsonga proverbs are not merely cultural artefacts preserved for heritage purposes but dynamic pedagogical resources capable of mediating moral reasoning, restorative dialogue, and conflict resolution competencies. The study therefore contributes to ongoing efforts to reposition Indigenous oral traditions as legitimate and valuable knowledge systems within formal education. Theoretically, it illustrates how Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Vygotskian sociocultural theory, Ubuntu philosophy, and social-emotional learning intersect to support holistic learner development. Proverbs functioned as cultural tools through which learners developed empathy, ethical awareness, perspective-taking abilities, and collaborative approaches to problem-solving, thereby providing a conceptual framework for understanding the educational value of culturally embedded knowledge.

While the study offers important insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The research was conducted within a limited geographical context and focused on selected FET schools offering Xitsonga Home Language, which may affect the transferability of the findings to other educational settings. The study also relied on a relatively small purposively selected sample, which is appropriate for qualitative inquiry but does not support broad generalisation. Furthermore, the findings are context-specific and based on participants' experiences and perceptions, and should therefore be interpreted as providing in-depth contextual understanding rather than universally applicable conclusions. Despite these limitations, the findings have important implications for educational policy, curriculum development, teacher education, and future research. The study suggests that Indigenous oral traditions should be more deliberately integrated into Home Language curricula to support not only linguistic development but also social-emotional learning, moral education, and conflict resolution. Curriculum frameworks such as CAPS and the Language-in-Education Policy would benefit from clearer guidance on the pedagogical use of proverbs and other Indigenous knowledge resources. Equally important is the provision of sustained professional development opportunities that equip teachers with practical strategies for employing proverb-based pedagogy as a dialogic, reflective, and restorative approach to teaching and learning.

At the classroom level, educators should move beyond treating proverbs solely as objects of linguistic analysis and instead utilise them as tools for critical reflection, ethical reasoning, and collaborative problem-solving. Strategies such as storytelling, role-play, group discussion, conflict-analysis tasks, and reflective writing can facilitate meaningful learner engagement with Indigenous knowledge while promoting social cohesion and responsible citizenship. Teacher education programmes should likewise strengthen the inclusion of Indigenous pedagogies and culturally responsive teaching approaches in both pre-service and in-service training.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of proverb-based pedagogy on learners' social, emotional, and academic development and examine the educational

potential of other Indigenous oral forms, including folktales, praise poetry, idioms, and riddles. Further investigations into teachers' experiences of implementing Indigenous pedagogies across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts would also deepen understanding of their role in curriculum transformation and learner development. The use of mixed-methods and longitudinal research designs could provide broader evidence regarding the effectiveness and sustainability of Indigenous knowledge-based educational practices.

In conclusion, the integration of Xitsonga proverbs into Home Language teaching offers a culturally responsive and educationally meaningful approach to developing conflict resolution skills, moral reasoning, social responsibility, and social cohesion among learners. Their pedagogical value extends well beyond language instruction, positioning Indigenous oral traditions as powerful resources for holistic education in contemporary South African classrooms. By demonstrating how culturally embedded knowledge can support learner well-being, ethical development, and restorative social relationships, this study contributes to ongoing efforts to decolonise education, strengthen culturally relevant pedagogy, and promote socially responsive learning environments within South African schools.

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TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES AND TRANSLATION IDEOLOGIES OF CULTURE SPECIFIC ITEMS IN THE NETFLIX DOCUMENTARY *STREET FOOD: USA*

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Abstract

This study investigates and classifies culture-specific items in the Netflix documentary *Street Food: USA*, along with the translation techniques and ideologies applied. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method. The data source was the Netflix documentary *Street Food: USA*, using English and Indonesian subtitles as target language. A total of 164 data containing culture-specific items were analyzed. The study draws on Newmark's (1988) theory for culture-specific items, Molina and Albir's (2002) framework for translation techniques, and Venuti's (2004) concept of translation ideology. Data were analyzed using translation equivalence and distributional methods. All categories of culture-specific items were identified in the subtitles. Material culture dominated (95 instances), followed by social organization (39), social culture (28), and ecology (1). Nine of eighteen techniques were identified. Pure borrowing was most frequent (78), followed by literal translation (36), adaptation (10), reduction and amplification (3), and particularization and calque (1). The dominant couplet technique was literal + pure borrowing (12). Foreignization dominated (145), while domestication appeared in 19. These findings contribute to audiovisual translation studies by demonstrating how subtitle translators negotiate cultural preservation and audience accessibility in documentary contexts.

Keywords: *culture specific items; netflix documentary; translation ideologies; translation techniques.*

1. Introduction

In the current era of digital globalization, audiovisual translation has become increasingly important in facilitating cross-cultural communication and enabling audiences to access information beyond linguistic boundaries. The rapid expansion of streaming platforms has intensified the global circulation of audiovisual content, making translation an essential medium for transferring meanings across languages and cultures. Among these platforms, Netflix has become one of the most influential global streaming. In Indonesia, Netflix is the most popular streaming platform (Alfianti et al., 2026). The platform has reached users in 190 countries and continues to broaden its marketing strategies to strengthen its global presence (Januar et al., 2023). Netflix has many genres to offers to viewers, including

documentary film. *Street Food: USA* is one of Netflix documentary. Documentary film portrays real life events and social realities. According to Plantinga (2005) documentaries can be classified into six categories, one of which is the observational mode. *Street Food: USA* is an observation documentary, which is this film shows the American society, the traditional foods, and the immigrant community in American. This film highlights the cultural diversity of United States and explored the culinary heritage by immigrant communities, such as Latino, Asian, and African American culture.

However, translation is not merely the replacement of words from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL), but a communicative and cultural process. According to Catford (1965), translation involves transferring textual material from one language into another while maintaining equivalence at the linguistic level.

Prior studies have highlighted the gap. Simbolon et al. (2025) investigated the translation ideologies and techniques of song lyrics. Kurniawan (2023) focused on culture specific items, translation techniques, and translation method on Novel. Firdaus and Putrananda Naully (2022) analyzed cultural terms and techniques of film. Yatuuzzuhriyah and Hilman (2022) focused on translation techniques and translation quality in novel. Thus, several previous studies have not fully explored the culture specific items, translation techniques, and translation ideologies on documentary film.

To address this gap, this study extends previous translation studies by examining how culture specific items categorization, translation techniques, and ideology interact within documentary subtitle translation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Culture Specific Items

Culture is a broad concept that can be categorized into Big-C Culture and Small-C Culture. According to Kramsch (1998) Big-C Culture refers to visible and tangible aspects such as arts, history, literature, national figures, and political systems. In contrast, Small-C Culture encompasses beliefs, social norms, interaction patterns, some visible (e.g., religious celebrations) and others embedded unconsciously in identity. Moreover, Hall's (1977) cultural iceberg model illustrates that culture consists not only of visible elements such as food, clothing, and language, but also invisible elements including values, perceptions, and social norms.

According to Newmark (1988), culture specific items consist of five categories, such as ecology, material culture, social culture, social organization, also gestures and habits.

2.2 Translation Techniques

According to Newmark (1988, as cited in Hartono, 2020), translators may employ one or more techniques in the process of translating texts. Using one technique is referred to as a single technique, while combining two techniques is known as a couplet. Many experts have introduced different terms to refer to these translation procedures. Different scholars use varied terminology: Vinay and Darbelnet (1977) call them procedures, Newmark (1988) procedures, Vazquez-Ayora (1977) operative techniques, Hatim & Munday (2004) strategies, and Molina & Albir (2002) translation techniques. Then, the translation techniques by Molina and Albir (2002) consists of eighteen categories, including adaptation, amplification, borrowing, calque, compensation, description, discursive creation, established equivalent,

generalization, linguistic amplification, linguistic compression, literal translation, modulation, particularization, reduction, substitution, transposition, and variation.

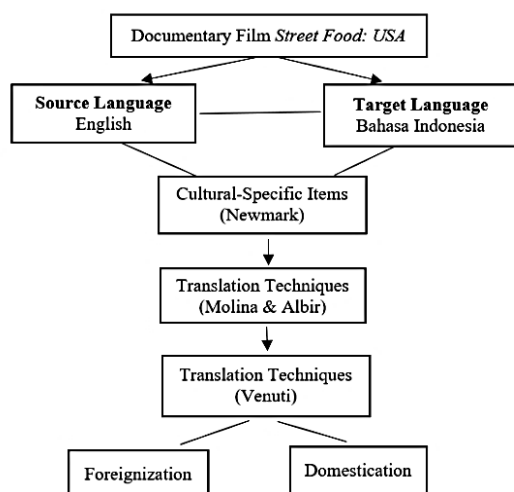
2.3 Translation Ideologies

Translation ideology encompasses the values and assumptions that guide translators in negotiating cultural and linguistic differences between source and target texts. Venuti (2018) identifies two influential ideological orientations in translation: foreignization and domestication. Foreignization emphasizes the preservation of source-culture elements and linguistic peculiarities, encouraging target readers to engage with the cultural distinctiveness of the original text. By maintaining traces of the source culture, this approach challenges ethnocentric tendencies and promotes intercultural awareness. Conversely, domestication adapts the source text to the linguistic conventions and cultural expectations of the target audience, producing a more fluent and natural-sounding translation. While domestication facilitates readability and accessibility, foreignization foregrounds cultural diversity and the visibility of the translator. Consequently, these ideologies serve as important analytical frameworks for examining translators' decisions and their impact on cross-cultural communication (Munday, 2016; Venuti, 2018).

2.4 Conceptual Relationship

Figure 1.

Conceptual Relationship



This study analyzed the English-Indonesian subtitles of a documentary film and draws on Newmark's (1988) theory for culture specific items, Molina and Albir's (2002) framework for translation techniques, and Venuti's (2004) concept of translation ideology.

The previous studies, Eryanto et al. (2024) analyzed subtitles of the Netflix film *Forrest Gump*, focusing on translation quality. Khoiriyatunnisa & Yuniar (2022) examined subtitles of the film *Al-Farabi*, focusing on translation strategies. Both studies focused on fictional films and emphasized translation quality and strategies. By contrast, this study examines a non-fiction documentary that highlights cultural practices and everyday habits. This study specifically analyzes subtitle translation, focusing on techniques and ideology.

3. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. A descriptive qualitative approach was chosen to examine translation ideology, techniques, and culture specific items in depth. The researcher served as the primary instrument, functioning as observer, analyst, and interpreter, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of human instrument.

Furthermore, this study analyzes the Netflix documentary *Street Food: USA*, focusing on English-Indonesian subtitles. Although, the documentary film consists of six episodes, four were selected for analysis due to their shared focus on African and Asian cultural representations in the United States. The study employed purposive sampling. The first series from Los Angeles, California, with a duration of 35 minutes, followed by Portland, Oregon (30 minutes); Oahu, Hawaii (32 minutes); and Miami, Florida (28 minutes). Data were analyzed using translational equivalence to assess meaning transfer and distributional methods to examine linguistic structures. The distributional method was applied to analyze linguistic structures of culture specific items across source and target language. Data classification was independently by two translation scholars. The subtitle source was obtained from Netflix.

The data collection in this study employs the observational method (*metode simak*), which is divided into two stages: basic and advanced techniques (Sudaryanto, 2015). The basic technique involves the tapping technique (*teknik sadap*), which is used to extract subtitles from the documentary series of *Street Food: USA*. The advanced technique consists of the taking-note technique (*teknik catat*), whereby the researcher records vocabulary containing translations of cultural terms and organizes into a data table. Data collection involved watching the documentary, extracting English and Indonesia subtitles, identifying culture specific items, and compiling them into categorized tables for analysis.

The data analyze process by several stages. First, analysis proceeded through observation, followed by identification of culture specific items, classification by category, and examination of translation techniques and ideologies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Culture Specific Items

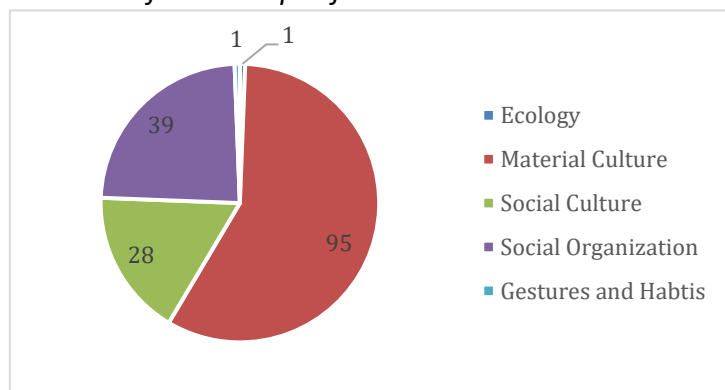
Table 1

Culture Specific Items Category

No.	Culture Specific Items	Occurrences	Percentages
1.	Ecology	1	0.6%
2.	Material Culture	95	57.9%
3.	Social Culture	28	17.1%
4.	Social Organization	39	23.8%
5.	Habits and Gestures	1	0.6%
Total		164	100%

Figure 2.

Pie chart of Culture Specific Items



1. Ecology

SL: "I was born and raised on **Oahu**, and on the weekend my dad and I come up to the North Shore and spend time with family". (5:40)

TL: "*Aku lahir dan besar di **Oahu**, dan di akhir pekan, aku dan ayahku pergi ke Pesisir Utara, kumpul keluarga.*"

Oahu is classified as an ecological cultural term, denoting a Hawaiian island with distinctive environment features. This finding support Newmark's concept of culture specific items, is connected to geographic features. The ecological category only one occurrence identified. This finding can be interpreted in relation to the thematic focus of *Street Food: USA*, which highlight culinary traditions, personal stories of food vendors, and culture habits. This findings differs with Muslim & Triyono (2022) that focused on ecology term. The discrepancy explained by different genre.

2. Material Culture

SL: What can I get for you today. A rib **banh mi**. (3:49)

TL: *Mau pesan apa hari ini.? **Banh mi** rusak.*

Banh Mi, a traditional Vietnamese bread, is categorized as material culture. Material culture was the third most frequent category, with 95 identified. This finding support Newmark's cultural classification, such element belongs to material culture because it represents product and object and align with previous studies Sari & Gusthini (2023), reported the material culture dominated to foods. This finding is consistent with the genre film *Street Food: USA* that focus on local foods and cultural artifact.

The translator preserves the local food name, because local food and cultural artifact often lack equivalent in target language, thus the culture specific concept embedded in the authentic culinary tradition.

3. Social Culture

SL: We usually have a **potluck**, make a bunch of dishes, and enjoy the time together. (5:53)

TL: *Kami biasanya **makan bersama**, buat banyak hidangan, dan menikmati waktu bersama.*

Potluck, a communal dining tradition in North America, is categorized as social culture. The term '*makan bersama*' is more familiar in TL. The translator employed this term to enhance comprehensibility and cultural accessibility. This support Venuti's concept of domestication and align previous studies from Jaya (2020).

4. Social Organization

SL: Man, you doing some **vodou** or something, man. (20:51)

TL: *Kau melakukan **Vodou** atau semacamnya.*

Vodou, originating in West Africa and Haiti, is categorized under social organization as a religious belief system. The translator retained the SL term in its original form to preserve its cultural authenticity. It supports the Newmark's concept of social organization and aligns previous studies from Sari & Gusthini (2023).

5. Gestures and Habits

SL: *Just smile and **shaka**.* (28:20)

TL: Senyum dan beri tanda **shaka**.

Shaka is a gesture hang loose classified under gestures and habits. It was the least frequent of culture specific items, with only one occurrence identified. This support with Newmark's classification of culturally specific body language and align previous studies from Korneenkova, et al. (2025). As a result, the finding focused on material culture and social culture. Therefore, visual gestures are not prominently highlighted in the documentary.

4.2 Translation Techniques

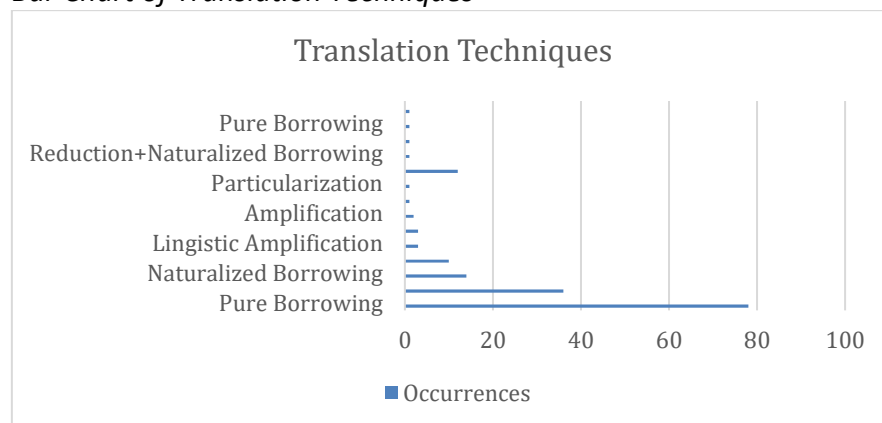
Table 2.

Translation Techniques Category

No	Translation Techniques	Occurrences	Percentages
Single Technique			
1.	Pure Borrowing	78	47.56%
2.	Literal	36	21.95%
3.	Naturalized Borrowing	14	8.54%
4.	Adaptation	10	6.10%
5.	Linguistic Amplification	3	1.83%
6.	Reduction	3	1.83%
7.	Amplification	2	1.22%
8.	Calque	1	0.61%
9.	Particularization	1	0.61%
Couplet Technique			
10.	Literal + Pure Borrowing	12	7.32%
11.	Reduction + Naturalized Borrowing	1	0.61%
12.	Pure Borrowing + Particularization	1	0.61%
13.	Pure Borrowing + Calque	1	0.61%
14.	Literal + Naturalized Borrowing	1	0.61%
Total		164	100%

Figure 3

Bar Chart of Translation Techniques



4.2.1 Single Technique

1. Pure Borrowing

SL: A lot of people say, “**Carnitas** is just carne”

TL: *Banyak orang bilang, “**Carnitas** hanya carne”*

Carnitas, a Mexican pork dish, was retained through pure borrowing due to lack of TL equivalence. The dominance of pure borrowing indicates the translator’s preference for preserving source-culture authenticity. This finding supports Molina & Albir’s concept of pure borrowing and aligns with previous translation studies from Doni Jaya (2020), that pure borrowing technique indicates to foreignization.

2. Adaptation

SL: I was still on **Section 8 housing**. (12:19)

TL: *Aku masih di **perumahan subsidi**.*

Section 8 Housing refers to a housing assistance program in the United States that provides rental vouchers to low-income residents. the translator chose to use *perumahan subsidi* in order to make it more accessible and comprehensible for target language (TL) audiences. It was used because the SL lacks an equivalent term. This finding supports Venuti’s concept of foreignization and aligns with previous studies from Doni Jaya (2020) and Hadi et al. (2020), adaptation technique indicates to domestication.

4.2.2 Couplet Techniques

1. Reduction + Naturalized Borrowing

SL: Food in LA, in **strips malls** and on the street, is incredibly rich, incredibly diverse, and just bursting with flavor. (7:12)

TL: *Makanan di Los Angeles, di **mal** dan di jalanan, sangat kaya, sangat beragam, dan penuh cita rasa.*

Strips malls were translated as ‘mal’, reflecting reduction and naturalized borrowing. However, ‘ruko’ would have been a closer equivalent. This finding supports Newmark’s concept of couplet technique and aligns with previous studies from Chotimah, et al. (2022).

4.3 Translation Ideology

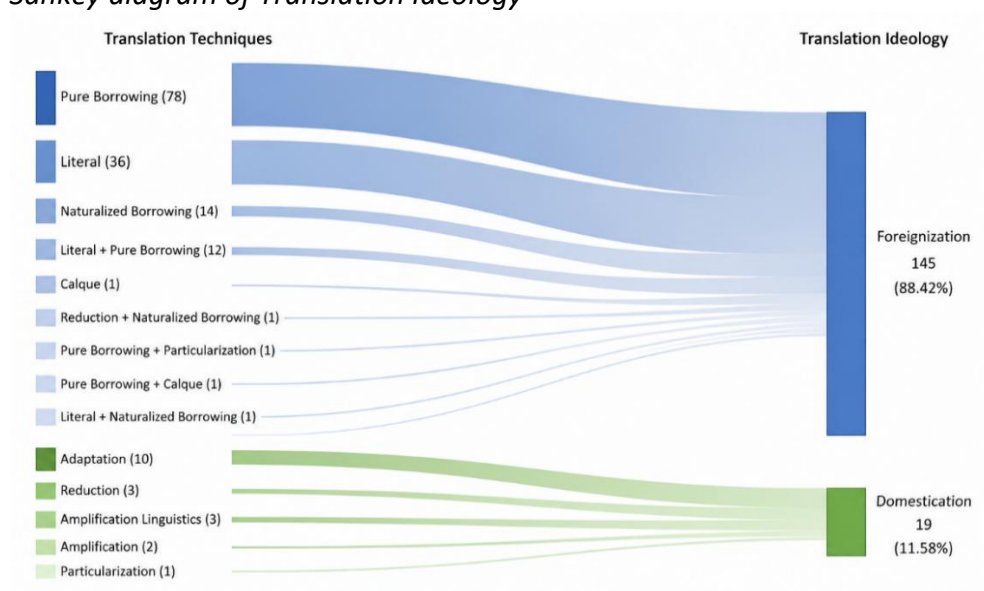
Tabel 3.

Translation Ideologies Category

No.	Translation Techniques	Occurrences	Percentages	Ideology
1.	Pure Borrowing	78	47.56%	Foreignization
2.	Literal	36	21.95%	
3.	Naturalized Borrowing	14	8.54%	
4.	Literal + Pure Borrowing	12	7.32%	
5.	Calque	1	0.61%	
6.	Reduction + Naturalized Borrowing	1	0.61%	
7.	Pure Borrowing + Particularization	1	0.61%	
8.	Pure Borrowing + Calque	1	0.61%	
9.	Literal + Naturalized Borrowing	1	0.61%	
Total		145	88.42%	
10.	Adaptation	10	6.10%	Domestication
11.	Reduction	3	1.83%	
12.	Amplification Linguistics	3	1.83%	
13.	Amplification	2	1.22%	
14.	Particularization	1	0.61%	
Total		19	11.59%	

Figure 4.

Sankey diagram of Translation Ideology



1. Foreignization

SL: Waiting on my Souse, **Souseman**. (0:45)

TL: *Aku tunggu souse-ku, Souseman*.

Souseman is a culture specific items referring to an occupation, denoting a seller of souse. The term 'Souseman' was maintained in TL, reflecting foreignization. It dominated

with 145 data, consistent with the content of *Street Food: USA* that focuses on local foods and cultural artifact. This finding support concept Venuti's of domestication and previous studies from Jaya (2020).

2. Domestication

SL: Souseman Larry is also a **pitmaster**. (4:01)

TL: *Souseman Larry juga seorang pemanggang*.

Based on the context, the translator translated a 'pitmaster' to 'pemanggang'. The translation demonstrates that the translator selects an equivalent expression that is more familiar and accessible to the target audience in the target language (TL). This approach indicates that the original meaning and cultural characteristics of the source language (SL) are not fully maintained." Pitmaster was domesticated into 'pemanggang,' prioritizing accessibility over cultural specificity. This finding support concept Venuti's of domestication and previous studies from Jaya (2020).

Overall, the findings reveal that *Street Food: USA* represents culture primarily through material culture, highlighting culinary practices, local foods, and culture artifact. The frequent of pure borrowing indicates a strong preference for preserving culture specific items, thereby maintaining the authenticity of source culture. This tendency reflects a foreignization ideology, which cultural preservation is prioritized to target language. As a result, the subtitles serve not only as a means of communication, but also for cross-cultural representation. Allowing the target language (TL), especially Indonesian audiences understanding of the culture represented in American street food tradition.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the translation of Culture Specific Items (CSIs) in the Netflix documentary *Street Food: USA*, focusing on culture-specific items categories, translation techniques, and ideologies. The findings indicated that material culture was the most dominant category, whereas ecology was the least represented. Pure borrowing emerged as the most frequently employed translation technique, while foreignization was identified as the dominant translation ideology. The study contributes to the field of audiovisual translation by identifying the predominance of material culture in culinary documentaries and highlighting the role of foreignization in preserving culture-specific items. In practical terms, the findings offer valuable insights for translators, translation students, and audience comprehension when translating culturally embedded expressions. However, this study was limited to the analysis of English-Indonesian subtitles in a documentary film. Therefore, this study recommends that future research extends beyond translation techniques and ideology. Future research should examine translation quality, including accuracy, readability, and acceptability. Moreover, future research may investigate culture-specific items in other language pairs. Since research on the translation of English-Indonesian texts has been widely.

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ECOCRITICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF DISASTER IN DENNY JA'S ESSAY POEM, *THE NAME OF DISASTER*

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Abstract

This study investigates the representation of the human–nature relationship in the essay poems of *Atas Nama Bencana* by Denny JA through the lens of Lawrence Buell's ecocritical theory. While previous studies on Denny JA's essay poetry have predominantly examined social, political, and humanitarian concerns, ecological dimensions and environmental representations remain insufficiently explored. Moreover, the application of Buell's ecocritical framework to contemporary Indonesian essay poetry has received limited scholarly attention. Addressing this gap, the study explores how ecological values and environmental criticism are articulated within the poems. Employing a descriptive qualitative design with a content analysis approach, the research examines words, phrases, lines, and stanzas related to ecological issues across ten essay poems in the collection. Data were gathered through close reading, note-taking, and classification techniques and analyzed using Buell's four ecocritical principles. The findings reveal that ecological disasters are portrayed not merely as natural occurrences but as consequences of anthropocentric exploitation and environmental negligence. Two dominant patterns emerge: nature is represented as an active agent capable of responding to human actions, and environmental degradation is depicted as both a moral and social crisis. Through the interconnected imagery of forests, rivers, rain, floods, and landslides, the poems challenge anthropocentric perspectives and promote ecological awareness. The study demonstrates the relevance of Buell's ecocritical framework in uncovering environmental ethics embedded in contemporary Indonesian literature, positioning *Atas Nama Bencana* as both an aesthetic work and a vehicle for ecological critique.

Keywords: *anthropocentrism; contemporary Indonesian literature; ecocriticism; environmental ethics; essay poetry; Lawrence Buell*

1. Introduction

Environmental crises such as floods, landslides, and deforestation have become increasingly prominent issues in contemporary society and are frequently represented in literary works. In Indonesia, ecological disasters extend beyond environmental phenomena and reflect the complex relationship between humans and nature. Literary texts often

articulate environmental concerns by portraying the consequences of ecological degradation and questioning anthropocentric perspectives that legitimize environmental exploitation. One contemporary literary work that foregrounds these issues is the essay poetry collection *Atas Nama Bencana* by Denny JA, particularly the poems themed *Bencana Sumatra*, which portray ecological disasters and their social impacts through poetic narratives.

Essay poetry combines poetic expression and reflective discourse, enabling authors to explore social realities through both aesthetic and critical perspectives. According to Ali (2012), cited in Mutiara et al. (2024), essay poetry integrates aesthetic and cognitive dimensions, allowing readers to appreciate literary artistry while engaging with the issues addressed in the text. Within contemporary Indonesian literature, ecological disaster narratives have emerged as an important theme, reflecting growing public concern regarding environmental degradation and its consequences for human life.

The floods and landslides that occurred in Sumatra at the end of 2025 provide a significant context for understanding the ecological issues represented in Denny JA's poems. Previous studies have indicated that deforestation and forest degradation reduce the environment's capacity to absorb water, thereby increasing the risk of natural disasters (Heo et al., 2024; Wahyuni et al., 2023). These environmental conditions are reflected in the poems through depictions of damaged forests, overflowing rivers, extreme rainfall, and the suffering experienced by affected communities. The poems construct ecological disasters as consequences of disrupted human–nature relationships and foreground the interconnectedness between environmental destruction and social vulnerability.

The relationship between literature and the environment is commonly examined through ecocriticism, an approach that investigates how literary texts represent nature and environmental issues (Larasati & Manut, 2022). Among the prominent ecocritical scholars, Lawrence Buell proposed four dimensions that are widely applied in ecological literary analysis: the presence of non-human nature, the limitation of human legitimacy over nature, human responsibility toward the environment, and nature as a dynamic entity. These dimensions provide an analytical framework for examining how ecological meanings are constructed within literary texts and how environmental ethics are articulated through narrative and poetic representation.

Previous studies have explored ecocritical representations in Indonesian poetry. Jannah and Efendi (2024) examined human–nature relationships in the anthology *Negeri di Atas Kertas*, while Munjiah et al. (2024) identified critiques of environmental exploitation in *Jelajah Sungai Menyapa Alam Barito*. Similarly, Sianturi et al. (2024) investigated environmental awareness through natural imagery in *Selendang Berenda Jingga*. Although these studies contribute to the development of ecocritical literary scholarship, most focus on conventional poetry anthologies and general environmental themes. Limited attention has been given to essay poetry that addresses ecological disasters through Lawrence Buell's four-dimensional ecocritical framework. Furthermore, previous studies have rarely examined how ecological disasters are constructed as manifestations of disrupted human–nature relationships in contemporary Indonesian essay poetry. This gap provides the basis for the present research.

Accordingly, the study addresses three research questions: (1) How is nature represented in Denny JA's essay poems themed *Bencana Sumatra*? (2) How are Lawrence Buell's four ecocritical dimensions manifested in the poems? and (3) What ecological meanings emerge from these representations? Drawing upon Lawrence Buell's ecocritical

framework, the present research examines ten essay poems from Atas Nama Bencana that are considered most relevant to ecological disaster issues. By analyzing the representation of nature, environmental responsibility, ecological agency, and human–nature relationships, the study contributes to the development of literary ecology and expands discussions of environmental ethics in contemporary Indonesian literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Literary Ecology and Ecocriticism

The growing environmental crisis has encouraged literary scholars to examine how literary texts represent and respond to ecological issues. Literary ecology emerged from the recognition that literature does not merely reflect social realities but also shapes environmental consciousness. Early ecocritical scholarship, particularly that of Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), positioned ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. This perspective challenged anthropocentric literary traditions by emphasizing the significance of non-human nature in textual interpretation.

Subsequent scholars expanded this framework. Garrard (2012) argues that ecocriticism should move beyond the representation of nature toward examining environmental discourses such as pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, and ecological responsibility. Similarly, Heise (2008) highlights the importance of understanding environmental issues within global and transnational contexts, arguing that ecological problems cannot be separated from cultural and social dimensions. Meanwhile, Morton (2007) critiques conventional notions of “nature” as a stable and harmonious entity, proposing that ecological thinking should acknowledge complexity, uncertainty, and interconnectedness.

Within Indonesian literary studies, literary ecology has been widely applied to investigate environmental awareness and ecological criticism in literary texts (Angelita et al., 2023; Widayati, 2021). However, many studies continue to focus on identifying environmental themes rather than examining how literary texts construct ecological meanings and challenge anthropocentric perspectives. Consequently, literary ecology provides an important framework for analyzing how environmental values, ecological crises, and human–nature relationships are articulated in contemporary literary works.

2.2 Lawrence Buell’s Ecocritical Perspective

Among the leading figures in ecocritical studies, Lawrence Buell offers a framework that is particularly relevant for examining representations of nature in literary texts. Buell (2005) argues that environmental representation should not be treated as a peripheral aspect of literature but as a central component in the construction of meaning. His perspective shifts attention from human-centered interpretations toward the interaction between human and non-human entities.

Buell’s framework consists of four interrelated dimensions. First, the presence of non-human nature recognizes nature as a significant textual presence rather than a passive background. Second, the limitation of human legitimacy challenges anthropocentric assumptions by acknowledging the intrinsic value of nature. Third, environmental responsibility emphasizes ethical obligations toward ecological sustainability. Fourth, nature

as a dynamic process positions the environment as an active and changing entity capable of influencing human life.

These dimensions provide a comprehensive analytical framework for examining ecological representations because they enable researchers to investigate not only how nature is depicted but also how environmental ethics and human–nature relationships are constructed within literary texts. Accordingly, Buell's framework serves as the primary theoretical foundation for analyzing ecological disaster narratives in Denny JA's essay poems.

2.3 Essay Poetry as Ecological Narrative

Essay poetry occupies a distinctive position within contemporary Indonesian literature because it combines poetic expression with reflective and argumentative discourse. Denny JA (2012) argues that essay poetry integrates aesthetic imagination and factual realities, allowing literary texts to engage directly with social issues. Unlike conventional poetry, essay poetry provides broader narrative space for discussing complex problems, including environmental crises, social injustice, and humanitarian concerns.

Previous studies have generally examined essay poetry as a medium of social criticism and public reflection (Rahmadi, 2021). However, limited attention has been given to its potential as an ecological narrative that articulates environmental ethics and critiques ecological destruction. The combination of poetic language and factual references enables essay poetry to construct environmental disasters not only as natural events but also as consequences of human actions. This characteristic makes essay poetry particularly suitable for ecocritical analysis.

In the context of Bencana Sumatra, ecological disasters are constructed through representations of floods, landslides, deforestation, and human suffering. These representations foreground the interconnectedness of environmental degradation and social vulnerability while simultaneously questioning anthropocentric practices that contribute to ecological crises. Therefore, essay poetry functions not only as an aesthetic form but also as a medium through which ecological awareness and environmental criticism are articulated.

3. Research Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design with a content analysis approach to examine ecological representations in Denny JA's essay poems. The qualitative approach was selected because the research focuses on interpreting meanings, ecological values, and human–nature relationships embedded in literary texts rather than measuring variables quantitatively. Content analysis enabled a systematic examination of textual units, including words, phrases, lines, and stanzas, to identify ecological themes and representations based on Lawrence Buell's ecocritical framework.

The primary data source of this study was the digital poetry collection *Atas Nama Bencana* by Denny JA. Although the collection contains twelve essay poems, only ten poems were selected through purposive sampling. The selection was based on specific inclusion criteria: (1) the poems explicitly address ecological disasters, environmental degradation, or human–nature relationships; (2) the poems contain ecological representations relevant to Lawrence Buell's four ecocritical dimensions; and (3) the poems provide sufficient textual evidence for ecocritical interpretation. The exclusion criteria included poems that primarily

focused on social, political, or humanitarian issues without substantial ecological content. This sampling strategy ensured that the selected texts were directly aligned with the objectives of the study and provided adequate data for ecocritical analysis.

Data collection was conducted through intensive reading, note-taking, and data organization procedures. The selected poems were read repeatedly to develop a comprehensive understanding of their ecological themes, narrative contexts, and environmental representations. Relevant textual segments containing ecological references and human–nature interactions were subsequently recorded and organized for analysis. The data consisted of words, phrases, lines, and stanzas reflecting ecological concerns, including floods, landslides, deforestation, environmental degradation, ecological responsibility, and the impacts of human intervention on nature.

The data analysis process was conducted through four interconnected stages. The first stage, familiarization, involved repeated reading of the selected poems to gain an in-depth understanding of the textual context and ecological issues represented in the works. The second stage, coding, focused on identifying and labeling textual segments containing ecological markers such as forests, rivers, rain, floods, landslides, environmental exploitation, ecological responsibility, and other representations of human–nature relationships. Each relevant textual unit was assigned preliminary codes based on its ecological significance. The third stage, categorization, involved grouping the coded data according to Lawrence Buell's four ecocritical dimensions: the presence of non-human nature, the limitation of human legitimacy over nature, human responsibility toward the environment, and nature as a dynamic entity. The final stage, interpretation, consisted of thematic analysis aimed at revealing ecological meanings, environmental ethics, and representations of ecological disasters constructed within the poems. This procedure enabled a systematic and theoretically grounded interpretation of the data.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed. An audit trail was maintained throughout the research process by documenting data selection, coding decisions, categorization procedures, and analytical interpretations. Peer debriefing was conducted through discussions with colleagues familiar with literary ecology and qualitative research to evaluate the consistency and credibility of the analysis. In addition, intercoder checking was carried out by comparing coding results with those of an independent reviewer to enhance coding reliability and reduce subjective bias. Theoretical triangulation was applied by comparing the findings with relevant ecocritical theories and previous studies in literary ecology. Furthermore, persistent observation was undertaken through repeated reading and verification of the textual data to strengthen analytical accuracy, consistency, and credibility. These procedures ensured that the findings were methodologically rigorous and aligned with the objectives of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This study examines ten essay poems in the book *Atas Nama Bencana* by Denny JA using Lawrence Buell's ecocritical perspective. The analysis was conducted on poetic excerpts that represent the relationship between humans and nature, environmental destruction, ecological disasters, and society's ecological awareness. Based on the findings, the essay poems do not merely portray disasters as natural events, but also as criticism of

human actions that damage the environment. Nature is represented as a living entity that possesses a close relationship with human life; therefore, environmental destruction directly affects the sustainability of human existence.

The findings indicate that the four aspects of Lawrence Buell's ecocriticism are present in the analyzed essay poems, namely: (1) the presence of non-human nature as an active element in the text; (2) the limitations of human legitimacy over nature; (3) human responsibility toward the environment; and (4) nature as a dynamic entity. However, the distribution of these aspects does not appear evenly throughout every poem. The aspects of the presence of non-human nature and the dynamics of nature are the most dominant because almost all of the poems present floods, landslides, mud, rivers, rain, and forests as primary elements that construct conflict and create the atmosphere of disaster.

The dominance of these aspects demonstrates that Denny JA attempts to position nature as the central focus of the poetic texts. Nature does not merely function as the background of events but appears as an active force that influences human life. Furthermore, the poems also contain criticism of environmental exploitation through depictions of deforestation, hill destruction, and the loss of ecological balance, which subsequently lead to ecological disasters. Therefore, the essay poems in *Atas Nama Bencana* illustrate the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature within the context of environmental crises.

The overall findings of the study can be seen in the following table.

Ecocritical Dimension	Frequency	Interpretation
Presence of non-human nature	20	Nature functions as an active textual presence shaping conflict and meaning.
Limitation of human legitimacy over nature	14	The poems criticize anthropocentric exploitation and environmental domination.
Human responsibility toward the environment	12	Ecological awareness and environmental ethics are emphasized.
Nature as a dynamic entity	18	Nature is represented as transformative and responsive.

The findings indicate that floods, rivers, forests, hills, rain, mud, and landslides recur throughout the poems as dominant ecological motifs. These elements function not merely as environmental settings but also as significant components in constructing atmosphere, conflict, and ecological meaning.

4.1.1 Representation of Nature in the Essay Poems of Denny JA

According to Buell (1995), non-human elements in literary texts play a significant role in shaping narrative structures and ecological meanings. Nature is not merely depicted as a passive setting or background but functions as an active presence that influences human experiences and the development of events within the text. This perspective is further supported by Zulfa (2021), who argues that the relationship between humans and nature in literature is reciprocal, allowing nature to function as an active agent rather than a silent object. In Denny JA's essay poems, natural elements such as floods, rain, rivers, hills, mud, and forests are represented as dynamic forces that directly affect human existence and suffering. This representation can be observed in the following excerpt: "The floodwaters took over the task of the angel of death, carrying away anyone who did not have time to

escape.” The quotation presents the flood as a powerful entity endowed with agency and authority over human life. Through the personification expressed in the phrase “*took over the task of the angel of death*,” the flood is elevated beyond its physical existence and becomes a force capable of determining human fate. Rather than functioning merely as a natural occurrence, the flood assumes a symbolic role associated with judgment, destruction, and mortality. From Buell’s ecocritical perspective, this portrayal challenges anthropocentric assumptions that place humans at the center of power and control. Nature emerges as an active participant in the narrative, possessing the capacity to shape and alter human destinies.

Furthermore, the phrase “*carrying away anyone who did not have time to escape*” emphasizes human vulnerability in the face of ecological forces. The image of helpless individuals being swept away by floodwaters reflects the fragility of human existence when confronted with environmental catastrophe. Denny JA uses this imagery to demonstrate that ecological imbalance can diminish humanity’s perceived dominance over nature. The flood thus becomes a reminder that environmental destruction often produces consequences that ultimately return to affect human communities. In this sense, the poem implicitly criticizes exploitative human behavior that disrupts ecological equilibrium.

The representation of nature as a living and conscious entity is further reinforced in the following quotation: “I am a very old hill.” The use of the first-person pronoun “I” grants the hill a voice and a subjective presence, transforming it from a physical landscape into a speaking subject. Through this personification, nature is endowed with identity, memory, and experience. The hill becomes capable of narrating its own history and expressing the ecological suffering it has endured. According to Khoerunnisa et al. (2024), the personification of nature in literary works enhances ecological awareness by encouraging readers to perceive nature not as an inert object but as a living entity possessing intrinsic value. By allowing the hill to speak, Denny JA symbolically restores agency to the natural world, enabling nature to communicate the consequences of environmental degradation directly to readers.

Moreover, the phrase “*very old*” carries significant ecological implications. It suggests temporal continuity and emphasizes the long-standing existence of nature before human intervention. The hill is portrayed as a witness to historical and environmental transformations, including the destructive impacts of human exploitation. This representation underscores the contrast between nature’s enduring presence and humanity’s short-term, often destructive actions. Consequently, the hill functions not only as a geographical feature but also as a symbol of ecological memory and resilience.

The active presence of nature is also evident in the following quotation: “The sky was pulled loose from its nails, crashing onto hills and houses.” This image presents nature as unstable, violent, and capable of overwhelming human civilization. The hyperbolic expression “*pulled loose from its nails*” creates a powerful image of cosmic disorder, as though the natural order itself has been disrupted. The sky, traditionally associated with permanence and stability, is transformed into a destructive force that collapses upon the earth. Through this personification, nature is represented not as a passive environment but as an active force capable of reshaping social and physical realities.

From Buell’s ecocritical perspective, this depiction highlights the interconnectedness between ecological conditions and human life. The collapse of the sky symbolizes more than a physical disaster; it reflects a broader ecological crisis resulting from the breakdown of environmental balance. The destruction of “hills and houses” further illustrates that

environmental disasters affect both natural landscapes and human settlements, emphasizing the inseparability of human and non-human worlds. Nature therefore functions as a central narrative force that generates conflict, suffering, and ecological reflection.

Taken as a whole, the analysis demonstrates that nature occupies a dominant and active position in Denny JA's essay poems. Through extensive use of personification, hyperbole, and symbolic imagery, natural elements are portrayed as living entities capable of speaking, remembering, responding, and even punishing human actions. Rather than serving merely as a backdrop for human experiences, nature becomes a central actor that shapes the narrative and conveys ecological messages. These representations encourage readers to reconsider anthropocentric perspectives and to recognize the interconnected relationship between humans and the environment. The findings strongly support Buell's (1995) ecocritical argument that non-human elements are fundamental components of ecological literature, functioning not only as settings but also as agents that participate actively in the construction of meaning and environmental consciousness.

4.1.2 The Limited Legitimacy of Human Interests toward Nature

Buell (1995) argues that human beings do not occupy an absolute position within the ecological order. Consequently, human interests cannot be regarded as inherently superior to the interests of non-human nature. This perspective challenges anthropocentric ideologies that legitimize the exploitation of natural resources solely for human benefit. Within ecocritical discourse, nature possesses intrinsic value independent of its economic usefulness to humanity. As Missleini (2023) emphasizes, excessive exploitation of the environment disrupts ecological balance and contributes to various environmental disasters. Denny JA's essay poems strongly reflect this ecocritical perspective by exposing the destructive consequences of human greed and environmental domination.

This criticism is particularly evident in the following quotation: "Those companies climbed onto my back, becoming a hungry army, stripping away my green hair." In this passage, the hill is personified as a living being whose body is subjected to systematic exploitation. The phrase "*hungry army*" symbolizes the insatiable greed of corporations driven by economic interests and resource extraction. By comparing companies to an invading army, the poem frames environmental exploitation as a form of aggression rather than a legitimate economic activity. The metaphor suggests a relationship characterized by domination, conquest, and violence, highlighting the unequal power dynamics between humans and nature.

Similarly, the phrase "*stripping away my green hair*" functions as a powerful metaphor for deforestation. The hill's "green hair" symbolizes the forests that cover and protect the landscape. The act of stripping away this vegetation evokes images of injury and humiliation, transforming deforestation into an act of ecological violence inflicted upon a living entity. Through this bodily imagery, Denny JA encourages readers to perceive environmental destruction not as a neutral economic process but as an ethical issue involving harm to the natural world. From Buell's ecocritical perspective, such a representation challenges the legitimacy of human interests when they result in ecological degradation and the destruction of non-human life.

Criticism of exploitative economic systems is further reinforced in the following quotation: "Every fallen tree became a number in a profit report." This quotation reveals the reduction of nature to a mere economic commodity. Trees are no longer valued for their ecological functions, biodiversity, or contribution to environmental stability; instead, they

are transformed into statistical figures that signify financial gain. The phrase “*a number in a profit report*” illustrates how capitalist systems often abstract nature from its ecological reality and reinterpret it solely through the lens of economic productivity. Hall (2024) argues that critiques of capitalism often focus on its tendency to commodify ever more aspects of life, including nature, by subjecting them to market logics and economic valuation. Such critiques emphasize that reducing environmental value to monetary terms may obscure the broader ecological and ethical significance of the natural world.

Through this representation, Denny JA exposes the consequences of an anthropocentric and profit-oriented worldview. The transformation of trees into economic data symbolizes the loss of ecological consciousness in modern society. Forests are no longer perceived as interconnected ecosystems that sustain life but as resources to be quantified, exploited, and consumed. Consequently, the poem critiques a development paradigm that prioritizes short-term economic benefits while neglecting long-term environmental sustainability.

The limitations of human legitimacy toward nature are also reflected in the following quotation: “because of the trees that were cut down long before the rain arrived.” This statement establishes a clear causal relationship between human actions and environmental disasters. The quotation suggests that floods, landslides, and other ecological crises are not purely natural phenomena but are closely linked to prior human interventions in the environment. The destruction of forests weakens ecological resilience and increases vulnerability to natural hazards. Through this depiction, Denny JA rejects the notion that environmental disasters occur independently of human responsibility.

Moreover, the phrase “*long before the rain arrived*” emphasizes the temporal dimension of ecological damage. Environmental crises emerge through gradual processes rather than sudden events. The consequences of deforestation may remain invisible for years before eventually manifesting in catastrophic forms. This representation reflects Buell’s ecological perspective that human and natural systems are deeply interconnected, and that actions directed toward nature inevitably generate consequences that return to affect human societies. The poem therefore highlights ecological reciprocity, demonstrating that environmental exploitation ultimately undermines human well-being itself.

Overall, Denny JA’s essay poems present a profound critique of anthropocentric attitudes and exploitative environmental practices. Nature is not portrayed as a passive object available for unlimited human use but as an essential and vulnerable entity whose existence possesses intrinsic value. Through personification, metaphor, and causal ecological imagery, the poems expose the destructive consequences of greed, capitalism, and environmental negligence. These representations encourage readers to reconsider humanity’s relationship with nature and recognize the ethical responsibility required to maintain ecological balance. Consistent with Buell’s (1995) ecocritical framework, the poems demonstrate that the legitimacy of human interests is limited by the need to respect and preserve the integrity of the natural world.

4.1.3 Forms of Human Responsibility toward Nature

From Buell’s perspective (2005), the relationship between humans and nature extends beyond practical or functional concerns and encompasses an ethical dimension. Ecocriticism emphasizes that humans bear moral responsibilities toward the environment because they are inseparable from the ecological systems that sustain life. Environmental degradation, therefore, is not merely an ecological issue but also an ethical failure resulting

from humanity's neglect of its obligations toward the natural world. Ecological awareness emerges through reflection, criticism, and a commitment to maintaining environmental sustainability. In Denny JA's essay poems, forms of human responsibility toward nature are represented through emotional identification with the environment, ecological awareness, and aspirations for environmental restoration.

This ethical relationship is evident in the following quotation: "that a tree is not merely wood, it is your own brother." The quotation challenges the anthropocentric tendency to view nature solely in terms of its economic utility. Rather than presenting the tree as a resource or commodity, the poem portrays it as "*your own brother*," establishing a relationship based on kinship, empathy, and mutual existence. The use of the word "*brother*" creates a powerful emotional connection between humans and nature, suggesting that both belong to the same ecological community. Through this familial metaphor, Denny JA encourages readers to reconsider their perception of nature, not as an object for exploitation but as a living entity deserving respect and protection.

From an ecocritical perspective, this representation reflects the recognition that humans and nature are profoundly interconnected. The destruction of forests is therefore not merely an act of environmental damage but a form of harm inflicted upon a member of one's own ecological family. The metaphor reinforces the idea that environmental preservation is fundamentally an ethical responsibility rather than simply a practical necessity. As Abror (2025) argues, emotional relationships between humans and nature in literary works play an important role in cultivating ecological awareness among readers. By framing trees as "*brothers*," Denny JA transforms environmental conservation into a moral imperative grounded in empathy and care.

Human responsibility toward nature is further emphasized in the following quotation: "If humanity does not learn, the map of the world will slowly change color: green into a register of grief." This quotation functions as a powerful ecological warning about the consequences of continued environmental destruction. The color *green*, traditionally associated with life, fertility, and ecological balance, is transformed into a "*register of grief*," symbolizing environmental loss and collective suffering. Through this color metaphor, Denny JA depicts ecological degradation as a gradual but devastating process that affects both nature and humanity.

The phrase "*If humanity does not learn*" carries particular significance because it highlights the possibility of change. The statement implies that environmental destruction is neither inevitable nor irreversible; rather, it is the result of human choices and actions. Consequently, humanity retains the capacity and responsibility to alter its behavior before ecological crises become irreversible. From Buell's perspective, this representation underscores the ethical obligation of humans to develop ecological consciousness and adopt more sustainable relationships with the environment. The quotation therefore serves not only as a warning but also as a call for collective environmental responsibility.

Hope for ecological restoration is expressed in the following quotation: "If one day the rain subsides and the earth regains its footing, Amir wishes to plant again." Unlike the previous quotations, which focus on environmental destruction and warning, this passage introduces the possibility of renewal and recovery. The phrase "*plant again*" symbolizes restoration, resilience, and commitment to repairing ecological damage. Planting functions as more than a physical activity; it represents an ethical act through which humans acknowledge their responsibility for environmental recovery.

The image of the earth “*regaining its footing*” further suggests that nature possesses the capacity to recover when given appropriate care and protection. However, such recovery requires active human participation. Through Amir’s desire to plant again, Denny JA emphasizes that ecological responsibility must be translated into concrete actions rather than remaining merely a matter of awareness or regret. Environmental stewardship becomes a practical expression of moral commitment toward the natural world.

In this context, Denny JA moves beyond ecological criticism and offers a constructive vision of environmental ethics. The poems encourage readers not only to recognize the consequences of environmental exploitation but also to participate in efforts aimed at restoration and sustainability. Ecological responsibility is portrayed as a continuous process involving awareness, reflection, and action.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that Denny JA’s essay poems construct a comprehensive vision of human responsibility toward nature. Through metaphors of kinship, warnings about ecological decline, and images of environmental restoration, the poems emphasize that the relationship between humans and nature is fundamentally ethical in nature. Environmental destruction is represented not merely as an ecological problem but as a moral and humanitarian crisis that demands accountability and corrective action. Consistent with Buell’s (2005) ecocritical framework, the poems advocate a form of environmental ethics grounded in empathy, responsibility, and ecological stewardship. Consequently, Denny JA’s essay poems function not only as literary expressions of environmental concern but also as powerful vehicles for ecological reflection and environmental awareness.

4.1.4 Nature as a Dynamic Entity

From Lawrence Buell’s ecocritical perspective (1995; 2005), nature is not a static backdrop against which human activities unfold. Rather, it is a dynamic and responsive entity that continuously changes through its interactions with human and non-human forces. Ecological systems are characterized by movement, transformation, and adaptation, meaning that environmental conditions are constantly shaped by reciprocal relationships between humans and the natural world. When ecological balance is disrupted, nature undergoes transformations that may generate consequences affecting all forms of life. This perspective challenges anthropocentric assumptions by recognizing nature as an active participant in ecological processes rather than a passive object of human control.

According to Arisandi (2025), the dynamic nature of the environment in literary texts is often represented through ecosystem transformations, environmental degradation, and ecological crises triggered by human intervention. Similarly, Insany et al. (2024) contend that literary representations of human–nature relationships reveal a reciprocal interaction in which human activities significantly influence environmental conditions, while environmental changes subsequently affect human life and social existence. From an ecocritical perspective, nature is not merely a passive backdrop for human actions but an active and responsive entity that reflects the ecological consequences of human behavior. Such portrayals underscore the interconnectedness between environmental sustainability and human conduct, emphasizing that ecological balance or destruction is largely determined by the ways individuals and societies engage with the natural world.

This dynamic quality of nature is illustrated in the quotation, “*The river transformed into a dark corridor.*” The statement conveys a profound ecological and symbolic transformation in the river’s function and meaning. Traditionally, rivers symbolize life,

fertility, continuity, and sustenance, serving as vital components of both natural ecosystems and human civilization. However, the metaphorical expression "*dark corridor*" reconfigures the river into a space associated with uncertainty, danger, confinement, and fear. The imagery suggests that ecological disruption has fundamentally altered the river's natural character, transforming a life-sustaining environment into a pathway of destruction and ecological decline. Furthermore, the verb "*transformed*" emphasizes the river's dynamic and evolving nature, highlighting that environmental conditions are neither static nor immutable but continually shaped by human actions and their consequences. Through this representation, the text portrays nature as an active entity undergoing significant change, while simultaneously warning of the detrimental effects of environmental exploitation and degradation on ecological systems.

From Buell's ecocritical perspective, this transformation signifies more than a physical environmental change; it reflects the disruption of ecological balance. The river becomes a symbol of a damaged ecosystem whose altered condition directly affects human life. The metaphor highlights the interconnectedness between environmental health and social well-being, suggesting that ecological degradation inevitably transforms the spaces upon which humans depend. Through this image, Denny JA demonstrates that environmental crises emerge when humans fail to maintain harmonious relationships with nature.

The dynamics of nature are further emphasized in the following quotation: "That night, the rain did not fall. It collapsed." This statement presents rain as an overwhelming force that exceeds the boundaries of ordinary natural processes. The verb "*collapsed*" conveys suddenness, violence, and destruction, creating the impression that nature itself has become unstable. Rather than gently nourishing the earth, the rain descends with catastrophic intensity, symbolizing ecological disruption.

The hyperbolic expression reinforces an atmosphere of environmental crisis while simultaneously illustrating the capacity of nature to transform under conditions of ecological imbalance. Within Buell's framework, such transformations are not random occurrences but manifestations of disrupted relationships between humans and the environment. The image of collapsing rain therefore functions as both a representation of disaster and a critique of environmental practices that contribute to ecological instability. Denny JA suggests that environmental destruction does not merely alter landscapes; it also transforms natural processes into sources of threat and suffering.

Nature's dynamic response to human behavior becomes even more explicit in the following quotation: "the land we fail to protect will cease to protect us." This quotation encapsulates one of the central ecological principles within Buell's theory: reciprocity. The relationship between humans and nature is portrayed as mutually dependent rather than hierarchical. Land is represented as a protective force that sustains human life through its ecological functions. However, when humans neglect or damage the environment, those protective functions gradually disappear.

The phrase "*cease to protect us*" implies the loss of ecological services essential for human survival, including soil stability, water regulation, biodiversity support, and protection from natural hazards. Consequently, environmental destruction is portrayed not merely as damage inflicted upon nature but as a process that ultimately undermines human existence. The quotation highlights the ethical and practical consequences of ecological neglect while emphasizing that environmental sustainability is inseparable from human well-being.

Beyond these specific examples, the dynamic nature of the environment is reflected throughout Denny JA's essay poems through recurring images of landslides, shifting mud, falling trees, and roads transformed into rivers. These representations create an atmosphere of ecological instability in which landscapes continuously change as a result of environmental degradation. Nature is not portrayed as harmonious and unchanging but as a living system experiencing stress, disruption, and transformation.

Importantly, these transformations are consistently linked to human actions. Deforestation, uncontrolled exploitation of hillsides, and environmental negligence are presented as factors that destabilize ecological systems. Floods, landslides, and other disasters therefore emerge not as isolated natural events but as consequences of environmental imbalance created by human activities. This portrayal reflects Buell's argument that ecological change must be understood within the context of reciprocal interactions between humans and the environment. Nature's transformations become expressions of ecological consequences that reveal the interconnectedness of all life forms.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the essay poems in *Atas Nama Bencana* represent the relationship between humans and nature through the four ecocritical dimensions proposed by Buell (1995; 2005): the presence of non-human elements as active agents, the limitations of human legitimacy toward nature, human ethical responsibility for environmental sustainability, and nature as a dynamic entity capable of responding to human actions. Collectively, these dimensions reveal that nature functions not merely as a setting within the poems but as an active force that shapes narratives, influences human experiences, and communicates ecological criticism.

The analysis indicates that ecological disasters in Denny JA's poems are consistently portrayed as consequences of environmental degradation rather than as purely natural occurrences. Floods, landslides, and ecosystem destruction are linked to deforestation, excessive resource exploitation, and development practices that disregard ecological balance. Such representations challenge anthropocentric ideologies that position humans as absolute rulers over nature. Instead, the poems portray nature as a living entity possessing intrinsic value and a legitimate claim to preservation and sustainability.

These findings support Dewi's (2016) argument that literary ecocriticism extends beyond representations of natural beauty to address environmental crises and ecological concerns within contemporary society. Likewise, the studies of Jannah and Efendi (2024), Khoerunnisa et al. (2024), Febrianti and Efendi (2025), Sofyaningrum and Sangdiyah (2024), Abror (2025), and Syahda and Abror (2025) demonstrate that literary works can effectively represent ecological relationships while fostering environmental awareness among readers. The present study confirms these perspectives by showing how Denny JA employs poetic language to transform environmental issues into emotionally compelling narratives.

Moreover, the findings reveal the unique capacity of essay poetry to communicate ecological concerns. Through personification, metaphor, symbolism, and natural imagery, environmental destruction is rendered emotionally accessible and ethically significant. Nature is depicted as capable of speaking, remembering, suffering, transforming, and responding to human actions. Such representations position nature as a subject rather than an object, thereby encouraging readers to reconsider their relationship with the environment.

From an ecocritical perspective, the poems ultimately convey a central ecological message: environmental destruction inevitably returns to affect human life. Human survival depends upon ecological balance, and any disruption of that balance generates consequences extending beyond the natural world to social, economic, and moral dimensions of existence. The reciprocal relationship between humans and nature depicted throughout the poems therefore serves as both ecological criticism and ethical reflection.

In conclusion, *Atas Nama Bencana* demonstrates that contemporary essay poetry can function as a powerful medium for environmental advocacy, social criticism, and ecological education. Through Buell's ecocritical framework, this study reveals that Denny JA's poems possess not only aesthetic significance but also profound ethical and environmental value. Furthermore, the dissemination of digital essay poetry through social media expands the reach of ecological discourse, enabling environmental concerns to be communicated to broader audiences in accessible and emotionally engaging forms. Consequently, this study contributes to the growing field of literary ecology in Indonesia and opens new possibilities for future research exploring the intersections of literature, environment, digital media, and ecological consciousness within contemporary Indonesian literary production.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the essay poems in *Atas Nama Bencana* by Denny JA construct the relationship between humans and nature through the four ecocritical dimensions proposed by Lawrence Buell, namely the presence of non-human nature, the limitation of human legitimacy over nature, human responsibility toward the environment, and nature as a dynamic entity. Among these dimensions, the presence of non-human nature and the representation of nature as a dynamic entity emerge as the most dominant. Nature is positioned not merely as a background setting but as an active presence that shapes conflict, influences human life, and articulates ecological meanings. Through recurring images of floods, rivers, mud, rain, hills, soil, and forests, the poems portray nature as capable of responding to human actions and reflecting ecological imbalance.

The findings also reveal strong ecological criticism of environmental exploitation, including deforestation, uncontrolled development, and the excessive utilization of natural resources for economic interests. Rather than presenting disasters solely as natural phenomena, the poems construct ecological disasters as representations of disrupted relationships between humans and nature. At the same time, ecological awareness is articulated through reflection, regret, and appeals for environmental restoration, emphasizing humanity's ethical responsibility toward ecological sustainability.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of literary ecology by demonstrating the applicability of Lawrence Buell's four-dimensional ecocritical framework to Indonesian essay poetry, a literary genre that has received limited attention within ecocritical scholarship. The study also expands discussions of ecological representation in contemporary Indonesian literature by highlighting how essay poetry integrates environmental criticism, ethical reflection, and disaster narratives.

Practically, the findings suggest that literary works can function as effective media for environmental education and ecological awareness. The ecological messages embedded in the poems may encourage readers, educators, and literary practitioners to engage more critically with environmental issues and the consequences of ecological degradation.

This study is limited to ten essay poems contained in Atas Nama Bencana and focuses exclusively on Lawrence Buell's ecocritical perspective. Consequently, the findings do not encompass other ecocritical approaches, literary genres, or broader comparative contexts.

Future research may explore ecological representations in other contemporary Indonesian literary works using different ecocritical frameworks, such as those proposed by Greg Garrard, Timothy Morton, or Ursula K. Heise. Comparative studies may also examine ecological discourse across Indonesian essay poetry, digital literary platforms, and other forms of contemporary literature to provide a broader understanding of environmental narratives in the digital era.

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RECONSTRUCTING THE CHOSEN ONE ARCHETYPE IN FRANK HERBERT'S *DUNE*: A JUNGIAN READING OF COLLECTIVE BELIEF AND INDIVIDUATION

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Abstract

This study explores the archetype of the Chosen One in Frank Herbert's *Dune* through Carl Jung's concepts of archetype and individuation. While previous studies have largely focused on Paul Atreides as a heroic or messianic figure, they have given limited attention to how his identity is constructed through collective belief and how this process affects individuation. Using a qualitative approach and textual analysis, this study focused on the development of Paul Atreides as a messianic figure shaped not only by internal transformation but also by myths, prophecies, and collective belief within the narrative. The findings reveal that Paul's position as the Chosen One emerges through the influence of the 'Bene Gesserit', the expectations of the Fremen, and the continuous interpretation of his actions within a prophetic framework. This construction also serves as a story engine, driving the story and shaping the novel's ideological dimension of power. The study also finds that Paul's individuation does not develop according to Jung's ideal model, as his identity becomes increasingly shaped by collective expectations rather than personal integration. These findings suggest that Jungian literary criticism may benefit from greater attention to the role of collective belief in shaping archetypal identity and disrupting individuation. Through the main character, Frank Herbert presents a critique of messianism and the dangers of placing excessive faith in a savior figure.

Keywords: *archetype; character development; collective belief; the chosen one*

1. Introduction

The concept of archetype occupies a significant position in literary studies because it offers a framework for understanding recurring patterns, symbols, and character types that transcend individual texts, cultures, and historical periods. Among these recurring patterns, the Chosen One archetype is among the most enduring and influential archetypes, particularly in fantasy and science fiction narratives. According to Jung (1969), archetypes are primordial images and universal patterns embedded within the collective unconscious that shape human perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of the world. Building upon Jungian and post-Jungian perspectives, archetypal criticism has emerged as a major approach in literary scholarship for examining recurring symbols, character configurations, and narrative structures across diverse literary works. This critical framework enables scholars to explore how archetypal patterns operate within texts, reveal shared cultural and psychological meanings, and contribute to the construction of literary significance.

Archetypal criticism remains a significant approach in literary studies because it explores recurring symbolic patterns, characters, and narratives that recur across cultures and literary traditions (Gijo & George, 2021). Recent scholarship, however, suggests that the approach is frequently oversimplified through the repetitive identification of archetypal figures without sufficient attention to its broader theoretical and methodological dimensions (Jamshidi R, Ghasemipour G, & Abshirini A, 2023). This indicates the continuing relevance of archetypal criticism while underscoring the need for more focused, theoretically grounded analyses.

Among the many archetypes discussed in literary studies, the Chosen One archetype remains one of the most recognizable figures in fantasy and science fiction narratives. Literature plays an important role in shaping both individual and collective identities by providing narratives through which people understand themselves and their social environment (Altun, 2023). One recurring narrative pattern through which these issues are explored is the archetype of the Chosen One. In fantasy literature and imaginary settings, the Chosen One symbolizes an individual selected by prophecy, fate, or a specific quest (Wisniewski, 2019). The archetype is commonly associated with transformation, leadership, and the fulfillment of a larger purpose (Wisniewski, 2019; Muştak, 2025). Studies of hero narratives similarly emphasize the role of exceptional individuals who undergo psychological or spiritual transformation while pursuing goals that extend beyond personal interests (Campbell, 1988). Recent discussions of identity formation further suggest that exemplary figures and social expectations play an important role in shaping individual self-understanding (Klimstra et al., 2023). Closely related to this idea is messianism, which often emerges as a collective socio-religious expectation centered on a figure believed to bring renewal, salvation, or significant social change to a community (Pace, 2007). Because of these characteristics, the archetype of the Chosen One is frequently associated with heroic journeys, prophetic expectations, and messianic leadership. Harry Potter by J. K. Rowling has frequently been interpreted as a Chosen One narrative (Shiong & Wang, 2022).

One of the most influential examples of the Chosen One archetype is *Dune* (1965), a science fiction novel by Frank Herbert. Widely regarded as a landmark work of science fiction, *Dune* has influenced numerous later works, including *Star Wars*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Alien*, and *Mad Max*. The novel follows Paul Atreides, a young nobleman whose arrival on the desert planet Arrakis gradually leads many people to believe that he is the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy. Unlike many conventional Chosen One narratives, however, *Dune* presents a more complex portrayal of the archetype. Paul's status as a savior figure is not established solely through destiny or personal qualities but is also shaped by myths, prophecies, and collective belief systems already embedded within Fremen society. Through this portrayal, Herbert raises broader questions about leadership, legitimacy, belief, and the relationship between individuals and the social structures that surround them.

Recent scholarship has examined *Dune* from a variety of perspectives, including gender, technology, politics, religion, adaptation, and heroism (Dridi, 2022; Immerwahr, 2022; Dewandaru, 2025). These studies demonstrate the richness of Herbert's novel and highlight its continuing relevance in literary scholarship. However, previous studies have primarily focused on issues such as ideology, power, adaptation, and heroic representation. Existing studies treat Paul primarily as an outcome of prophecy rather than examining prophecy as a mechanism of identity construction. Existing scholarship has also tended to interpret Paul Atreides through heroic or leadership frameworks rather than examining how his authority emerges through collective belief. Consequently, limited attention has been

devoted to understanding how Paul's messianic identity is socially constructed through prophecy, myth, and shared expectations within Fremmen society. Likewise, the relationship between this process and Jung's concept of individuation remains underexplored. This omission is significant because it overlooks the possibility that archetypal identities are shaped not only by internal psychological development but also by external social and ideological forces.

Therefore, this study investigates the construction of the Chosen One archetype in Frank Herbert's *Dune*, its narrative and ideological functions, and its implications for Jungian individuation. Theoretically, this study contributes to Jungian literary criticism by extending discussions of individuation beyond individual psychological development and highlighting the influence of collective belief on the formation of identity. From a literary perspective, this study offers a reinterpretation of Paul Atreides as a socially constructed messianic figure whose authority arises from myth, prophecy, and collective belief rather than from destiny alone.

Unlike previous Jungian readings that emphasize intrapsychic transformation, this study conceptualizes individuation as partially mediated by collective belief and symbolic recognition. Based on these considerations, this study addresses three research questions: How is the Chosen One archetype constructed in Frank Herbert's *Dune*? What are its narrative and ideological functions within the novel? And what are its theoretical implications for Jung's concept of individuation?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Chosen One Archetype

Building on Jung's concept of archetypes, literary scholars have examined recurring character patterns across myths and narratives. One of the most recognizable archetypal figures in fantasy and science fiction is the Chosen One, a character associated with destiny, prophecy, and social transformation.

The archetype of the Chosen One generally refers to an individual believed to possess a unique destiny or a special role in transforming society (Wisniewski, 2019). Such characters are frequently associated with prophecy, exceptional abilities, and expectations that extend beyond ordinary human experience. Their narratives often center on personal transformation, conflict, sacrifice, and the fulfillment of a larger purpose.

The development of the Chosen One archetype is closely related to hero narratives. Campbell, in *The Power of Myth* (1988), argues that heroic stories commonly follow a journey in which an individual leaves an ordinary condition, undergoes trials and transformations, and eventually returns with knowledge or power that benefits a wider community. Vogler (1992), with *The Writer's Journey*, later adapted Campbell's model for narrative analysis, emphasizing the Hero as a recurring archetypal figure who grows through challenges and self-discovery. Similarly, Booker (2004) identifies recurring narrative patterns across literary traditions and argues that many stories revolve around the development and transformation of a central protagonist. Frye (1957), through *The Archetypes of Literature*, also argues that literary works are shaped by recurring archetypal and mythic patterns that reappear across texts and cultural traditions.

Recent Jungian literary scholarship has expanded the application of archetypal criticism beyond the identification of recurring symbols and character types. Contemporary studies increasingly examine how archetypes interact with identity formation, cultural narratives, and social contexts, suggesting that archetypal figures should be understood as

dynamic constructs rather than fixed psychological patterns (Armbrust, 2025; Kechan, 2020; Muştak, 2025). Similarly, recent discussions of identity formation highlight the role of exemplary figures, social expectations, and collective recognition in shaping individual self-understanding (Klimstra et al., 2023). These perspectives are particularly relevant to the present study because Paul Atreides' identity is shaped not only by internal psychological development but also by the Fremen's prophetic expectations and collective beliefs. Within this framework, the Chosen One archetype in *Dune* can be examined not only as a psychological structure rooted in archetypal patterns but also as a socially constructed identity shaped through collective recognition, belief, and expectation.

In fantasy and science fiction, the archetype of the Chosen One often arises from these heroic traditions. However, unlike conventional heroes, chosen figures are often connected to prophecies and collective expectations that position them as individuals destined to alter the course of history. Their identities are therefore shaped not only by personal transformation but also by social recognition and belief. Popular examples include Harry Potter in the Harry Potter series (Shiong & Wang, 2022) and other protagonists whose identities emerge through the interaction between individual development and collective expectations. Viewed from this perspective, the archetype functions not only as a narrative device but also as a means of exploring identity, leadership, legitimacy, power, and the psychological process of becoming.

2.2 Jungian Archetypes and Individuation

Jung's analytical psychology provides an important framework for understanding the psychological dimensions of literary characters. Jung (1969) proposes that archetypes emerge from the collective unconscious and influence human behavior, imagination, and symbolic expression. These archetypes frequently appear in myths, dreams, religious traditions, and literary narratives.

One of the most significant archetypes in Jungian theory is the Hero. Although Jung did not explicitly define the Chosen One as a separate archetype, many of its characteristics overlap with the Hero archetype, particularly in relation to transformation, struggle, and the pursuit of a higher purpose (Jung, 1969; Wisniewski, 2019). Both figures are associated with transformation, confrontation with challenges, and the pursuit of a higher purpose. Through these experiences, the individual gradually develops a more complete understanding of the self.

Jung (1969) argues that the psyche also contains other major archetypal dimensions, including the Persona, the Shadow, and the Self. The Persona refers to the social identity or public image presented to others and is often shaped by cultural expectations and social roles. In contrast, the Shadow consists of repressed desires, fears, weaknesses, and impulses that individuals may refuse to acknowledge. The Self functions as the organizing center of the psyche and symbolizes the integration of conscious and unconscious elements into a unified whole. The tension among these archetypal dimensions frequently becomes a source of psychological conflict in literary narratives.

Central to Jungian psychology is the concept of individuation, which refers to the process through which individuals move toward psychological wholeness by integrating different aspects of the psyche (Jung, 1969). Individuation involves recognizing the limitations of the Persona, confronting the Shadow, and gradually integrating these elements into the Self (Klimstra et al., 2023). In literary narratives, this process is often

reflected through a character's struggles, decisions, and encounters with symbolic forces that reshape their understanding of themselves and the world.

2.3 Messianic Narratives and Collective Belief

The archetype of the Chosen One is closely connected to messianic narratives. Messianism is commonly understood as a collective expectation centered on the emergence of a figure capable of bringing renewal, salvation, or significant social transformation (Pace, 2007). Unlike conventional heroic narratives, messianic narratives involve not only the individual but also the collective beliefs of the community that recognizes and legitimizes the figure.

Prophecy often plays a central role in this process. Prophetic narratives shape expectations about the arrival of a particular individual and provide communities with a framework for interpreting events and assigning meaning to specific figures. As a result, the legitimacy of a messianic figure frequently depends not only on personal actions but also on society's willingness to accept and sustain belief in that individual. Such forms of authority resemble what Weber (1978) describes as charismatic authority, in which followers grant legitimacy to individuals perceived as possessing extraordinary qualities or a special mission.

This relationship between prophecy and collective belief distinguishes messianic figures from ordinary heroes. Whereas heroic narratives primarily emphasize personal transformation, messianic narratives involve broader social processes through which communities construct, validate, and reinforce the identity of a savior figure. The interaction between individual development and collective expectation, therefore, becomes a crucial element in understanding the formation of the Chosen One archetype.

2.4 Previous Studies on *Dune*

Previous scholarship on *Dune* has examined a wide range of themes, including imperialism, religion, identity, adaptation, and political power. Immerwahr (2022) explores issues of empire and indigeneity in Herbert's depiction of Arrakis, while Dridi (2022) analyzes how Denis Villeneuve's adaptation reinterprets Herbert's narrative through contemporary cultural perspectives. Studies have also investigated the novel's psychological and ideological dimensions, including Paul Atreides' internal conflicts (Alfarisi et al., 2022) and the deification of the messianic figure Lisan al-Gaib (Dewandaru, 2025). More recently, Zamfir (2025) discusses the relationship between identity formation and heroic representation in *Dune* and *Dune Messiah*.

Despite these contributions, existing studies generally examine Paul Atreides as a heroic, political, or religious figure rather than investigating how the Chosen One identity is constructed through the interaction between archetypal patterns, prophecy, and collective belief. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the relationship between the construction of the Chosen One archetype and the process of individuation. This gap is significant because it suggests that archetypal identities may emerge not only through internal psychological transformation but also through external social forces that influence how individuals are perceived and legitimized by others.

The reviewed studies demonstrate the richness of *Dune* scholarship while indicating the need for further research on the relationship between prophecy, collective belief, and identity formation.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative literary research approach using textual analysis and close reading of Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965). The study examines the construction of the Chosen One archetype through the character of Paul Atreides and analyzes its relationship to Jung's concept of individuation. Since the research investigates meanings, symbols, and narrative patterns embedded in the text, an interpretive, qualitative approach is considered appropriate.

3.1 Data Collection

The primary source of data is Frank Herbert's *Dune*. The data consist of narrative descriptions, dialogues, internal monologues, epigraphs, and character interactions that construct Paul Atreides as the Chosen One. Particular attention is given to passages related to prophecy, messianic expectations, social recognition, collective belief, identity transformation, and the responses of other characters toward Paul.

Data selection was conducted purposively. Passages were selected based on three criteria: (1) their relevance to the development of the Chosen One archetype, (2) their contribution to understanding Paul's identity transformation, and (3) their significance in illustrating the role of collective belief and social legitimization within the narrative. Through this process, approximately 11 key passages were identified and analyzed as the primary textual evidence for the study. The selected passages were considered sufficient because they repeatedly represented the major stages of the Chosen One archetype construction and directly addressed the research questions.

Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, and previous studies related to archetypal criticism, Jungian psychology, hero narratives, messianic figures, and *Dune* scholarship. These sources were used to provide theoretical support and contextualize the findings within existing academic discussions.

3.2 Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, the selected passages were examined through close reading to identify recurring archetypal patterns associated with the Chosen One archetype, including prophecy, destiny, social recognition, exceptional ability, and leadership. Through this process, the analysis focused on language, characterization, symbolism, and narrative context to understand how the novel constructs and reinforces Paul Atreides' archetypal identity. Second, the identified passages were categorized into six thematic groups: the first encounter and the activation of prophetic expectations; rejection and validation; collective legitimization; narrative function; justification and power; and theoretical implications related to Jungian individuation. Third, the categorized textual evidence was interpreted using Jung's concepts of archetype and individuation. Particular attention was given to how Paul's identity develops through the interaction between internal psychological transformation and external social influences. Finally, the findings were connected to the research questions to explain how the archetype of Chosen One is constructed, how it functions narratively and ideologically within the novel, and what implications this construction has for understanding Jungian individuation.

3.3 Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the analysis's credibility, the study employs theoretical triangulation by integrating archetypal criticism, Jungian psychology, hero-narrative studies, and discussions

of messianic belief. These perspectives were used in complementary ways to examine the interaction among archetypal identity, heroic transformation, collective belief, and psychological development. The interpretation of textual evidence was consistent, relating each quotation to both its narrative context and its theoretical significance. In addition, interpretive consistency was maintained by applying the same analytical framework throughout the study, ensuring that conclusions were derived from patterns repeatedly supported by textual evidence rather than isolated passages.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Chosen One Construction

In *Dune* (1965), Frank Herbert makes the Chosen One construction central to the story. In the novel, the Chosen One archetype is shaped not only by prophecy or destiny but also by society's expectations, myths, and collective beliefs. The main point of this construct is Paul Atreides, with the planet Arrakis as the primary setting.

4.1.1 The First Encounter and the Activation of Prophetic Expectations

The construction of the Chosen One archetype in *Dune* begins before Paul performs any heroic action. Rather than emerging from individual achievement, his identity is initially shaped by prophetic expectations already embedded in Fremen society. This reflects one of the defining characteristics of the Chosen One archetype, in which an individual is recognized through prophecy and collective belief before receiving social validation through action.

Herbert complicates the conventional Chosen One narrative through the role of the Bene Gesserit and the Missionaria Protectiva. The prophetic traditions associated with the *Kwisatz Haderach* and the *Lisan al-Gaib* provide a pre-existing framework for interpreting Paul by the Fremen. Consequently, the archetype is presented not as the result of destiny alone, but as a social construction sustained by myth, prophecy, and collective expectation.

Paul's arrival on Arrakis shows that the Fremen already had expectations about a savior figure before he proved himself. His presence is not viewed neutrally, but is connected to prophecies and myths previously spread through 'Missionaria Protectiva', as seen in the conversation between Stilgar and the other Fremen:

"He's certainly the one Liet told us to seek."

"But . . . a child, Stil"

"Yet he could be the Lisan al-Gaib" (p.451)

The passage demonstrates that Paul's identity is constructed through interpretation rather than objective evidence. Although Paul has not yet proven himself, Stilgar already associates him with the prophecy. This finding suggests that the archetype of the Chosen One is activated through collective expectation before it is validated through action. In this sense, belief precedes proof.

This idea becomes stronger through the internal reflection of Jessica, Paul's mother, and a member of the 'Bene Gesserit', after hearing the term 'Voice of Cielago':

"You heard the voice of cielago, Jamis," Stilgar said. "Why do you press me?"

And Jessica Thought: Cielago! The Clue of the tongue opened wide avenues of understanding: this was the language of Ilm and Fiqh, and cielago meant

bat, a small flying mammal. Voice of the cielago: they had received a distrans message to seek Paul and herself. (p. 452)

Jessica's realization further reveals the prophecy's artificial nature. Rather than representing a spontaneous religious belief, the expectation surrounding Paul can be traced to narratives deliberately planted by the Bene Gesserit. Herbert, therefore, portrays the Chosen One archetype not as an entirely natural archetypal emergence but as an identity constructed through cultural narratives and maintained through collective belief.

This indicates that the construction of the Chosen One archetype does not begin from Paul's own actions, but from expectations that already exist before his arrival. These expectations later become the foundation for Paul's more readily accepted status as a savior figure among the Fremen.

4.1.2 Rejection and Validation

The second stage of the Chosen One's construction involves validation. Although prophetic expectations prepare the Fremen to recognize Paul as a potential savior, collective belief alone is insufficient. The prophecy must be reinforced through events that appear to confirm its legitimacy.

From an archetypal perspective, rejection functions as an important stage in the development of the Chosen One archetype. Hero narratives frequently present moments of doubt that test whether a seemingly extraordinary figure truly deserves recognition. In *Dune*, Jamis functions not merely as Paul's opponent but as a symbolic challenge to the prophetic identity being projected onto him. The conflict therefore operates on two levels: a physical confrontation between individuals and a symbolic confrontation between belief and uncertainty.

The tension intensifies after Jessica assumes the position of 'Sayyadina' and reflects on the consequences of the duel:

I can take him, Jessica thought, but that might conflict with the way they interpret the legend. And again she wondered at the way the Missonaria Protectiva's work had been twisted on this planet. (p.483)

This passage illustrates the fragile nature of prophetic authority. Although the Fremen already possess a framework for interpreting Paul as a messianic figure, Jessica understands that belief requires continual confirmation. Her concern demonstrates that the prophecy does not function automatically; it depends upon events that can be interpreted as evidence supporting the legend. The passage, therefore, reveals how collective belief operates through a process of selective interpretation in which actions acquire meaning only when they correspond to existing expectations.

The duel consequently becomes a mechanism of archetypal validation. Rather than functioning as a simple test of combat ability, it serves as a public event through which the community evaluates whether Paul corresponds to the role already prepared for him by prophecy.

The Fremen's interpretation of the duel serves as another form of recognition of the prophecy. Paul's victory over Jamis is perceived not merely as a successful combat outcome but as tangible confirmation that the long-awaited savior figure has begun to emerge. This perception is reflected in the Fremen's astonishment when they observe that, despite facing a skilled and experienced fighter, Paul remains unharmed: "him against Jamis and not a

single mark on him" (p. 494). For the Fremen, this remarkable outcome signifies more than physical superiority; it is interpreted as evidence of an extraordinary quality that aligns with their prophetic expectations.

Rather than viewing the duel as an isolated event, the Fremen immediately incorporate it into their existing prophetic framework. Paul's success is thus transformed into symbolic proof that validates the legend of the Mahdi. This reaction demonstrates how archetypal identities gain legitimacy and authority through collective interpretation, particularly when ordinary events are reframed within established systems of belief. Consequently, Paul's victory functions not only as a personal achievement but also as a pivotal moment in the construction and reinforcement of his archetypal role as the prophesied savior.

This situation shows that conflict does not weaken the construction of the Chosen One archetype. Instead, doubt becomes an essential component in strengthening belief. By overcoming opposition, Paul acquires the validation necessary for the prophecy to appear credible. This reveals that Frank Herbert presents the Chosen One archetype as still in flux, with an uncertain outcome, as reflected in Jessica's fear that the prophecy may lead to an outcome different from what was expected.

4.1.3 Collective Legitimization

Following the duel, the construction of the Chosen One archetype enters a stage of collective legitimization. What initially exists as a possibility gradually becomes a shared conviction. Recognition is no longer limited to individual figures such as Stilgar or Jessica but expands throughout the wider Fremen community.

From the perspective of collective belief, legitimacy emerges when a community reaches a common interpretation of reality. The Chosen One becomes meaningful not because the individual claims the role, but because others repeatedly recognize and reinforce that identity. In Dune, this process can be observed in the Fremen's response after Paul is accepted into their society:

Again a murmuring response went through the troop as man turned to man: "Wisdom with strength . . . Couldn't ask more . . . It's the legend for sure . . . Lisan al-Gaib . . . Lisan al-Gaib . . ." (p.497)

The dialogue indicates a transition from individual interpretation to collective consensus. The repeated invocation of "Lisan al-Gaib" demonstrates that Paul's identity is becoming institutionalized within the community's belief system. At this stage, the prophecy no longer functions merely as an expectation of the future; it becomes an accepted explanation of the present.

This pattern resembles what Pace (2007) describes as messianic authority, in which collective belief elevates an individual into a symbolic figure whose legitimacy extends beyond ordinary social structures. In Paul's case, recognition by the Fremen transforms him from a potential leader into a prophetic figure whose authority is reinforced through collective belief rather than individual achievement alone.

The passage further illustrates that collective belief is self-reinforcing. As more members of the community recognize Paul as the fulfillment of prophecy, alternative interpretations become increasingly difficult to sustain. Legitimacy emerges not from objective proof but from repeated communal affirmation. The Fremen do not simply observe Paul; they actively participate in constructing the meaning of his identity.

This process reveals an important aspect of Herbert's reconstruction of the Chosen One archetype. Traditional narratives often present extraordinary qualities as the primary reason for a hero's recognition. In contrast, *Dune* suggests that recognition itself plays a crucial role in producing the heroic identity. Paul's authority is therefore not solely the result of personal qualities but also the product of collective belief that continuously validates and reinforces his status.

The findings demonstrate that the construction of the Chosen One archetype in *Dune* occurs through a gradual process consisting of prophetic expectation, validation, and collective legitimization. Elements commonly associated with the archetype, including prophecy, exceptional ability, and eventual leadership, do not emerge naturally but are produced through the interaction between myth, social interpretation, and collective belief. Herbert therefore reconstructs the Chosen One archetype as a socially mediated identity rather than a purely destiny-driven role. This interpretation supports the argument that Paul's authority is shaped not only by personal transformation but also by others' willingness to recognize and sustain his messianic status.

4.2 Narrative and Ideological Functions of the Chosen One in *Dune*

As Paul begins to be recognized as a savior figure, his presence starts to shape the story and how others see him. Paul is no longer viewed only as a savior figure, but also becomes the center that shapes conflict and influences how power is understood within the narrative. In this context, the Chosen One is not only an identity attached to Paul, but also becomes a framework through which other characters view, respond to, and believe in his existence. Therefore, the following discussion focuses on how this construction functions both as a force that drives the story forward and as an element that shapes the novel's ideological dimension.

4.2.1 Narrative function: Driving and Shaping the Direction of the Story

The narrative significance of the Chosen One archetype extends beyond character identity, functioning as a structural mechanism that organizes conflict and directs plot development.

In the *Dune* novel, the archetype of the Chosen One serves as one of the main driving forces of the story, as the conflicts and expectations within the narrative gradually center on Paul. From the beginning, Paul's existence has already been placed within a prophetic framework that shapes expectations about his future role.

This can be seen in one of the epigraphs of *Dune* with the title *Manual of Muad'Dib* (p. 158).

Some of the people along the way recalled the legends and the prophecy and they ventured to shout: "Mahdi!" But their shout was more a question than a statement, for as yet they could only hope he was the one foretold as the Lisan-al-Gaib, the Voice from the Outer World

The epigraph reflects the Fremens' early perception of Paul. When Paul first appears before the public, some people shout "Mahdi," yet the narration explains that the shout is more a question than a statement.

This shows that recognition of Paul as a messianic figure is not fully certain but instead grows from expectations already formed. Because of this, the construction of the Chosen One functions as a trigger for the narrative's development, where Paul's actions are

understood not only as personal actions but also as part of a larger process connected to the fulfillment, or even the possible failure, of the prophecy.

This construction also creates continuous narrative tension throughout the novel. *Dune* not only questions whether Paul is truly the figure described in the prophecy, but also explores the consequences that may emerge if the prophecy is fulfilled. Therefore, the narrative function of this construction not only moves the plot forward but also shapes the story's direction through uncertainty and ambiguity.

4.2.2 The Function of the Chosen One Archetype: Justification and Power

Beyond its narrative function, the Chosen One archetype also serves as a source of symbolic authority, shaping social relations and legitimizing power within the narrative. As belief in such figures grows stronger, their actions become harder to question.

In the *Dune* novel, the construction surrounding Paul does not stop at collective belief, but gradually develops into a real form of power within the story. This change can be seen when Paul is no longer understood simply, but is instead portrayed as a contradictory and difficult figure to measure.

"he was a warrior and mystic, ogre and saint, the fox and the innocent, chivalrous, ruthless, less than a god, more than a man... there is no measuring Muad'Dib's motives by ordinary standards" (p.757).

At this point, Paul is recognized as Muad'Dib, a new identity that enhances his role as both leader and savior among the Fremen. The quote indicates that Paul is no longer viewed solely as a prophecy fulfiller but as a figure who transcends typical moral judgments and human standards.

Paul's position as Muad'Dib places him in the middle of political conflict and betrayal. However, he still chooses to continue his path. This decision shows that his actions are no longer based on moral considerations in the usual sense. This can be seen in his statement: *"I am the Kwisatz Haderach. That is reason enough."* (p.757). The quotation shows that Paul's actions are no longer grounded in ordinary moral values, but in his belief that he is the 'Kwisatz Haderach', the figure long expected and believed in by many people.

This becomes evidence that the construction of the Chosen One Archetype in *Dune* does not function only as a form of collective recognition but also as the foundation for the formation of absolute power. In this condition, Paul no longer acts as an ordinary individual but becomes increasingly identified with his role as a messianic figure.

This transformation can also be understood through Weber's concept of charismatic authority. According to Weber in *Economy and Society*, charismatic authority emerges when followers obey a leader because they believe in the leader's extraordinary qualities, revelations, heroism, or exemplary character (Weber, 1978). In *Dune*, Paul's authority does not rely solely on political inheritance or institutional power. This resembles Weber's concept of charismatic authority because legitimacy is derived from belief rather than institutional structures. The Fremen obey Paul not primarily because of legal authority or hereditary status, but because they interpret him as the fulfillment of prophecy. It becomes increasingly grounded in the Fremen's belief that he is the fulfillment of prophecy and the long-awaited Lisan al-Gaib. As a result, his legitimacy derives not only from his actions but also from the collective trust placed in his exceptional status.

This identity gradually justifies his actions, even as they begin to cross moral lines. The story suggests that believing in a savior figure does not always lead to positive outcomes and can sometimes pave the way for destructive forms of power.

4.3 Theoretical Implications in *Dune*

The relationship between archetypal identity and psychological development becomes particularly significant in Paul Atreides' character arc. When someone is repeatedly treated as a certain symbol, they may slowly lose the boundary between their true self and the role they are expected to perform. This can also be seen in *Dune*, especially when Paul becomes increasingly tied to his identity as a savior figure believed in by many.

Paul's identity as the Chosen One starts to influence his psychological development and can be examined through Carl Jung's concepts of archetypes and individuation. In Jungian theory, individuation is the process of integrating the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche to achieve the 'self'. In *Dune*, this process does not unfold smoothly because Paul's character is disturbed by external pressures stemming from collective beliefs and social expectations within the narrative, not only from the internal psyche.

This becomes clear when Paul realizes he no longer has full control over the direction of his life. In one reflective moment, he states: *"this sense of the future—I seem to have no control over it. The thing just happens"* (p.320). This suggests that Paul's awareness does not lead him toward freedom but instead places him on a predetermined path that already seems impossible to escape. Here, awareness no longer serves to achieve self-integration but becomes a burden that pushes him in a certain direction.

This condition later becomes more complex when Paul begins to realize the existence of a 'terrible purpose' connected to the coming jihad. He sees the future as something unavoidable, even when he tries to resist it. This can be seen in the following narration: *"he had thought to oppose the jihad within himself, but the jihad would be... they needed only the legend he already had become"* (p.783). This scene marks the point at which Paul's status as a long-awaited figure has transcended his individual identity. He no longer controls the archetype of the Chosen One, but slowly becomes controlled by that role instead.

From a Jungian perspective, this condition can be understood as an excessive identification with the archetype, in which the individual no longer integrates it into the 'self' but is instead dominated by it. This becomes even clearer when Paul realizes that his future moves like something unstoppable: *"like a river hurtling toward a chasm"* (p.629). This reveals that his journey no longer moves toward balance but toward a point he cannot control. This situation reflects the dominance of the archetype over the individual. Jung explains that the main danger appears when individuals are "succumbing to the fascinating influence of the archetypes" (Jung, 1969, p. 53), especially when the archetype is not fully recognized consciously. In this context, Paul's awareness does not bring him freedom but instead binds him more closely to his identity as the Chosen One. Because of this, Paul's individuation process no longer develops entirely as a personal journey but is shaped by external pressures and expectations.

This condition shows that the archetype of the Chosen One in *Dune* not only reflects the pattern of the 'hero' archetype, but also demonstrates a shift in its function. Frank Herbert does not use this archetype as a path toward self-unity, but instead presents it as something that gradually traps the individual in a role already constructed. As a result, Paul no longer develops freely but moves in a direction shaped by prophecy, myth, and the social expectations surrounding him.

From a broader theoretical perspective, these findings suggest that individuation in literary narratives cannot always be understood as an exclusively internal psychological process. In Jungian psychology, individuation primarily refers to the integration of unconscious and conscious elements within the psyche in order to achieve psychological wholeness (Jung, 1969). However, Paul's experience demonstrates that forces outside the individual may also shape identity formation. Throughout the novel, prophecy, myth, and collective belief repeatedly influence how Paul understands himself and how others interpret his role. As a result, external social pressures become active factors in shaping the direction of his psychological development.

This finding also contributes to discussions of the Chosen One archetype. In conventional hero narratives, the chosen figure often progresses toward self-realization through personal growth, self-discovery, and the successful completion of a heroic quest (Campbell, 1988; Vogler, 1992). The archetype is commonly associated with empowerment, transformation, and the fulfillment of destiny. In *Dune*, however, Frank Herbert presents a different pattern. Rather than functioning as a path toward greater autonomy, the archetype gradually limits Paul's freedom. The more he is recognized as the fulfillment of prophecy, the less control he possesses over his own future. Consequently, the Chosen One archetype is reconstructed not as a symbol of liberation but as a mechanism that increasingly constrains individual agency.

The findings further indicate that the construction of the Chosen One in *Dune* depends not only on the protagonist's personal qualities but also on collective recognition. Paul becomes the Lisan al-Gaib and Muad'Dib not solely because of his abilities, but because the Fremen interpret his actions through a prophetic framework that already exists before his arrival. This suggests that archetypal identities are not formed entirely through individual transformation. Instead, they may emerge through an interaction between personal development and collective belief. In this sense, *Dune* demonstrates that archetypes can function as social constructions sustained by cultural narratives, myths, and shared expectations.

Furthermore, the novel can be read as a critique of Herbert's messianic leadership. Although Paul initially appears to embody the familiar role of a heroic savior, the narrative gradually reveals the dangers of collective devotion to a single figure. The prophecy surrounding Paul provides legitimacy, authority, and influence, yet it also contributes to the emergence of violence and the inevitability of jihad. Herbert challenges the conventional assumption that a messianic figure necessarily produces positive outcomes. Instead, *Dune* suggests that elevating an individual to the status of a symbolic savior may create conditions that justify domination, obedience, and large-scale destruction.

These findings extend Jungian literary criticism by demonstrating that archetypal development may be influenced not only by intrapsychic processes but also by external social and ideological forces. While Jung emphasizes the integration of archetypal elements within the individual psyche, *Dune* illustrates how collective belief can shape, redirect, and even constrain the process of individuation. Consequently, the novel offers a more complex understanding of identity formation, one in which psychological development is inseparable from the cultural and social systems that surround the individual.

Overall, the findings indicate that *Dune* reconfigures the relationship between archetype and individuation. The novel extends conventional understandings of both the Chosen One archetype and Jungian individuation by demonstrating how external forces may redirect the process of identity formation.

5. Conclusion

This study argues that the archetype of the Chosen One in *Dune* is not formed solely by destiny, but is shaped by myths, prophecies, and prepared collective expectations. Through the character of Paul Atreides, Frank Herbert tells how a savior figure can be socially constructed until he is eventually accepted as truth by those around him. This construction serves not only as a driving force but also as a foundation that strengthens power and shapes the main character's identity.

From a Jungian perspective, this study also shows that the process of individuation in *Dune* does not go as Carl Jung described. Paul's growth is influenced not only by his own efforts but also by societal pressures, expectations, and roles that shape him. Frank Herbert presents the archetype of the Chosen One not as a path toward self-unity, but as something that slowly traps the main character in a role that is already constructed.

Dune not only tells a story about a savior figure but also critiques how society creates, believes in, and eventually grants power to certain individuals. Through the character of Paul Atreides, Frank Herbert shows that when someone is excessively trusted as a symbol of hope, that identity can develop into a form of power that becomes difficult to control and may lead to greater destruction.

The findings contribute to Jungian literary criticism by suggesting that individuation in literary narratives may be influenced not only by internal psychological processes but also by external social and ideological forces. While Jung's model primarily emphasizes the integration of archetypal elements within the individual psyche, *Dune* demonstrates that collective beliefs, prophecy, and social expectations can significantly shape identity formation. Consequently, the novel expands conventional understandings of individuation by illustrating how psychological development may be redirected or constrained by broader cultural and social structures.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The analysis focuses exclusively on Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) and does not examine later novels in the series. As a result, the discussion is limited to the initial construction of Paul Atreides as the Chosen One and does not explore how this identity develops in subsequent narratives. In addition, the study concentrates on archetypal construction, narrative function, ideological function, and individuation, leaving other possible perspectives open for further investigation.

Future studies may expand this discussion by examining the continuation of Paul Atreides' development in *Dune Messiah*, particularly in relation to the consequences of messianic leadership and the evolution of his identity. Comparative studies may also be conducted with other prominent Chosen One narratives, such as *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Matrix*, in order to explore similarities and differences in the construction of prophecy, heroism, collective belief, and individuation across different literary and popular culture texts. Such studies would contribute to a broader understanding of how the Chosen One archetype is adapted, reconstructed, and challenged in contemporary narratives. More broadly, the study invites literary scholars to reconsider archetypes as dynamic cultural constructions rather than exclusively psychological structures.

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THE VAK METHOD FOR QUR'ANIC VOCABULARY MEMORIZATION IN A CHILD WITH SEVERE DYSLEXIA AND DYSPRAXIA: AN EMBEDDED CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This study analyzes the application of the Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK) method to improve Quranic vocabulary memorization in a child with severe dyslexia, dyspraxia, and superior intellectual ability. The primary focus was comparing the subject's ability to memorize concrete versus abstract nouns in Surah Al-Fil. Employing an embedded mixed-method single-case design, data were collected using the Observe-Participate-Discuss technique. This involved participatory observation with interactive PowerPoint slides and audio recitations as learning media while directly tracking the subject's responses. The results indicate that the VAK method helps twice-exceptional children discover new ways to store and recall information. Vocabulary concreteness heavily influenced the method's effectiveness. Concrete nouns (*al-fil*, *hijarah*, and *sijjil*) were memorized more easily, achieving a "very good" rating with an N-Gain score of 0.70. Conversely, the abstract noun *taqlil* yielded an N-Gain score of 0.16, falling into the "poor" category. Imaginative kinesthetic learning emerged as the most prominent modality aiding memorization. Ultimately, integrating the VAK method enhanced cognitive processing and provided crucial affective support, boosting the subject's self-confidence. These findings highlight the importance of multisensory, meaning-oriented instruction for Quranic learning among students with neurodevelopmental differences.

Keywords: *children with dyslexia; dyspraxia; Quranic vocabulary; VAK method*

1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental right for every individual to develop their potential, including for children facing learning disabilities or language disorders (Apriyani et al., 2022). One neurological disorder that clearly affects language processing ability is dyslexia (Ulpah & Tatang, 2024). Dyslexia is characterized by specific difficulties in phonological processing and word recognition, resulting in low pronunciation accuracy and difficulties in storing word sound information into long-term memory (Windasari et al., 2022). Previous neurocognitive studies suggest that this condition is associated with impaired function in the occipito-temporal cortex, temporo-parietal cortex, and inferior frontal cortex, which are responsible for processing visual word forms and articulation (Aziz et al., 2025). This condition is often

exacerbated by comorbid dyspraxia, which disrupts motor planning, creating dual barriers both in sound processing in the brain and in the execution of movements to produce sounds (Aziz et al., 2025).

In religious education, mastering the vocabulary of the Qur'an poses a significant challenge for children with dyslexia due to the complex phonological characteristics of the Arabic language (Son, 2025). Although children with dyslexia often possess intellectual potential at an average or even superior level, conventional methods that rely solely on the auditory channel frequently fail to yield optimal results (Tarjiah et al., 2023). This results in a gap between intellectual potential and actual memorization ability. Therefore, an intervention strategy using the VAK method is needed, which offers a multisensory approach by integrating vision, hearing, and physical movement into a single learning process.

For children with severe dyslexia and dyspraxia, the kinesthetic element in the VAK method serves as a memory anchor that stabilizes focus and facilitates the process of recalling memorized material (Primasari & Supena, 2021). In accordance with the *Dual Coding Theory* developed by Allan Paivio, human memory retention operates through verbal (*logogens*) and non-verbal (*images*) systems (Paivio, 1990). In children with dyslexia, the verbal pathway is often fragile, so the use of concrete nouns in the Qur'an—such as words with high visual imagery becomes crucial because they trigger visualization and understanding of the meaning of each word. Conversely, abstract vocabulary or words with complex phonetic structures tend to impose a heavier cognitive load on the subject (Paivio, 1990; Mayer, 2022).

Although research on the Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK) method has been extensive in general special education, a significant empirical and theoretical gap remains concerning its application to Arabic Quranic vocabulary memorization for individuals with comorbid neurodevelopmental disorders. Existing literatures predominantly examine the VAK method within single-disability frameworks, mostly focusing on Latin-based languages that possess different orthographic and phonological structures. Consequently, current models fail to account for how multisensory interventions operate when a child faces a dual barrier: severe phonological deficits from dyslexia combined with articulatory motor planning impairments from dyspraxia, especially when dealing with the high phonetic complexity of Arabic sounds. Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of pedagogical research exploring how children who possess superior intelligence alongside these dual deficits utilize alternative cognitive pathways to process semantic meaning.

This study addresses these gaps by evaluating how the VAK method serves as a compensatory mechanism, redirecting the cognitive load from the fragile verbal pathway to a more stable sensorimotor matrix during Quranic vocabulary retention. Unlike previous studies that have primarily focused on VAK application for general learning disabilities, this research offers a distinct contribution by examining the dual cognitive barriers of severe dyslexia and dyspraxia within a single case study. By integrating multisensory interventions specifically tailored to bridge phonological deficits and motor planning impairments in a student with superior intellectual potential, this study addresses a critical gap in pedagogical literature. It provides a unique model for how alternative cognitive pathways can be leveraged to achieve Quranic vocabulary mastery when traditional speech-based methods are ineffective. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does the VAK method influence Quranic vocabulary memorization among a child with severe dyslexia and dyspraxia?
2. How do visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities contribute to vocabulary retention?
3. What psychopedagogical impacts emerge during the implementation of the VAK method?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Characteristics of Severe dyslexia and dyspraxia Comorbidity

Dyslexia is a neurologically based learning disorder characterized by specific difficulties in phonological processing and word recognition (Vellutino et al., 2004; Wolf et al., 2024). Neurobiologically, this condition is associated with dysfunction in the *occipito-temporal cortex*, *temporal-parietal cortex*, and *inferior frontal cortex*, which are responsible for processing visual word forms and articulation (Aziz et al., 2025). The primary challenge for individuals with dyslexia lies in the inability to consistently link phonemes with graphemes, resulting in inefficient pronunciation accuracy and the storage of sound information in long-term memory. The complexity of these challenges is often exacerbated by comorbid dyspraxia, which affects *motor planning* and the coordination of articulatory muscles (Aziz et al., 2025). This dual condition creates barriers to both sound processing in the brain and the physical execution of movements required to produce speech sounds.

2.2 Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK) Method

The VAK method is a multisensory approach that integrates the three primary pathways of information processing to strengthen memory pathways in the brain. For children with dyslexia, the involvement of the kinesthetic aspect is key to bridging phonological difficulties through sensorimotor stimulation (Primasari & Supena, 2021). Theoretically, children in the concrete operational stage (ages 7–11) learn most effectively through direct experiences involving physical movement (Piaget, 1952). While this foundational stage remains central to understanding cognitive development, contemporary research emphasizes that these developmental milestones are best achieved through active, multisensory construction of knowledge in adaptive learning environments (Maspul et al., 2023; Syarifuddin et al., 2024). For children with dyslexia, this implies that the transition from concrete to abstract conceptualization requires multisensory scaffolds that bridge the gap between their intellectual potential and phonological processing deficits.

2.3 The Power of Memorization through Dual Coding Theory

The theoretical basis for selecting material from Surah Al-Fil is grounded in Dual Coding Theory (DCT), which posits that memory retention operates through integrated verbal and non-verbal systems (Paivio, 1990). This theory has been significantly evolved by modern multimedia learning research, which demonstrates that combining imagery with verbal cues is an effective pedagogical strategy for mitigating cognitive load (Mayer, 2021; Mayer, 2022). In the context of students with severe dyslexia, this multisensory integration often referred to in recent literature as an essential compensatory mechanism for language disorders allows the brain to form stable mental representations before articulation, thereby enhancing recall accuracy (Gosiewska & Turek, 2025). In children with dyslexia, the verbal pathway is often fragile, making the use of concrete nouns such as *qitṭun* (قُطْن) and *jabalun* (جَبَلْن) crucial due to their high *concreteness*. On one hand, Surah Al-Fil is dominated by a group of concrete nouns that possess very high visual imagery (*imageability*). This

characteristic is crucial for children with dyslexia because it triggers *the Picture Superiority Effect*, whereby the brain’s non-verbal system (*imagery*) can easily process word meaning through visual representations and hand gestures before converting them into sounds (Primasari & Supena, 2021). Conversely, abstract nouns tend to impose a heavier cognitive load on the subject because they are difficult to visualize directly.

2.4 The Importance of Noun Vocabulary in Quranic Learning

Vocabulary mastery is the smallest component of language that plays a crucial role in literacy skills (Tarjiah et al., 2024). For children with dyslexia, adequate vocabulary mastery helps overcome difficulties in semantic processing, ensuring that religious messages can still be conveyed despite conventional reading barriers. The use of strategies involving physical movement has been shown to strengthen long-term memory of linguistic information (Kiswanto et al., 2023). The focus on nouns in Surah Al-Fil aims to assess the effectiveness of the VAK method as a compensatory approach for subjects’ motor limitations, improving pronunciation accuracy while reinforcing the memorization structure of Qur’anic vocabulary (Gani & Al Farisi, 2022).

Based on the literature reviewed, severe dyslexia and dyspraxia create interconnected phonological and motor-planning barriers that hinder vocabulary acquisition. The VAK method, supported by Dual Coding Theory, provides an alternative cognitive pathway by combining visual imagery, auditory reinforcement, and sensorimotor experiences. This theoretical integration forms the conceptual framework underpinning the present study.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Characteristics and Design

This study employs a mixed method approach through an embedded case study design, focusing in-depth on a single subject with a highly specific cognitive profile. This design allows for the systematic integration of quantitative evaluation specifically pre-test and post-test N-Gain scores within a predominantly qualitative case analysis framework. The research subject is an elementary school child diagnosed with severe dyslexia and dyspraxia hereafter referred to as ADDS. The clinical diagnosis of severe dyslexia and dyspraxia was officially established based on medical records certified by a medical doctor who also serves as the head of the specialized department at the subject's school. Due to strict institutional confidentiality policies and privacy protocols concerning special education records, further granular access to the subject's comprehensive medical history was restricted by the school. The unique characteristic of this subject lies in the contrast between his intellectual potential, which falls within the superior range, and clear neurological impairments in phonology and motor coordination.

Table 1.

Subject’s Identity and Intellectual Profile

Education	Age	Gender	Competencies	Health History
3rd Grade	10 years	Male	Already knows the Arabic alphabet and can read the Quran at the Iqro 4 level	Severe dyslexia, dyspraxia, superior IQ

As this study involves a minor with neurodevelopmental disorders, strict ethical protocols were maintained to ensure the subject's well-being and privacy. Formal research authorization was obtained from the head of the specialized department at the subject's school, and the subject's identity was fully anonymized using the pseudonym 'ADDS'. Furthermore, all data collection procedures were designed to be non-invasive and integrated into the school's existing pedagogical framework to ensure no psychological or physiological distress was imposed upon the subject.

3.2 Data Collection Process: Observe-Participate-Discuss Technique

Data in this study were collected using the Observe-Participate-Discuss technique, in which the researchers served a dual role as the instrument. The researchers actively listened to every detail of the subject's articulation to map phonetic changes, fully engaged in providing interventions through the VAK method, and established dialogic interactions to explore the subject's psychosocial and cognitive responses to the memorization material. The data collection process began with participatory observation by having native speakers of read Surah *Al-Fil* via an audio recitation, followed by the delivery of VAK method interventions using interactive PowerPoint presentations while observing the subjects' sensorimotor responses and focus. The entire intervention process was documented using audio-visual equipment to obtain authentic data that could be replayed to ensure the accuracy of observations regarding kinesthetic movements and pronunciation errors that might have been missed by the naked eye.

3.3 Classification of Vocabulary as the Research Object

Vocabulary derived from Surah *Al-Fil* was proportionally classified into two main categories: concrete nouns and abstract nouns. This distinction aimed to determine the extent to which neurological barriers resulting from severe dyslexia and dyspraxia comorbidity could be minimized through multisensory stimulation on different word types.

Table 2.

Categorization of Nouns in Surah Al-Fil

Concrete	Abstract
رَبُّكَ	كَيْدِهِمْ
أَصْحَابِ	تَضَلُّيلٍ
الْفِيلِ	
ظَهْرًا	
أَبَابِيلَ	
حِجَارَةً	
سِجِّيلٍ	
عَصْفٍ	
مَآكُولٍ	

The complexity of learning in children with dyslexia is often exacerbated by comorbid conditions such as dyspraxia. This condition affects motor planning as well as the coordination of the articulatory muscles required for pronunciation. Therefore, this study

distinguishes subjects' responses to concrete and abstract nouns to determine the extent to which these neurological barriers can be minimized through multisensory stimulation.

3.4 Supporting Instruments and Assessment Metrics

To ensure the accuracy and objectivity of the data, the researchers utilized a series of audiovisual stimulus instruments, including an audio recitation of Surah Al-Fil by Sheikh Abdul Qadir Al-Utsmani as the primary auditory reference, as well as a PowerPoint presentation integrating Arabic text with representative visual images. Performance assessment of memorization refers to the indicator evaluation standards (Sugiyono, 2013), which are then analyzed in depth. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection, the research instruments, including the pre-test and post-test assessments for vocabulary mastery, were reviewed and validated by two educational experts specializing in Arabic language teaching and special education pedagogy. In the retention measurement procedure, subjects undergo a 45 minute memorization session, followed by a short-term memory test after a 1- to 2-hour interval without additional intervention. The researchers also used field notes to capture specific, unexpected phenomena during the learning process.

3.5 Data Processing and Thematic Analysis

The data processing procedure followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. These stages were conducted iteratively throughout the study to ensure systematic interpretation and analytical rigor.

3.5.1 Transcription and Listening

All recorded data obtained during the intervention sessions were transcribed and repeatedly reviewed through intensive listening procedures. The transcription process aimed to identify linguistic and articulatory patterns associated with dyslexia and dyspraxia.

Indicators of dyslexia included difficulties in retaining and retrieving vocabulary, repetition of words, incomplete pronunciation of phonological units, and challenges in recalling complete sound sequences. Meanwhile, indicators of dyspraxia focused on difficulties related to speech motor planning and articulatory coordination, including limited control over oral motor movements involving articulatory organs such as the tongue, lips, and jaw.

Repeated listening and cross-checking procedures were employed to increase the consistency and trustworthiness of data interpretation.

3.5.2 Thematic Analysis

After transcription, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and construct meaningful categories related to the implementation of the Visual–Auditory–Kinesthetic (VAK) method. The analysis focused on five major themes:

- a. Patterns of Vocabulary Retention Improvement Following VAK Implementation
- b. Responses to Visual Modality
- c. Responses to Auditory Modality
- d. Responses to Kinesthetic Modality
- e. Psycho-pedagogical Impacts of VAK-Based Intervention

Themes were generated through repeated coding, categorization, comparison across sessions, and interpretation of participants' behavioral and linguistic responses during the intervention process.

3.5.1 Descriptive Data Analysis:

The success of the intervention and the participant's memory strength were measured descriptively and qualitatively using two main instruments: a pronunciation rating scale and a gain test calculation category. The rating scale was used to categorize the quality of the subjects' sound production into a range of values from 1 to 100 using indicators (Sugiyono, 2013) with qualitative criteria ranging from very good to very poor. To calculate the effectiveness of the memory improvement, the N-Gain score was determined using the following formula (Hake, 1999):

$$N\text{-Gain} = \frac{\text{Posttest} - \text{Pretest}}{\text{Maximum Score} - \text{Pretest}}$$

Furthermore, the researchers applied a descriptive N-Gain test to calculate the success of memory improvement between *pre-test* and *post-test* scores. The results of these calculations were classified into the categories of very good ($g > 0.70$), good ($0.30 < g < 0.70$), poor ($g < 0.30$), and very poor ($g < 0$), where these categories were adjusted to align with the indicators; they serve as objective benchmarks for the success of the VAK method in enhancing the subjects' memory.

3.6 Data Validation and Research Ethics Protocol

The validity of the data in this study was ensured through cross-checking from various sources and transparent documentation of all research stages. Additionally, to comply with research ethics regarding children with special needs, the subjects' real identities were fully anonymized to protect their privacy.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the study indicate that the application of the VAK method has a positive effect on the ability to memorize Quranic vocabulary among subjects with ADDS. This improvement did not occur uniformly across all learned vocabulary words but was influenced by the characteristics of the vocabulary and the subjects' responses to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities during the learning process. These findings indicate that the memorization process in children with severe dyslexia and dyspraxia does not rely solely on the ability to recall sounds but also involves the ability to build mental imagery, understand meaning, and connect kinesthetic experiences with the information being learned.

To provide a more comprehensive overview, the discussion begins with an analysis of the patterns of vocabulary memorization improvement following the implementation of the VAK method. Subsequently, the discussion focuses on the subjects' responses to the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities as the primary components of the VAK method, as well as the psychopedagogical effects that emerge during the learning process.

4.1 Patterns of Vocabulary Retention Improvement Following the Application of VAK

Table 3.

Retention Results and Memory Scores

Vocabulary Al-Fil	Memorization		N-Gain Score	Memory
	before	after		
الفيل	40	90	0.83	Very Good
حجارة	60	90	0.75	Very Good
سجّيل	60	90	0.75	Very Good
أصحاب	60	90	0.75	Very Good
مأكول	80	90	0.50	Good
أبائيل	90	95	0.50	Good
رُبك	90	95	0.50	Good
ظيّر	75	85	0,40	Good
عصف	70	80	0,33	Good
كئيدهم	70	75	0,16	poor
تضليل	70	75	0,16	poor

The application of the VAK method showed an improvement in the subjects' vocabulary memorization ability, as measured using the N-Gain Test to assess the success of the intervention. Based on these parameters, memory performance results were obtained by comparing pre and post-intervention recall scores, which encompassed phonological integrity, vocabulary recall ability, and the alignment between recall and the kinesthetic responses demonstrated by the subjects.

The findings in Table 3 indicate that improvements in recall were not uniform across all vocabulary items. Concrete vocabulary such as al-fil (الفيل), hijarah (حجارة), and sijzil (سجّيل) showed the highest improvements, with N-Gain values of 0.83, 0.75, and 0.75, respectively all falling into the "very good" category. This high retention success with concrete vocabulary through multisensory stimulation aligns with the findings of Coskun dan Mitrani (2020), who emphasize that vocabulary interventions for children with dyslexia are far more effective when using words with strong physical representations, as this reduces the phonological workload on the child's fragile system. These results are further supported by Baddeley's (2003) working memory model, which states that the coordination of visual and phonological stimuli assists children in consolidating new information into long-term memory.

Conversely, vocabulary that is harder to visualize, such as *kaydihim* (كيدهم) and *taḍlīl* (تضليل), showed more limited improvement, with N-Gain scores of 0.16 and 0.16, respectively. This limited improvement with abstract words aligns with research by Pietro et al. (2025), which confirms that vocabulary interventions for children with language processing disorders often hit a wall of semantic abstraction, requiring longer and more repetitive intervention time because they lack a direct visual anchor in the subject's brain. To validate these metrics, data triangulation was conducted through behavioral observations and teacher interviews. When memorizing concrete words like *al-fīl*, the subject spontaneously used synchronized hand gestures that stabilized his articulation. Conversely, abstract words triggered visible motor planning anxiety and prolonged phonetic pauses. The teacher noted: *'With concrete nouns, ADDS's superior IQ instantly converted the visual slide into a physical gesture, bypassing his speech-motor barriers. However, for abstract terms like kaydihim, the lack of an internal image overloaded his working memory, causing his dyspraxia to trigger phonetic errors.'* This qualitative evidence explains the low N-Gain (0.16) for abstract vocabulary.

Interviews with the supervising teacher reinforced these findings. The teacher emphasized that a lack of understanding of the meaning makes it difficult to connect kinesthetic elements with the vocabulary being memorized. Therefore, adequate contextual explanation is required before the VAK method is applied. The importance of contextual meaning comprehension before memorization confirms the approach proposed by Islam et al. (2025), who argued that integrating a constructivist approach at the beginning of the session is an absolute prerequisite for students with special needs. In general, the positive effectiveness of the VAK learning model in enhancing memory is consistent with Mabruroh's (2024) research, which demonstrated that the VAK model significantly improves Arabic vocabulary mastery compared to traditional methods.

Based on the average calculation of 11 vocabulary words in Surah Al-Fīl, the memorization score before the intervention was 69.55 and increased to 85.91 after the application of the VAK method. which was obtained by averaging the individual N-Gain scores of all 11 vocabulary items (total N-Gain 5.17 divided by 11), falling into the moderate/good category. This pattern indicates that vocabulary characteristics are a key factor influencing the success of applying the VAK method to subjects with ADDS. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of the VAK method is determined by the extent to which the learned vocabulary can be understood, visualized, and connected to the subject's learning experiences. This multisensory integration involving real sensorimotor experiences aligns with a comparative study by Ali et al. (2023), which found that the use of physical strategies provides a crucial space for children with dyslexia to manifest word understanding into their muscle memory, thereby facilitating information recall.

4.2 Visual Modality Response

Based on the results of participatory observation, ADDS demonstrated a very positive response to visual stimuli presented through interactive PowerPoint media. Throughout the learning process, the subject's attention was consistently focused on the visual elements and text displayed. This high visual focus was particularly evident when the subjects were learning vocabulary with concrete forms that were easy to visualize, such as *al-fīl* (الفيل), *ḥijārah* (حجارة), and *ṭayran* (طيور). Thus, by viewing the displayed visuals, ADDS

were aided in visualizing them. This strong and dominant visual response from ADDS aligns with the findings of Sarajar dan Pratiwi (2024), who found that children with dyslexia have a very high dependence on visual learning media to compensate for their reading difficulties, where visual stimuli act as an essential trigger for focus during the intervention process.

This finding indicates a strong alignment between the cognitive potential of subjects in the superior category and the visual stimulation provided. The subjects' focus on visual elements confirms the Picture Superiority Effect theory (Paivio, 1990). For children with dyslexia who face barriers in the verbal processing pathway, visual stimuli are not merely illustrations but the primary means that help subjects understand the meaning of vocabulary before memorizing it.

These findings also align with the Dual Coding Theory, which states that information is more easily remembered when processed through both verbal and nonverbal channels simultaneously. In the case of ADDS, visual stimuli function as a compensatory channel that allows understanding of word meanings to form first before the subject faces the demand to recall the sounds of the Arabic language. Therefore, successful memorization of concrete vocabulary can be understood as the result of the strong mental imagery formed in the subject's mind with the aid of visual stimuli. This role of visual integration in meaning formation is consistent with Zhou's (2021) research, which demonstrated that visual representations can accelerate the acquisition of foreign vocabulary in children before they engage in phonological production.

In addition, the superior intelligence possessed by ADDS appears to play a role in accelerating the formation of connections between real objects and the vocabulary being learned. Once the meaning of a word has been understood through visual stimuli, the process of recalling the word becomes easier. Thus, the visual modality serves as the foundational basis supporting the success of other components within the VAK method. The importance of these visual stimuli aligns with Sepsita dan Wijaya (2024), who state that structured visual elements effectively activate right-brain functions to compensate for the letter-processing deficits in children with dyslexia.

4.3 Auditory Modality Response

In the auditory modality, the subjects exhibited a distinctive learning pattern. During the learning process, children with ADHD required repetition two to four times for each word before being able to recall it effectively. Interestingly, the subjects did not immediately imitate the sounds they heard but first listened to them deeply before attempting to memorize them. This tendency to listen deeply before imitating sounds aligns with Mettler et al. (2024), who noted that children with dyslexia require a slower auditory processing interval to internally map phoneme structures before articulating.

The need for relatively high repetition indicates the presence of a Phonological Core Deficit, a characteristic commonly found in children with dyslexia. The subject requires more time and higher exposure frequency to build understanding of the sounds heard. In this context, the process of deep listening functions as a compensatory strategy to ensure that the received sounds have been accurately understood before being stored in memory. This constant need for repetition aligns with the conception proposed by Wolf et al. (2024), who state that phonological processing difficulties in dyslexia require consistent auditory repetition as an accommodation to establish stable neural memory pathways.

This phenomenon demonstrates that the primary obstacle in ADDS does not lie in auditory ability but in the processing of linguistic sounds. Each word must undergo a process of repeated listening before it can be effectively remembered. Therefore, repetition in this study cannot be viewed as a learning weakness but rather as a neurological need that must be facilitated. The importance of facilitating this need for repetition aligns with the findings of Hidayah et al. (2025), who noted that in foreign language learning for children with special needs, clear and repeated auditory stimuli are absolutely necessary to maintain the accuracy of their oral pronunciation.

Although the subjects' phonological pathways were relatively weak, the auditory modality still played a crucial role as the primary source of correct Arabic sound models. In other words, the visual modality helps build meaning comprehension, while the auditory modality provides the sound models that form the foundation of the memorization process.

4.4 Kinesthetic Modality Response

The most notable finding in this study pertains to the kinesthetic modality. During the intervention process, the subject demonstrated high enthusiasm when given the freedom to create kinesthetic responses based on their own imagination. Unlike approaches that require students to imitate specific movements, the subject was given the space to create kinesthetic responses deemed most appropriate for the meaning of the learned vocabulary.

This freedom was shown to enhance the subjects' self confidence and engagement in learning. Kinesthetic responses born from personal imagination form stronger memory anchors because they involve motor memory. For children with dyspraxia, the incorporation of kinesthetic elements helps reduce barriers in the motor planning process, making the recall of vocabulary easier to perform. The success of this self-directed movement modality aligns with the study by Ali et al. (2023), which highlights that the incorporation of self-directed physical strategies provides a crucial outlet for children with dyslexia to manifest their understanding of words into their muscle memory.

This finding is reinforced by the results of interviews with supporting teachers who stated:

"Hand movements, being multisensory, certainly aid learning. The consideration of dividing vocabulary into concrete and abstract categories is also excellent because such detailed analysis is rarely done."

The teacher also explained that:

"The subjects used hand movements spontaneously, especially with concrete vocabulary such as *abābil* (أبواب) and *ṭayran* (طيور), although this was not done for all words."

This statement confirms that kinesthetic elements have become a strategy that emerges naturally in the subject when attempting to recall a vocabulary word.

The accompanying teacher also confirmed that ADDS finds it much easier to visualize vocabulary with tangible forms that are easy to visualize. This ease of visualization is directly proportional to the subject's ability to reinforce memorization and retrieve information stored in their memory. The process of recalling vocabulary is often initiated by

spontaneous kinesthetic responses that serve as triggers for the emergence of accurate recall. Salamah et al. (2025) conducted research on the *Total Physical Response* method, in which gross motor movements act as a bridge to activate children's receptive language abilities when their expressive oral production faces neurological barriers.

This improvement in memory occurs because the VAK method creates alternative memory pathways by simultaneously integrating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities. The superior intellectual potential possessed by ADDS enables them to automatically establish logical connections between kinesthetic elements and word meanings, such as the kinesthetic response of flapping wings for the word *ṭayran* (طير). Because gross motor coordination is relatively more stable than speech muscle coordination, kinesthetic elements serve as memory triggers that help the subject recall vocabulary more effectively (Tarjiah et al., 2023).

Neurologically, a positive response to kinesthetic modalities indicates activation of motor pathways as a form of compensation for weak phonological pathways. Multisensory integration allows subjects to learn in a low-pressure environment, enabling them to focus more on the process of recalling vocabulary rather than fixating on articulation difficulties. Structured physical movement elements have proven to be a highly tool for memorizing the Qur'an among children with dyslexia (Muslim & Mohamed 2025 effective compensatory).

4.5 Psychopedagogical Impact of Applying the VAK Method

Based on observation results during the intervention, the subject demonstrated positive learning responses in both cognitive and affective aspects. Cognitively, the subject was able to maintain focus during the learning process and showed better comprehension of the material when kinesthetic activities were involved compared to verbal instruction alone. The ability to recall vocabulary for approximately 45 minutes indicated that the intervention aligned with the subject's working memory capacity.

On the affective aspect, the subject demonstrated a high interest in learning as well as positive emotional responses. During the learning process, ADDS appeared able to speak, joke, and laugh freely without showing excessive stress. A review by Hidayah dan Hidayati (2023) found that children with dyslexia are prone to decreased *self-esteem* due to repeated failures; thus, an adaptive multisensory approach effectively restores their emotional comfort, which explains why the active responses demonstrated by ADDS indicate that the VAK method possesses significant psychopedagogical advantages.

The active responses demonstrated by ADDS indicate that the VAK method possesses significant psychopedagogical advantages. For children with dual neurodevelopmental challenges, the demands to memorize and recall sounds accurately often trigger learning anxiety. However, the incorporation of kinesthetic elements in the VAK method serves as a mediator, helping learners engage through more meaningful and enjoyable experiences. These meaningful activities through physical movement align with Son's (2025) findings that integrating movement into instructional learning has been shown to positively impact students' cognitive engagement and learning motivation.

The superior intelligence possessed by students with special needs also plays a role in fostering positive emotional responses. Regarding this emotional regulation, Pratisti (2022) emphasizes that multisensory methods can trigger positive emotions and intrinsic motivation because students with special needs feel in control of their learning process, enabling them to recognize the success of the kinesthetic strategies they have developed

themselves and connect it to the memorization success achieved. This awareness generates learning satisfaction, which then develops into internal motivation to continue learning.

Thus, the VAK method not only functions as a cognitive aid in improving the memorization of Quranic vocabulary but also as an affective support instrument that strengthens the subject's self-confidence amidst the neurological challenges they face. The success of the multisensory intervention is reflected not only in improved memorization scores but also in the creation of an inclusive, comfortable learning environment that supports the psychological development of the students.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the application of the VAK method in teaching Qur'anic vocabulary to a child with severe dyslexia and dyspraxia is determined not only by the multisensory approach but also by the characteristics of the vocabulary. Concrete and easily visualized vocabulary yielded better memorization outcomes, indicating that successful retention in children with neurodevelopmental disorders is influenced by the ability to connect vocabulary to meaningful learning experiences. Furthermore, the VAK method serves as a compensatory strategy for phonological processing and motor planning deficits by creating alternative cognitive pathways for storing and recalling information, thereby reducing reliance on traditional verbal-only instruction.

While the VAK method proved highly effective for this subject, as a single-subject case study, these findings represent a focused exploration of cognitive pathways rather than a universal pedagogical protocol. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs and larger, more diverse samples to assess the generalizability of these results across different age groups, Qur'anic chapters, and special needs profiles. Investigating the interaction between vocabulary characteristics, Arabic phonological complexity, and individual neurological profiles will enable the development of more tailored and context-specific multisensory learning models.

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ILLOCUTIONARY SPEECH ACTS IN NETIZENS' RESPONSES TO THE "INDONESIA GELAP" POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON X

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Abstract

This study examines illocutionary speech acts in netizens' comments on X regarding the President's "Indonesia Gelap" speech and explains their functions in constructing criticism, satire, opinions, and emotional expressions. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were drawn from netizens' comments on X about the President's speech on migration abroad. The data consisted of written utterances containing illocutionary speech acts and were collected through observation and note-taking. The data were analyzed using Miles et al.'s (2014) interactive model. The findings show that expressive speech acts were the most dominant type, accounting for 75.53% of the data, followed by assertive speech acts (17.02%) and directive speech acts (7.45%). Expressive speech acts were primarily used to express anger, satire, criticism, and dissatisfaction toward public figures and socio-political conditions. Assertive speech acts functioned to convey opinions, evaluations, and claims, whereas directive speech acts appeared in the form of suggestions, commands, and prohibitions directed at particular parties. Commissive and declarative speech acts were absent from the dataset. These findings indicate that political communication on X tends to be spontaneous, emotional, and confrontational. Social media thus serves as a space for emotional expression, social criticism, and public opinion formation. This study contributes to digital pragmatics by demonstrating how expressive language functions as a dominant mechanism for political criticism and emotional engagement in online public discourse.

Keywords: *digital pragmatics; illocutionary speech acts; netizen expressions; political communication; social media; X*

1. Introduction

Social media functions as a public sphere where users express opinions, criticism, support, and evaluations regarding socio-political issues (Astuti, 2013; Padila, 2025; Suhendra & Pratiwi, 2024; William & Loisa, 2025). Digital platforms such as X have transformed communication patterns into faster, more open, and more massive interactions, enabling individuals to communicate, express opinions, and disseminate information in real time through virtual public spaces (I. Putri et al., 2022; Setiadi, 2016; Setiawan, 2023; Zordi et al., 2026). Comment sections now function not only as spaces for

responses but also as arenas for shaping public opinion and expressing collective attitudes toward public policies and statements made by political figures. Consequently, language use in social media frequently reflects communicative intentions such as criticism, satire, suggestions, commands, and emotional evaluations.

This phenomenon can be observed in netizens' responses to the President's speech on the "Indonesia Gelap" issue and the phenomenon of people wishing to move abroad. The speech generated diverse reactions on social media, particularly in the comment section of an X account that shared excerpts from the statement. The responses included satire, criticism, insults, and emotional expressions directed toward the issue and the speaker. This reflects distinctive features of digital communication: freedom of expression, anonymity, and socio-political context, all of which influence how users construct and communicate their views online (Fatimah, 2025; Gibson, 2019; Houghton et al., 2020; Mukhoyyaroh, 2020; Setiawan, 2023).

Such communicative practices can be examined through Speech Act Theory. Searle (1979) classified illocutionary acts into five categories—assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative—highlighting how utterances perform social actions rather than merely convey information. This theory interprets utterances beyond literal meaning by focusing on speakers' intentions and the social functions embedded in communication (Sagita & Setiawan, 2019). In social media environments, illocutionary speech acts provide insights into how netizens construct opinions, express attitudes, and communicate emotions toward public issues (Ameria et al., 2026; Pali' et al., 2024; Sembiring et al., 2026; Zidan, 2024).

The growing importance of digitally mediated communication has also contributed to the emergence of digital pragmatics, which examines how language use, meaning construction, and communicative intentions are shaped by online environments. Unlike traditional pragmatics, digital pragmatics focuses on interactions occurring through social media platforms and other networked technologies where communication is influenced by multimodality, user anonymity, algorithmic mediation, and the persistence of digital texts (Crystal, 2011; Diedrichsen, 2022; Sykes, 2021). In these environments, meaning is often conveyed through both linguistic and multimodal resources, including emojis, visual elements, and typography, which contribute to the interpretation of speakers' intentions (Čmehýlová-Rašová & Škvareninová, 2026; Rahardi et al., 2025). Moreover, digital communication facilitates the rapid circulation of opinions, emotions, and ideological positions, allowing users to negotiate identities, construct social meanings, and participate in public discourse in ways that differ from conventional communication contexts (Ivanyan, 2026; Rahmat et al., 2026). Therefore, the analysis of illocutionary speech acts on X offers valuable insights into contemporary digital political communication.

Prior studies have examined speech acts across various communication contexts, including Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, films, and talk shows (Hastuti et al., 2023; Indriani & Yuniawan, 2022; Maryati & Ningsih, 2023; Sampe et al., 2022). These studies have contributed to understanding the forms and functions of speech acts in digital and non-digital settings. However, most prior studies focused on structured communication contexts, leaving spontaneous netizen discourse on X relatively underexplored, particularly in relation to political issues.

Few studies have analyzed netizens' illocutionary acts in X comment sections responding to presidential speeches, especially expressive acts such as satire, criticism,

insults, and emotional evaluations. Existing research has largely emphasized the classification of speech act types rather than examining how speech acts function as mechanisms of political resistance, emotional mobilization, and public opinion construction in contemporary digital discourse. This limitation is significant because X has become one of the most influential platforms for political discussion and public contestation. Therefore, investigating illocutionary speech acts in responses to the President's speech on "Indonesia Gelap" provides an opportunity to extend current understanding of digital political communication and public engagement.

The novelty of this study lies in analyzing X comment sections on a contemporary political issue while integrating Searle's speech act framework with the socio-political functions of netizen discourse. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on identifying speech act categories, this research also examines how netizens employ language to construct opinions, challenge public authority, express dissatisfaction, and negotiate political meanings in digital public spaces. By combining pragmatic analysis with socio-political interpretation, the study offers a broader understanding of the role of language in contemporary online political communication.

This study aims to describe illocutionary speech acts in netizens' comments on X about the "Indonesia Gelap" speech and to explain their communicative functions in constructing criticism, satire, opinions, and emotional expressions. This study contributes to digital pragmatics by showing how netizens' illocutionary acts on X construct socio-political criticism and emotional discourse within contemporary digital public spaces. The findings are expected to enrich research on speech acts in online environments and provide insights into the dynamics of political communication in social media.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speech Act Theory and Illocutionary Acts

Speech Act Theory, introduced by Austin and further developed by Searle, views language as action rather than mere description. The theory classifies speech acts into three categories: locutionary acts (the production of utterances), illocutionary acts (the communicative intention behind utterances), and perlocutionary acts (the effects of utterances on listeners) (Cooren, 2015; Degoooyer, 2010; Emery, 2010). Among these categories, illocutionary acts occupy a central position because they reflect the speaker's intended social action and communicative purpose (Hanna & Richards, 2019; Sovrano & Vitali, 2023).

Searle classified illocutionary acts into five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Assertive acts convey information, beliefs, or opinions; directive acts seek to influence others' actions; commissive acts express commitments to future actions; expressive acts communicate emotions and psychological states; and declarative acts create changes in social reality through the utterance itself (Akyüz, 2023; Chanpradit et al., 2025; Demolombe & Louis, 2006; Edmondson, 1981; Hanna & Richards, 2019; Zainal, 2017). In digital communication, these categories are manifested in various forms, such as expressing opinions, giving recommendations, criticizing public figures, supporting political positions, or mobilizing collective responses to social issues.

Illocutionary acts differ from locutionary acts, which concern literal meaning, and perlocutionary acts, which focus on the effects generated on audiences (Hanna & Richards,

2019; Sovrano & Vitali, 2023). Rather than functioning solely as a means of information exchange, these classifications highlight language as social action embedded in particular communicative contexts (Chanpradit et al., 2025; Demolombe & Louis, 2006). Consequently, Speech Act Theory provides a valuable framework for examining how individuals use language to express attitudes, negotiate relationships, and construct meaning in contemporary digital environments.

2.2 Social Media as a Digital Communication Space

Social media has transformed communication by enabling interactive and multidirectional exchanges among individuals, organizations, and communities. Through digital platforms, users can participate in reciprocal interactions, share information, and engage in public discussions that shape responses to social and political issues (Katunga et al., 2023; Kuzmina & Abramov, 2023). As a result, social media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing collective reactions to current events.

Beyond information exchange, social media supports identity construction across age groups by enabling self-presentation, social comparison, and audience feedback (Pérez-Torres, 2024). These platforms also facilitate community formation, allowing users to exchange ideas, seek recommendations, and participate in discussions that strengthen social relationships and collective engagement (Chotia, 2025; Gazi et al., 2024; Sujith & Aju, 2025). Consequently, social media functions not only as a communication channel but also as a space where meanings, identities, and social positions are continuously negotiated.

Integrating speech act theory with social media studies reveals how illocutionary acts function in digital political communication. Previous studies demonstrate that speech acts are frequently employed in online interactions to express opinions, negotiate identities, convey evaluations, and establish social relationships (Akyüz, 2023; Chanpradit et al., 2025; Hanna & Richards, 2019). At the same time, the interactive nature of social media encourages rapid and emotionally charged communication, creating opportunities for users to respond immediately to social and political developments (Katunga et al., 2023; Kuzmina & Abramov, 2023).

Within these digitally mediated interactions, expressive speech acts appear particularly prominent because social media environments facilitate emotional disclosure, spontaneous reactions, and reduced social constraints compared with face-to-face communication (Chotia, 2025; Gazi et al., 2024; Pérez-Torres, 2024). Through comments, replies, and discussion threads, users frequently employ language to express criticism, dissatisfaction, support, satire, and other emotional responses toward public issues. Such communicative practices demonstrate how language functions not only as a vehicle for conveying information but also as a means of expressing attitudes and mobilizing public sentiment in digital spaces.

Although previous studies have successfully identified and classified speech act types across various digital platforms, limited attention has been devoted to understanding how expressive speech acts function as mechanisms of political resistance, emotional mobilization, and public opinion construction in contemporary political discourse. Moreover, studies focusing on spontaneous netizen interactions on X remain relatively scarce, particularly in relation to viral political narratives in Indonesia.

Therefore, the present study extends existing scholarship by investigating the realization and functions of illocutionary speech acts in netizens' responses to the

President's speech concerning "Indonesia Gelap." This review establishes the theoretical foundation for analyzing netizens' illocutionary acts on X while highlighting gaps in previous research on spontaneous political discourse. By examining the relationship between speech act realization and digital political engagement, the study contributes to the growing field of digital pragmatics and offers insights into the dynamics of political communication in contemporary social media environments.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Approaches and Types

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative research is used to explore and understand meanings within social and humanities contexts. This approach was selected because the study aims to examine the meanings, contexts, and functions of language used by netizens in social media comment sections. The descriptive qualitative design enabled the researcher to analyze naturally occurring data and provide an in-depth interpretation of illocutionary speech acts in digital political communication.

3.2 Data Sources and Research Data

Data were drawn from netizens' comments on an X account that shared excerpts from the President's speech on the "Indonesia Gelap" issue and the phenomenon of people wishing to move abroad. The study focused on illocutionary speech acts classified by Searle (1979), namely assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative acts.

Comments were collected from posts published between 29–30 April 2026. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 94 comments were selected for analysis. The inclusion criteria comprised comments containing identifiable illocutionary speech acts, contextual relevance to the issue under discussion, and sufficient linguistic content for interpretation. The unit of analysis consisted of written comments containing communicative intentions related to the political issue.

3.3 Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through observation and note-taking techniques (Sudaryanto, 2015), focusing on comments containing illocutionary speech acts. The researcher observed netizens' responses in the selected X post and recorded comments relevant to the research objectives. Data selection was based on three criteria: (1) comments containing illocutionary speech acts, (2) comments with identifiable contextual meanings, and (3) comments directly related to responses toward the President's speech on "Indonesia Gelap." Irrelevant, duplicated, or spam comments were excluded from the dataset.

3.4 Research Instrument

The researchers served as the primary instrument, directly involved in data collection, classification, interpretation, and conclusion drawing (Moleong, 2022). To support the analytical process, a classification table was used to group data according to Searle's categories of illocutionary speech acts. This instrument facilitated systematic coding and interpretation of the collected comment

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, comments containing illocutionary speech acts were selected and categorized according to Searle's classification. In the data display stage, the categorized data were organized into tables and descriptive explanations to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying dominant speech act types and explaining their communicative functions within the context of digital political discourse. Particular attention was given to how netizens employed language to express criticism, satire, opinions, and emotional evaluations regarding the political issue under discussion.

3.6 Data Validity

Data validity was ensured through theory triangulation. The findings were compared with Searle's theory of illocutionary speech acts and relevant studies in digital pragmatics to ensure consistency and accuracy in interpretation. In addition, repeated examination of data classification was conducted to enhance analytical reliability and reduce interpretive bias. These procedures strengthened the credibility of the findings and ensured that the analysis accurately reflected the communicative functions of netizens' utterances.

Because the study analyzed publicly accessible social media comments, informed consent was not required. To ensure ethical research practices and protect user privacy, usernames and other identifying information were omitted from the dataset, and all user identities were anonymized in the analysis and reporting of the findings. This approach was adopted to protect users' privacy and comply with ethical standards for online discourse research. Only comments relevant to the research objectives were included in the analysis, and no personal information was disclosed in the presentation of the findings.

This methodological design ensures the systematic identification of illocutionary speech acts and rigorous analysis of their functions in digital political discourse. Consequently, it provides a reliable framework for understanding how netizens use language to construct opinions, express emotions, and negotiate socio-political meanings within social media environments.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The findings of this study were obtained from netizens' comments posted in response to the President's speech on the "Indonesia Gelap" issue and the phenomenon of people wishing to move abroad. Based on the analysis of 94 comments, three types of illocutionary speech acts were identified: assertive, directive, and expressive. No commissive or declarative speech acts were found in the dataset. The distribution of speech acts is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Distribution of Illocutionary Speech Acts in Netizens' Comments

No	Types of Speech Acts	Frequency	Percentage
1	Assertive	16	17.02%
2	Directive	7	7.45%

3	Expressive	71	75.53%
4	Commissive	0	0%
5	Declarative	0	0%
Total		94	100%

The results indicate that expressive speech acts were the most dominant category, accounting for 71 comments (75.53%). These utterances primarily conveyed emotions, evaluations, criticism, disappointment, and sarcasm toward the issues discussed. Assertive speech acts appeared in 16 comments (17.02%) and were used to express opinions, assumptions, and evaluations regarding social and political conditions. Directive speech acts occurred in 7 comments (7.45%) and generally contained suggestions, requests, or indirect commands directed toward public officials. No commissive or declarative speech acts were identified in the data. This suggests that the comment section mainly functioned as a space for emotional expression and opinion sharing rather than commitment-making or institutional declarations.

4.1.1 Assertive Speech Acts

Assertive speech acts were identified in 16 comments (17.02%). These utterances were mainly used to express opinions, assumptions, and evaluations regarding political figures and public issues.

Data 01

"Hobi banget yapping emang ni wowok" [This wowok really loves yapping all the time.]

This utterance reflects the speaker's evaluation of the target's communication behavior. Although expressed sarcastically, it presents a claim that the speaker considers valid based on personal observation. The comment functions to construct a negative perception of the target as someone who talks excessively.

Data 02

"Ndut lupa pernah ngacir ke yordania" [Ndut forgot that he once ran off to Jordan.]

The speaker refers to a past event to criticize the target. The utterance functions as both a reminder and a sarcastic evaluation of the target's perceived inconsistency.

Data 03

"beliau sedang mencontohkan dirinya sendiri" [He is actually using himself as the example.]

This comment conveys criticism through indirect satire. The speaker implies inconsistency between the target's statement and behavior. Rather than providing factual information, the utterance serves as an evaluative judgment presented in the form of a statement.

In general, assertive speech acts were predominantly employed to communicate criticism, assumptions, and negative evaluations of political figures and public statements

4.1.2 Directive Speech Acts

Directive speech acts occurred in 7 comments (7.45%). Most were expressed in the form of suggestions, requests, and indirect commands directed toward public officials.

Data 04

"Indonesia memang gelap pak. Coba cek PLN udah masuk ke seluruh wilayah Indonesia belum? Buat nerangin Indonesia, paling cuma butuh berapa hari MBG. Yang burem itu mata para pejabat." [Indonesia really is dark, sir. Try checking whether electricity from PLN has reached all regions of Indonesia yet. To brighten Indonesia, it probably only takes a few days, MBG. What is actually blurry is the vision of the officials.]

The phrase *"coba cek"* functions as a suggestion encouraging the target to verify social conditions directly. The utterance simultaneously conveys criticism toward perceived governmental detachment from public realities.

Data 05

"kek, mending ke lapangan, jgn keluar negeri terus, liat warga, bukan laporan enak dan bagus aja yg didenger." [Seriously, it is better to go directly to the field. Stop going abroad all the time. Look at the people, not only listen to pleasant and favorable reports.]

This utterance combines suggestion and prohibition. The speaker encourages greater engagement with citizens while criticizing the target's perceived distance from everyday social conditions.

Generally, directive speech acts served as a vehicle for expressing expectations regarding leadership, accountability, and responsiveness to public concerns.

4.1.3 Expressive Speech Acts

Expressive speech acts constituted the largest category, accounting for 71 comments (75.53%). These utterances primarily reflected emotions such as disappointment, anger, ridicule, sarcasm, and frustration.

Data 6

"Presiden ga tau diri. Cerewet nya udah kek boti" [The President has no self-awareness. He talks too much like a 'gay'.]

This utterance expresses dissatisfaction and ridicule toward the target. The primary function is to communicate the speaker's negative emotional response.

Data 7

"anjing bgt ya ni orang, lebih sampah dari babi" [This person is such a damn dog, even more disgusting than a pig.]

The comment demonstrates a strong emotional reaction expressed through offensive language. Rather than presenting an argument, the utterance functions as a direct expression of anger and hostility.

Data 8

"Sumpah prabow udh ga cocok jadi presiden. Presiden apaan begini taiii tai" [Honestly, Prabowo is no longer suitable to be president. What kind of president is this, damn shit.]

The speaker expresses disappointment and rejection of the target's leadership. The utterance reflects a strongly negative evaluation accompanied by emotional intensity.

Data 9

"Pasti hati mungilnya pernah ditolak seme/uke dari yaman </3" [His tiny little heart must have once been rejected by a seme/uke from Yemen </3"]

The speaker employs sarcasm and mockery to express a negative attitude toward the target. The utterance does not aim to provide factual information but rather to ridicule the individual being discussed.

Data 10

"orang aneh, padahal dia sendiri yang kabur2an ke luar negeri! dasar orang tua bau tanah" [Such a weird person, even though he himself kept running abroad! Just an old fossil.]

This comment combines criticism and personal attack. The speaker highlights perceived inconsistency while simultaneously expressing frustration and disapproval.

The predominance of expressive speech acts indicates that the comment section functioned primarily as a space for emotional expression. Netizens tended to communicate feelings, evaluations, and reactions rather than engage in deliberative discussion or policy-oriented debate.

4.2 Discussion

The findings reveal that expressive speech acts dominated the comment section, accounting for 75.53% of the data. Rather than merely indicating the prevalence of a particular speech-act category, this pattern reflects the communicative characteristics of contemporary digital political discourse. The issue of *Indonesia Gelap* represents a politically sensitive topic that triggered strong public reactions, causing netizens to employ language primarily as a vehicle for expressing emotions, evaluations, and ideological positions. In this context, communication is not limited to information exchange but serves as a mechanism for displaying attitudes, negotiating political identities, and expressing collective dissatisfaction.

The dominance of expressive speech acts can be explained through the concept of affective publics, which argues that emotions play a central role in shaping online political participation. Social media platforms encourage users to respond rapidly to political events through emotional reactions that are highly visible and easily disseminated. Consequently, political discussions become increasingly driven by affective engagement rather than deliberative reasoning. Expressions of anger, disappointment, ridicule, and sarcasm found in the present study illustrate how emotional discourse functions as a means of constructing public responses to political issues.

These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Septiani et al. (2016), which found criticism to be the dominant form of expressive speech act. Similarly, Fatmawati and Ningsih (2024) argue that cyberpragmatic interactions are frequently characterized by criticism, satire, complaints, and emotional expressions due to the open and participatory nature of social media platforms. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that emotional expression becomes even more salient when digital communication intersects with political controversy and public dissatisfaction.

The findings, however, differ from those reported by Cahyaningsih and Rahmawati (2022), who found that expressive speech acts in educational interactions were predominantly realized through agreement. Likewise, Nadhirah et al. (2022) identified a wider range of expressive forms, including praising, apologizing, criticizing, and complaining within classroom communication. Such differences highlight the importance of communicative context. Educational discourse is generally governed by pedagogical objectives, institutional norms, and interpersonal politeness. In contrast, social media discussions surrounding political issues tend to be spontaneous, evaluative, and emotionally charged, encouraging the emergence of more confrontational linguistic behavior.

A further explanation for the dominance of expressive speech acts can be found in the online disinhibition effect, whereby individuals communicate more freely and aggressively in online environments than they would in face-to-face interactions. Relative anonymity, reduced social accountability, and the absence of immediate interpersonal consequences often lower communicative restraints. As a result, users may express stronger emotions, harsher criticism, and more direct hostility toward public figures. This phenomenon was evident in the data, where expressive utterances frequently contained insults, mockery, derogatory labels, and sarcastic evaluations. From a digital-pragmatic perspective, such expressions indicate that language functions not only to communicate opinions but also to perform emotional positioning and identity construction in online spaces.

This tendency is closely related to the phenomenon of digital aggression, which refers to the use of language to attack, demean, or delegitimize individuals in digital communication environments. The prevalence of insults, ridicule, and hostile evaluations suggests that political disagreement on social media is often manifested through aggressive verbal behavior. Although such expressions may function as forms of political criticism, they simultaneously contribute to the intensification of polarization and antagonism within online public discourse. Thus, expressive speech acts in this study should be understood not merely as linguistic forms but also as manifestations of broader socio-political tensions operating within digital environments.

The findings also support Searle's (1979) theory of expressive speech acts, which emphasizes the role of language in conveying psychological states such as anger, disappointment, condemnation, and sarcasm. However, the present study demonstrates that in social media contexts, expressive speech acts perform broader social functions. They are used not only to communicate emotions but also to challenge authority, negotiate political identities, and construct public perceptions of political actors. Consequently, expressive speech acts become a strategic resource for participation in contemporary digital political discourse.

Although expressive speech acts dominated the dataset, assertive speech acts also played a significant role in shaping online discussions. Netizens frequently used assertions,

evaluations, accusations, and opinions to construct interpretations of political events and public figures. These findings are consistent with Kasih and Maharani (2024), who argue that assertive speech acts connect speakers to propositions they believe to be true. Similar patterns were identified by Putri et al. (2025), who found that assertive speech acts are commonly used to express evaluations, beliefs, and claims. In the present study, however, assertive speech acts often appeared intertwined with sarcasm and criticism, demonstrating that the boundary between factual assertion and evaluative commentary becomes increasingly blurred in digital political communication.

The findings also support Karuniawan et al. (2025), who explain that assertive speech acts function to communicate beliefs and viewpoints regarded as valid by speakers. Nevertheless, unlike institutional or academic communication, social media interactions allow subjective interpretations to be presented as seemingly factual statements. This tendency reflects the role of assertive speech acts in constructing legitimacy, reinforcing ideological positions, and influencing public perceptions. Consequently, assertive speech acts function not only as communicative acts but also as rhetorical strategies in online political debates.

Directive speech acts appeared less frequently than expressive and assertive forms. However, their presence remains significant because they reveal attempts by netizens to influence the behavior of public figures through suggestions, recommendations, prohibitions, and indirect commands. Expressions such as *coba cek PLN*, *jangan cuman denger informasi*, and *mending ke lapangan* demonstrate efforts to encourage political leaders to become more responsive to social realities.

These findings align with previous studies by Rahmadani et al. (2019), Astriani et al. (2023), Nurlita and Alber (2025), and Rahima and Yulisah (2023), all of which identified commands, prohibitions, and advice as dominant directive functions. However, unlike previous studies conducted in novels, dramas, or educational settings, directive speech acts in the present study emerged within a highly dynamic digital environment. Consequently, directive expressions were frequently accompanied by criticism, sarcasm, and evaluative language. This finding suggests that directives in political social media discourse are often less concerned with offering solutions and more concerned with expressing dissatisfaction and demanding accountability.

The absence of commissive and declarative speech acts further highlights the communicative orientation of social media discourse. Netizens primarily focused on expressing emotions, opinions, and evaluations rather than committing themselves to future actions or performing institutionally recognized declarations. This finding suggests that participation in digital political discourse is largely symbolic and expressive, emphasizing attitude display and opinion formation rather than concrete social action.

In general, this study contributes to the development of digital pragmatics by demonstrating how speech acts operate within emotionally charged political discussions on social media. The findings indicate that X functions not merely as an information-sharing platform but as a space where emotional discourse, digital aggression, identity performance, and public opinion formation intersect. The predominance of expressive speech acts reflects the transformation of contemporary political communication into increasingly affective, confrontational, and emotionally mediated forms of interaction. Such developments

illustrate how digital platforms reshape the ways individuals participate in public discourse and respond to socio-political issues in contemporary society.

5. Conclusion

This study found that expressive speech acts dominated netizens' responses to the "Indonesia Gelap" political discourse on X, comprising approximately three-quarters of the dataset. Assertive and directive speech acts appeared less frequently, while commissive and declarative speech acts were absent. These findings indicate that X primarily functions as a space for emotional expression, social criticism, and public evaluation of political issues. Expressive acts manifested through anger, sarcasm, mockery, and insults, reflecting netizens' emotional responses toward public figures and political statements. Assertive acts conveyed evaluations and opinions, often through satire and subjective judgments presented as credible interpretations of social and political realities. Meanwhile, directive acts appeared in suggestions and prohibitions, reflecting attempts at constructive criticism and calls for greater responsiveness from political leaders. The findings suggest that digital political communication on X is spontaneous, open, and confrontational. Anonymity and freedom of expression shape netizens' language use in digital spaces, encouraging the public display of emotions, criticism, and political attitudes. Consequently, X serves not only as a platform for information exchange but also as a site where public opinion, political identity, and social criticism are actively negotiated through language. From a digital-pragmatic perspective, the predominance of expressive speech acts reflects the emergence of emotionally driven political discourse in online environments. The findings further demonstrate how social media facilitates affective engagement and confrontational communication, allowing users to express dissatisfaction, challenge authority, and construct evaluations of public figures through linguistic practices. This study contributes to digital pragmatics by revealing how netizens' speech acts on X construct emotional, critical, and confrontational political discourse. These findings may assist researchers, policymakers, and digital communication practitioners in understanding how emotional discourse shapes public responses to political communication on social media and influences the dynamics of contemporary digital public spheres.

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BEYOND AWARENESS: COERCIVE CONTROL AND RESTRICTED AGENCY IN MORIARTY'S *BIG LITTLE LIES*

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Abstract

This study examines coercive control in Liane Moriarty's *Big Little Lies*, analyzing how victim awareness did not guarantee freedom from abuse. This study applied Evan Stark's theory of coercive control to analyze how abuse worked through systematic strategies that restricted the victim's autonomy and decision-making capacity. A qualitative approach was used, with data drawn from narratives, dialogues, and internal monologues in the novel. Data were categorized into coercive control strategies such as violence, intimidation, manipulation, and micro-regulation. The findings showed that manipulation and micro-regulation were the most dominant strategies used by the perpetrator. Manipulation manifested in gaslighting and love bombing, distorting the victim's perception of reality and reinforcing dependency. Meanwhile, micro-regulation was evident in the control of household routines, financial access, and emotional expression. Together, these strategies formed a system of control that eroded agency and independence. The study concluded that the victim's agency remained constrained by the absence of external support, despite her awareness, education, and privilege.

Keywords: *coercive control; domestic violence; manipulation; micro-regulation; psychological entrapment.*

1. Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) continues to affect millions of women worldwide, with WHO reporting that nearly one in three women experience abuse. This figure shows that violence in intimate relationships is still a widespread social problem. According to WHO (2021, as cited in Gunarathne et al. 2023), IPV involves not only physical assaults but also psychological abuse, sexual coercion, and controlling behaviors that harm victims within intimate relationships. Therefore, IPV can no longer be understood merely as a series of isolated physical attacks. IPV involves systematic control that often remains hidden yet causes profound harm. Lohmann et al. (2024) support this by explaining that non-physical tactics can be even more destructive than physical violence, as the persistent threat and the gradual erosion of the victim's sense of self lead to lasting psychological harm.

In line with IPV, Stark (2007) introduced the framework of coercive control. According to Stark, coercive control is a liberty crime that destroys the victim's structural autonomy through non-physical strategies. Katz (2022) supports this by demonstrating the

impact of this deprivation of freedom, explaining that victims who live with a coercive control perpetrator will have their reality distorted. This condition restricts the victim's space for action, paralyzing their ability to think, speak, and express themselves normally.

Although coercive control is destructive, traditional perspectives still prioritize victim awareness as the key to ending abuse. It is frequently assumed that once a woman realizes she is in an abusive relationship, she will possess the agency to leave. However, Studies show that leaving an abusive relationship is complex, shaped by psychological, social, and structural barriers (Luthfia et al., 2023; Mabunda et al., 2025; Rezaei et al., 2025; Saunders, 2020). As noted by Sichimba et al. (2020, as cited in Heron et al., 2022), a victim of domestic abuse may also stay because they hope that their partner will change their behavior. The assumption that victims can easily leave once they recognize the abuse becomes highly problematic when confronted with the reality of such an entrapment.

This contradiction is portrayed in Liane Moriarty's novel *Big Little Lies*. The novel depicts the lives of women in an upper-middle-class suburban community in Australia. One of the characters, Celeste Wright, is an educated woman who once worked as a lawyer but experiences repeated physical abuse from her husband. Celeste's husband, Perry Wright, embodies public respectability while privately exercising domination and violence. On the other hand, Celeste is not the typical passive victim. She is fully aware of her husband's abusive nature. Despite her education, financial stability, and awareness, Celeste remains entrapped. This failure illustrates the gap between awareness and agency under coercive control.

Although previous studies have examined domestic violence, masculinity, and misogyny in *Big Little Lies*, few studies have specifically investigated how coercive control operates as a mechanism of choice restriction that prevents victims from translating awareness into action. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how coercive control strategies in the novel work to undermine the victims' agency, demonstrating that awareness and resources are often insufficient to guarantee freedom against a structured cage of control. Based on this background, the study addresses the following question: How does coercive control in *Big Little Lies* restrict victim agency, so that awareness does not guarantee freedom?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Coercive Control as a Liberty Crime

Stark (2007) argues that the most devastating aspect of partner abuse is not physical injury, but the systematic deprivation of the victim's freedom. Within this framework, Stark conceptualizes coercive control as a "liberty crime" that targets the victim's fundamental civil liberties and structural autonomy. The perpetrator does not merely assault the victim's body; instead, they construct a "social cage" that strips away the victim's capacity for independent agency and traps them in psychological captivity.

Rather than relying on isolated incidents, this social cage is sustained through integrated and repetitive strategies that enforce total compliance. Physical and sexual violence (Fontes, 2015) serve as the underlying enforcement mechanism, providing a concrete guarantee that any future, non-physical threats will be taken seriously. This physical force allows the perpetrator to seamlessly transition into continuous intimidation to rule through fear (Giri & Parveen, 2024), which is systematically paired with isolation to sever the victim's ties with external support systems (Katz et al., 2020). To deeply erode the

victim's self-confidence, perpetrators employ cognitive manipulation such as gaslighting (Klein et al., 2023) and tactical love bombing to create debilitating trauma bonds (Mukhtar, 2023). Ultimately, this control operates comprehensively through the micro-regulation of daily life, dictating personal choices from clothing and cooking to social interactions (Stark, 2007). Through this condensed matrix of abuse, the domestic sphere is effectively transformed into a site of profound subordination where the victim's self-determination is entirely replaced by the perpetrator's authority.

2.2 Choice Restriction and Victim Entrapment

The most dangerous impact of coercive control is not merely physical suffering, but the erosion of the victim's agency and self-determination. The accumulation of physical force, intimidation, manipulation, and micro-regulation systematically restricts the victim's autonomy. Katz (2022) conceptualizes this phenomenon through the shrinking of the victim's "space for action." As this space narrows, the victim's fundamental capacity to think, speak, and express themselves normally becomes paralyzed. Consequently, victims living with a perpetrator experience a distorted reality, where their perception of the abuse is heavily manipulated, leaving them feeling as though they have no rational options left to escape.

This profound restriction underpins the mechanism of victim entrapment within abusive relationships. Traditional perspectives often incorrectly assume that once a victim recognizes the danger of their situation, they will simply leave. However, recent scholarship reveals that the decision to exit an abusive dynamic is far more complex. Saunders (2020) explains that psychological barriers, such as guilt and trauma bonding, frequently paralyze the victim's intent to leave. These internal struggles are further compounded by social pressures and structural isolation, wherein victims lose access to legal protection or independent economic support (Mabunda et al., 2025; Rezaei et al., 2025). Additionally, victims often remain trapped due to emotional manipulation that fosters a false hope for change in the partner's behavior (Sichimba et al., 2020). This paradox demonstrates a severe gap between awareness and agency; full cognitive awareness of abuse does not guarantee the freedom to act when the victim's life choices have been entirely locked down by the perpetrator's structured control.

2.3 Coercive Control in Literary Representation

Literary representation provides an important medium for exposing forms of abuse that often remain invisible in public discourse. Unlike physical violence, coercive control is typically embedded in everyday interactions through intimidation, isolation, manipulation, and the regulation of daily activities (Stark, 2007). Because these behaviors are frequently normalized within intimate relationships, they may be overlooked by outsiders and even by victims themselves. Literary texts make these hidden dynamics visible by granting readers access to characters' thoughts, emotions, and lived experiences. Through narrative techniques such as characterization, dialogue, and internal monologue, literature reveals how seemingly ordinary interactions can function as mechanisms of domination and control.

Furthermore, literature provides a unique space for illustrating the gradual and cumulative nature of coercive control. Rather than presenting abuse as isolated incidents, literary narratives can depict how repeated strategies shape a victim's perception of reality

over time. Therefore, literature challenges conventional understandings of domestic abuse that prioritize physical injury while neglecting psychological and emotional forms of domination. By representing these invisible structures of abuse, literary texts enable readers to recognize coercive control as a systematic pattern of power that undermines autonomy and freedom within intimate relationships.

One example of such representation can be found in Liane Moriarty's *Big Little Lies*. Through the character of Celeste Wright, the novel demonstrates how coercive control can exist beneath the appearance of an affluent and successful family life. As a result, *Big Little Lies* offers a valuable literary portrayal of the hidden mechanisms through which coercive control operates.

2.4 Previous Studies and Research Gap

Beyond theoretical frameworks, several scholars have analyzed *Big Little Lies* (2014) from different perspectives. Previous studies predominantly highlight masculinity (Salsabila & Ariastuti, 2020), discourse patterns (Moreno-Serrano, 2021), and conspicuous feminism within the #MeToo movement (Bautista, 2022) as the critical factors in domestic violence. Specifically, the abuse is understood as an effort to maintain male dominance (Salsabila & Ariastuti, 2020), which manifests linguistically through recurring communication cycles of tension and reconciliation (Moreno-Serrano, 2021). Meanwhile, Bautista (2022) argues that the representation of abuse in the narrative operates within a "conspicuous feminism" that gains commercial visibility through its scrutiny of misogyny. However, few studies use Stark's coercive control theory to explain why Celeste Wright, despite awareness and resources, remains entrapped. This study contributes by applying Stark's coercive control framework to demonstrate how awareness and resources are insufficient against systematic choice restriction.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative literary method with an interpretive approach to conduct a comprehensive textual analysis of the selected narrative. Creswell & Creswell (2023) explain that the qualitative method is a framework that prioritizes the use of text and images as the primary data sources. In addition, this qualitative inquiry focuses on interpreting the core meaning of the phenomena by pulling direct evidence from the text (Abdussamad, 2021: 31). The interpretive lens allows the study to move beyond literal readings, critically exploring the invisible power structures and psychological dynamics embedded within the literary work.

The primary source of data for this study is the contemporary novel *Big Little Lies* written by Liane Moriarty, utilizing the paperback edition published by Penguin Books in 2014. The data extracted from this primary source consist of specific textual units, including character dialogues, narrative expositions, contextual descriptions, and internal monologues. The analysis focuses on Celeste and Perry Wright's relationship as depicted in Moriarty's *Big Little Lies*.

The data collection involved examining the novel to identify textual units, narratives, dialogues, and internal monologues that illustrate coercive control. The researchers performed repeated close readings of the novel to gain a deep familiarity with the narrative structure and the subtle behavioral changes in the characters. During the note-taking phase, the researchers identified and documented all textual units including dialogues and internal

monologues that indicated systematic domination. The coding process was then initiated by indexing the selected texts based on text-identifying markers. These identified data were structured into an inventory data sheet using a table matrix based on explicit classification criteria, ensuring that every textual excerpt could be systematically cross-referenced with its corresponding page number and narrative context.

Data analysis was carried out through systematic thematic coding and conceptual categorization derived from Stark's (2007) framework. The collected data were sorted and classified into four primary strategic categories of coercive control: physical and sexual violence, intimidation, manipulation, and control through the micro-regulation of daily life.

The thematic coding process focused on analyzing how each strategy functions as part of a unified system that restricts decision-making. By aligning the textual evidence directly with the research question, the researchers analyzed how these strategies erode Celeste Wright's autonomy and generate profound psychological barriers. This interpretation explains the internal mechanisms of victim entrapment, demonstrating why external resources and acute awareness are insufficient to ensure freedom when confronting a structured system of control.

To ensure analytical credibility and rigor, this study employed three validation strategies. First, the researchers engaged in repeated readings of the novel to achieve a deep familiarity with the text. Second, theoretical triangulation was established by cross-checking the textual data against Stark's (2007) conceptual categories of coercive control. Lastly, peer debriefing was conducted with academic advisors and peers to review the coding process and ensure objective, well-grounded interpretations.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of this research present the forms of coercive control exerted by the abuser against the victim based on Stark's theoretical framework. These discovered forms of coercive control work together as an interconnected system that destroys autonomy and creates deep dependency. Consequently, the victim remains unable to break free from the relationship despite possessing full awareness of the abuse.

4.1 Coercive Control Employed in the *Big Little Lies*

4.1.1 Violence

The strategy of violence in this study is categorized into both physical and sexual abuse, which the abuser utilizes to reinforce dominance and punish any signs of resistance. Here, physical force is employed by the abuser as a calculated mechanism to assert control over the body of the victim. The first pattern of physical violence is clearly observed in Data 1:

"He grabbed her upper arm. His fingers dug into the flesh. 'Hey,' she said. 'That hurts.' He gripped harder. 'Don't,' she said. 'Perry. Just don't.'"
(Moriarty, 2014, p. 144)

This physical assault occurs when the abuser perceives that the victim has made an independent decision. This finding supports Stark's (2007) argument that within a coercive framework, physical violence functions less as an episodic event and more as a continuous enforcement mechanism. The deliberate infliction of physical pain forces the victim into

compliance and silence, establishing that any resistance will invite further punishment. The second pattern of physical violence is evidenced in Data 2:

".....but then he grabbed her by the hair, twisting it behind her and pulling so hard," (Moriarty, 2014, p. 338)

The strategic execution of this physical assault is further reinforced by the victim's internal narration in Data 3, which normalizes the hidden nature of the abuse due to the social privilege standing of the abuser:

"My husband hits me, Renata. Never on the face of course. He's far too classy for that. Does yours hit you?" (Moriarty, 2014, p. 83)

Data 3 reveals the exact physical violence is highly calculated to avoid leaving visible marks. This refines Stark's (2007) concept of the "social cage", the cage here is built not by physical confinement, but by the boundaries of upper-class. This physical aggression is systematically followed by sexual violence, which is manifested as marital sexual abuse in Data 4 and utilized by the abuser as a tool for forced reconciliation:

"And sex was part of it. There was always sex afterward." (Moriarty, 2014, p. 78)

This stands in contrast to Moreno-Serrano (2021) interpretation of reconciliation within the cycle of violence. Data 4 illustrates that the reconciliation is fundamentally enforced through sexual subjugation rather than emotional restoration. Furthermore, these findings extend Bautista's (2022) discussion of domestic abuse by revealing that these strategies function not merely as representations of misogyny, but as strategic mechanisms of coercive control. Data 1 to Data 4 demonstrate that physical and sexual violence are strategically concealed to preserve public image, intensifying psychological isolation.

4.1.2 Intimidation

The abuser employs intimidation as a psychological strategy to keep the victim in a state of subjugation, even when physical contact is not being made. Intimidation is manifested in Data 5 through a direct death threat uttered by the abuser within the domestic space:

"'If you ever, ever embarrass me like that again, I will kill you, I will fucking kill you.' He tightened his grip. 'How dare you. How dare you.'" (Moriarty, 2014, p. 338)

An extreme verbal threat of murder combined with physical restraint is unleashed by the abuser to punish the independent action taken by the victim in public. According to Katz (2022) severe intimidation does not just frighten the victim, it fundamentally paralyzes their capacity to speak. Intimidation through death threats reinforces constant fear, ensuring compliance without physical contact. This finding extends from Salsabila & Ariastuti's (2020) explanation on masculinity by showing that intimidation functions not only as an expression of patriarchal authority but also as a strategy to micro-regulate the victim's future behavior.

4.1.3 Manipulation

Manipulation is identified as a frequent strategy used by the abuser to confuse the emotions of the victim and alter the reality of the victim.

The first form of manipulation is gaslighting, where the perception of reality is distorted by the abuser to make the victim feel responsible for the conflicts within the home. This form of manipulation is illustrated in Data 6:

"'You sick of me already?' He looked hurt. She'd been thoughtless. She should have known better. Perry was always looking for evidence that she didn't really love him." (Moriarty, 2014, p. 143)

Based on this evidence, the abuser practices emotional guilt-tripping by deliberately showing a vulnerable, "hurt" appearance to shift the moral responsibility of the conflict onto the victim. This dynamic embodies Katz's (2022) on manipulation, specifically how abuser constructs a false narrative to present themselves as "deserving of sympathy". This induces deep self-doubt and unnecessary guilt, forcing the victim to change her behavior to appease the insecurities of the abuser.

The second form of manipulation is love bombing, where the abuser utilizes dramatic displays of affection and material gifts post-violence to regain control, as demonstrated in Data 7:

"..... Perry cried. She cried. He promised. He swore on his children's lives. He was heartbroken. He bought her the first piece of jewelry she would never wear." (Moriarty, 2014, p. 145)

This intense affection creates a powerful illusion of hope. As identified by Sangeetha et al. (2022) this represents the 'honeymoon' stage, where a powerful illusion of hope is created by the abuser, successfully paralyzing the intent of the victim to escape. Stark's (2007) framework reveals that this intense affection is actually a tactical tool of choice restriction. Through a comparative synthesis with Data 8 (Moriarty, 2014, p. 393), the long-term impact of this behavior shows that the victim rationalizes abuse through a distorted moral economy, equating small acts of kindness with compensation for violence.

Furthermore, tactical promises of self-improvement are used by the abuser as another form of emotional manipulation to secure compliance when the victim tries to pull away, as shown in Data 9:

"He looked unhinged. 'I'll get help,' he said. 'I promise you I'll get help.'"
(Moriarty, 2014, p. 419)

This simulation of weakness is executed by the abuser to evoke the sympathy of the victim and stop her from leaving. Theoretically, this highlights Stark's (2007) assertion that coercive control operates through the micro-regulation of the victim's moral boundaries. This finding refines Moreno-Serrano's (2021) discussion of the reconciliation phase by demonstrating that apologies, affection, and promises of change are not simply restorative behaviors but calculated forms of manipulation that restrict the victim's ability to leave. When synthesized with Data 10 (Moriarty, 2014, p. 348), this tactical promise is driven entirely by a narcissistic projection of reality, ensures that the absolute focus of the relationship remains on his emotional need rather than the survival of the victim.

4.1.4 Control through Micro-Regulation

Control through micro-regulation is a structural strategy where the small details of the daily life of the victim are managed by the abuser to create a sense of absolute powerlessness. First, the rules of the house and parenting are micro-regulated by the abuser in Data 11:

"'You're turning them into spoiled brats,' Perry had said. 'I don't want to live in a pigsty,' said Perry" (Moriarty, 2014, pp. 168-169)

Constant verbal monitoring over domestic neatness and child-rearing is enforced by the abuser to break the victim's independence and undermine her authority as a mother. This finding aligns with Stark's (2007) definition of "liberty crime". By policing how victim raises her children and maintains the house, this forces the victim into a constant state of anxiety, where she must continuously monitor her environment to avoid triggering domestic anger.

Second, financial control is utilized by the abuser in Data 12 to directly lower the victim's autonomy:

"'She also seems to think we have unlimited financial resources,' said Perry. 'Doesn't earn a cent herself, but sure knows how to spend it.'" (Moriarty, 2014, p. 444)

This Material micro-regulation is executed by the abuser against the victim through public financial insults. This negative narrative regarding household spending to reinforce economic dependency and destroy the victim's self-worth, systematically eroding her professional confidence despite her background as a lawyer.

Ultimately, integrating these strategies reveals that the micro-regulation of domestic routines, finances, and emotional identity entrenches dependency and erodes autonomy. As synthesized in Data 13 (Moriarty, 2014, p. 257), this continuous tracking of material resources shapes a captive mindset where the victim cannot imagine where to go or how to live, making independent survival seem impossible. This entrapment is further consolidated by the emotional micro-regulation in Data 14 (Moriarty, 2014, p. 116), where the abuser completely takes over the victim's identity and desire, conditioning her to believe that life without him would be empty and boring. Salsabila & Ariastuti (2020) explain Perry's need for superiority through the lens of masculinity. However, the present study specifies how such superiority is exercised in everyday life through micro-regulation of finances, parenting practices, domestic routines, and emotional identity. Rather than being isolated demands, these micro-regulations function as a unified cage that completely destroys the victim's self-concept, trapping her into a dangerous relationship over an independent existence.

4.2 The Failure of the Escape Plan

The failure of the victim's plan to escape from the abusive relationship is caused by a complex network of internal and external barriers. Physical and sexual violence (Data 1 and Data 2) successfully triggers the victim's awareness of the domestic danger, prompting her to formulate plans to leave. However, the execution of these plans is systematically undermined by non-physical strategies. The abuser utilizes gaslighting and false promises of self-improvement (Data 6 and Data 9), to confuse the mind of the victim and distort reality. Furthermore, the cycle between physical assault and intense affection, known as love

bombing (Data 7), forces the victim to accept a distorted transactional logic (Data 8). This bad coping strategy causes the victim to focus on surviving the relationship day by day rather than executing the actual plan to leave. This internal entrapment is further reinforced by the micro-regulation of finances and emotional identity (Data 12 and Data 14), which destroys the victim's professional confidence and erodes her ability to envision independent survival (Data 13). This internal helplessness is made worse by external factors, specifically the lack of a good support system from the environment and friends of the victim. Because the abuser carefully hides the physical violence by not leaving visible marks on the face of the victim (Data 3) and covers the domestic abuse with expensive gifts, friends and people around the victim fail to notice the abuse. Without an external support system to provide physical safety, real logistical help, and emotional validation, the victim is forced to face the dangerous situation alone. In conclusion, despite awareness, escape fails due to the interplay of violence, manipulation, dependency, and lack of support.

5. Conclusion

This research shows that the escape plan made by the victim in the novel *Big Little Lies* fails due to the highly interconnected and systemic nature of coercive control. Within Stark's framework, secret preparations to leave represent active resistance. Although physical violence successfully makes the victim aware that the relationship is dangerous and triggers a plan to leave, the escape plan is undermined by non-physical abuse and entrenched. The entrapment operates through a deliberate combination of strategic concealment, severe verbal intimidation, and psychological manipulation such as gaslighting and love bombing which forces the victim into a state of continuous daily coping. This internal paralysis is further reinforced by the micro-regulation of domestic routines and finances, which effectively destroys the victim's autonomy and professional confidence, locking her into a state of structural dependency.

The narratives illustrate that the victim engages in active resistance, yet remains entrapped by systemic coercive control. Therefore, remaining in the relationship reflects a coping mechanism shaped by coercive dependency rather than passivity. Theoretically, this study extends Stark's framework by demonstrating that coercive control operates through the gradual internalization of dependency that transforms awareness into psychological paralysis. Practically, the findings highlight how literature can be used pedagogically to illuminate the hidden dimensions of domestic violence beyond physical harm. However, this study is limited to a single literary text and focuses primarily on one victim-perpetrator relationship. For future research, it is recommended to examine isolation more deeply, particularly how social disconnection interacts with manipulation and dependency to reinforce coercive control.

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DISABILITY HIERARCHIES AND INTERNALISED ABLEISM IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S *THE LIFE YOU SAVE MAY BE YOUR OWN*

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Abstract

Flannery O'Connor's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* examines the ableist and exploitative attitudes affecting persons with disabilities. The text demonstrates how disability hierarchies intensify marginalisation based on the severity of impairments. It presents two characters with distinct disabilities: one physically impaired and the other psychologically impaired, whose experiences converge through shared marginalisation and exploitation. Through this convergence, O'Connor exposes not only ableism pointed at persons with disabilities by the able-bodied community, but also intra-community ableism, where individuals with lesser impairments marginalise those with more severe disabilities. Accordingly, this study employs a qualitative close reading approach to explore hierarchies within the disabled community and their impact on victimisation and marginalisation of persons with disabilities. The study finds that differing social valuations attached to disability contribute to the reproduction of internalized ableism. Less severely disabled characters exploit and marginalise those with greater impairments, perpetuating othering, systemic discrimination, and lived struggles within the disabled community. The analysis of these findings is grounded in Critical Disability Theory.

Keywords: *ableism; cognitive disability; disability hierarchy; Flannery O'Connor; internalised ableism*

1. Introduction

For decades, global societies have confronted systemic human rights violations such as racism, gender discrimination, and cultural stereotyping that have received significant scholarly attention. These ills emerged as a result of the persecution and marginalisation of specific groups in societies. For instance, racism has a historical trace from the colonial age, where non-white racial groups were systematically handicapped, while gender-discrimination prompted feminist movements all over the world to combat the unjust conditions against women, and religious and cultural stereotypes, seeing particular religions and cultural groups being alienated (Smith & Read, 2024). The extensive focus on these issues has, to some extent, led to the neglect of other marginalised groups, particularly people with disabilities who confront challenges shaped by social structures and cultural perceptions of impairment (Oliver, 1990). Many issues related to the rights of the disabled

community remain underexplored, especially the internalised ones, as most current studies tend to concentrate on the external forces against the rights of persons with disabilities. While disability studies have mainly examined discrimination imposed by able-bodied structures in wider society, limited scholarly attention has been paid to the hierarchies and power asymmetries operating within the communities of people with disabilities themselves. Most of the current disability studies have assessed discrimination inflicted by the dominant ableist structures, neglecting the ways in which persons with disabilities process ableist practices and reproduce the discriminatory practices against each other, especially literary studies (Shakespeare, 2013; Goodley, 2014).

Scholars such as Boehm and Jammaers (2024) observed that, notwithstanding the legislative efforts to improve disability inclusivity and scholarship, especially in the dimension of management and organisations, disability progress in this respect is rather slow. In addition, Beatty and Joffe (2006) note that there is an increasing scholarly attention to disability discrimination linked to invisible disabilities, and there is extensive literature on psychological impairments in workplaces that appear to be the most ostracised form of disability. Complementing this observation, Blanck (2020) argues that, notwithstanding the increasing disability-inclusive policies and working environment frameworks, people with non-physical and cognitive disabilities persist in experiencing exclusion.

Moreover, Stewart (2004) asserts that disability hierarchies position some impairments as more or less disabling compared to others, with the notion that some impairments are better or less severe than others. These hierarchies do not stem from the inherent variations in disabilities, but from socially constructed appraisals that privilege independence, linguistic competence, and productivity. Sandberg, Rosqvist, and Grigorovich (2021) affirm that these hierarchies are further intensified by normative traditions about independence, communication and productivity. These scholars justify the promising scholarly attention on external forces against the disabled; however, few studies engage with the intra-community discrimination, where individuals with lesser impairments marginalise those with more severe disabilities.

Against this backdrop, this gap prompts the present study, which aims to examine how Flannery O'Connor's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* stages disability hierarchies as a hierarchical category that generates internalised ableism and exploitation within the community of persons with disabilities. This study contributes to disability studies' existing body of knowledge by applying Critical Disability Theory to explore intra-disability marginalisation and hierarchy among characters with disabilities in literary representations, addressing the following question: How does Flannery O'Connor's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* represent disability hierarchies and internalised ableism among persons with disabilities?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social versus Medical Model of Disability

Disability has been understood through the social and medical models, which continue to inform both policy and scholarly representations. The medical model views disability as an individual impairment that needs to be treated or fixed medically, whereas the social model perceives disability as a result of structural and societal barriers rather than individual impairment (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2013). These models' varied viewpoints are embedded in various policy frameworks, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), which argues that disability arises from the interplay between health conditions and

contextual factors through the biopsychosocial approach. Equally, the Conventions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) conceptualises disability as a concept that is shaped by social constraints rather than innate impairment (Parker, 2006). However, despite how in-depth these models and frameworks conceptualise disability, they remain limited in how hierarchies and power asymmetries operate within the communities of people with disabilities themselves. This limitation creates a conceptual gap, prompting the present study to examine disability beyond external barriers.

Most scholarly research on ableism has focused on external forces through the social and medical models, often neglecting internalised dynamics within disability communities. The social model views disability as socially constructed exclusion, while the medical model frames it as impairment with personal and social consequences (Wasserman, 2017). Studies on disability have described and critically engaged with this subject within the paradigms of social and medical models against external agents, not limiting disability to physical exclusion. For instance, Wasserman (2017) identifies a wide range of conditions, from physical impairments to psychiatric disorders, underscoring the complexity of defining disability such: “the congenital absence or adventitious loss of a limb or a sensory function; progressive neurological conditions like multiple sclerosis; chronic diseases like arteriosclerosis; the inability or limited ability to perform such cognitive functions as remembering faces or calculating sums; and psychiatric disorders like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder” (2). This scholar further cites paraplegia, deafness, blindness, diabetes, autism, epilepsy, depression, and HIV as forms of disabilities, which raises a concern about who can be considered disabled or really disabled.

Foundational scholars challenges the above medicalised framing as follows: Boorse (2009) assert that the term “disability” evolved as a reference to a distinct group of people, later inability and legal restrictions on rights and power, whereas more recent researchers like Campbell (2019) argue that disability perceptions are also socially and institutionally constructed through structures that regulate the bodies and minds that are deemed legitimate, productive and functional. These descriptions of disability collapse Wasserman’s (2017) confinement of disability within medical diagnosis, prompting a concern about whether disability can exist without medical diagnosis.

Similarly, Davis (2013) introduces the concept of “normalcy,” showing how society views disability through statistical and cultural standards of what is considered normal. Similarly, Garland-Thomson (2002) stresses that disability is culturally formed and represented through visual and textual media that portray certain bodies as “other.” Extending this critical perspective, Goodley (2021) expands disability studies into critical disability studies, emphasising how ableism operates not only externally but also through processes of identity construction, subject formation, and internalised oppression.

2.2 Hierarchies of Disability and Internalised Ableism

Ongoing disability scholarship progressively views disability as a category that is not unified, but rather organised through hierarchies of value, which often advantage certain types of disabilities over others. Siebers (2008) asserts that disability operates within cultural values that judge bodies and determine what is good, normal, and acceptable, in line with productivity, independence, and normality. While the WHO also acknowledges disability standards by noting that persons with disabilities encounter various unequal health consequences, system disadvantages and exclusion informed by disability stigma. These

differences signal not only exclusion from society but also within the disability communities indirectly.

Similarly, CRPD emphasises equality and inclusion; however, its broader framework opens the door to various interpretations, which may indirectly reproduce existing hierarchies that categorise disability according to various standards, leading to inequalities within the community of persons with disabilities (Parker, 2006). Additionally, Campbell (2009) perceives ableism as a hierarchy of unequal valuation, implying that hierarchies are not only imposed externally but also internalised and perpetuated across social and relational settings. This suggests that this unequal valuation can also be internalised and reproduced among persons with disabilities themselves. This present study aims to examine how Flannery O'Connor's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* theorises disability hierarchies as a hierarchical category that generates internalised ableism and exploitation among the community of persons with disabilities.

Shakespeare et al. (2017) assert that institutional and bureaucratic systems are often used to consider disability authenticity through medical verification, productivity and normative conventions about independence. This determining mechanism tends to nurture hierarchies of disability by privileging visible impairments while marginalising complicated cognitive and psychological impairments. This reinforces the 'really disabled' notion by advancing a criterion through which other conditions are substantiated and other challenged. Jammaers and Fleischmann (2025) also point out that individuals with a vast diversity of impairments often share the experiences of subtle and more clearer forms of disability-driven discrimination, justifying the existence of hierarchies within the disability communities, with those challenged with exposed disabilities more susceptible to discrimination. Within the same lines, Jammaers and Williams (2021) note that these hierarchies are also gender-motivated, where disabled men and women experience different treatment due to sexist and paternalistic anticipations that make women more accountable for nurturing others and men to compete in the workspace.

Hennekam et al (2023) find that people with mental illnesses often hold themselves accountable for their failures to fit in rather than the lack of accommodation that the physically impaired often receive. He highlights how individuals with mental illnesses often internalise blame, reinforcing hierarchies that privilege physical impairments. This noted, Jammaers and Zanoni (2021) show that organisational inclusion practices often reproduce ableism, distinguishing between categories of disabled employees. These scholars found that "varieties of ableism" here, meaning each organisation upheld clear distinctions between the constructed categories of disabled employees and followed ableist ways of organising work, based on assumptions of workers as able-bodied and neurotypical. Existing studies rarely address internalised discrimination within disability communities, a gap this paper seeks to fill by drawing on O'Connor's text, as the text foregrounds disability hierarchies as central to exploitation. This literature review establishes the theoretical foundation for analysing disability hierarchies in O'Connor's text, which in turn informs the methodological framework adopted in this study.

Moreover, internalised ableism establishes a critical lens for understanding how discrimination operates within disability community. Before interrogating internalised ableism, it is crucial to define ableism. Ableism refers to the structured privileging of able-bodied norms that are constructed through institutional, cultural, and interpersonal practices and under-privileging individuals that appear to deviate from these standards of normality, whereby disability is considered a deficiency. Additionally, internalised ableism can be

defined as the process which persons with disabilities adopt and reproduce the able-bodied norms and reinforce hierarchies among themselves. While intra-disability discrimination further emphasises this hierarchical valuation by stating that certain disabilities are considered more acceptable than others (Goodley, 2014).

In addition, the existing data acknowledge that ableism is a framework of beliefs that sets norms of values that allocate inferior value to disability, of which individuals, including persons with disabilities themselves, may process and reproduce. This framework of beliefs perpetuates inequality and oppression among persons with disabilities, as they also discriminate against each other based on disability types. As the WHO (2011) asserts that persons with disabilities encounter various unequal health consequences, system disadvantages and exclusion informed by disability stigma. Additionally, the concept of psycho-emotional disablism highlights how the internal discrimination within the community of disability influences the relationship between individuals with disabilities (Thomas, 2014; Campbell, 2009; WHO, 2011; Reeve, 2014). Hence, the present study examines how Flannery O'Connor's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* portrays disability hierarchies as a hierarchical category that generates internalised ableism and exploitation among the community of persons with disabilities.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Critical Disability Theory (CDT), which theorises disability as a socially and politically shaped phenomenon constructed by hegemonic relations, marginalisation, and cultural views rather than solely by medical impairment. The CDT predominantly focuses on the analysis of disability as a cultural, historical, relative, social and political phenomenon (Hall, 2019). The CDT frames disability as a political and cultural phenomenon, emphasising power relations both between abled and disabled groups and within disability communities themselves.

Disability hierarchies are ranks constructed through social relations, in which certain disabilities are considered more functional than others, with the notion that some impairments are better or less severe than others. These hierarchies determine access to social value, care, and recognition (Stewart, 2004). On the other hand, ableism refers to a systematic structure that favours able-bodied people over persons with disabilities. This favouritism is shaped by cultural, institutional, and interpersonal standards. According to this perception of ableism, anyone who does not meet the standard of what is considered normal based on the constructed cultural norms, that individual is considered defective, hence disability is considered a deficiency from ableism point of view. Additionally, internalised ableism refers to the process by which persons with disabilities adopt and reproduce the able-bodied norms and reinforce hierarchies among themselves (Goodley, 2014).

Moreover, the CDT conceptualises power not only as a domination of abled-bodied people over persons with disabilities, but also as a social influence among marginalised people. As Devlin and Pothier (2006, 2) state, "disability is not fundamentally a question of medicine or health, nor is it just an issue of sensitivity and compassion; rather, it is a question of politics and power (lessness), power over, and power to." In this context, power does not only function as dominance asserted by the abled persons over the disabled ones but also as a social force that operates within marginalised groups, affording some persons with disabilities the ability to approximate normative ideals while positioning others as disposable.

Rather than perceiving disability as an individual medical condition (biomedical model), the CDT modifies analysis to a human rights approach that argues for equal access to all aspects of social life. This calls for equal access extends beyond inequalities between disabled and abled persons to include disparities within disability communities, which this study identifies as analytically important. Thus, Garland-Thomson underlines disability identity as a socially constructed aspect that is guided through cultural representation and embodiment. Williams (2001, 134) states that "If disability is seen as a personal tragedy, disabled people are treated as the victims of circumstance. If disability is defined as social oppression, disabled people can be seen as the collective victims of an uncaring, discriminatory society." This present study builds on this line of argument by focusing on how oppression is replicated through hierarchical valuation within disability communities. Therefore, instead of adopting CDT as a theoretical lens in general, this study will use the above analytical categories, such as disability hierarchies, to examine how Flannery O'Connor's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* theorises disability hierarchies as a hierarchical category that generates internalised ableism and exploitation within the community of persons with disabilities.

3. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative textual analysis anchored in Critical Disability Theory (CDT) to examine the representation of internalised ableism in Flannery O'Connor's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*. The study employs a close reading approach, focused on characterisation, dialogue, and conventions of ableism in the text. The primary data comprise Flannery O'Connor's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* (1953), in which the researcher will interpret the text through close reading to examine how disability hierarchies are a hierarchical category that generates internalised ableism and exploitation within the community of persons with disabilities. The closed reading is appropriate to this study, as it equips the researcher to interpret the text using literary strategies through which internalised ableism, hierarchies of disability, and exploitation are constructed (Tyson, 2015).

The analysis in this study includes characters' interactions, narrative descriptions, and dialogue in line with disability representation in the text. The systematic qualitative procedure guides the data analysis in this study as follows: first, disability representations will be identified within the text, including portrayals of physical and cognitive impairment. Secondly, the textual evidence is coded, and relevant extracts are selected in line with the emerging themes. Thirdly, data are categorised into the key analytical categories of disability hierarchies and internalised ableism. Lastly, the findings are interpreted using CDT to examine the study's phenomenon. In essence, the analytical approach in this study involves a systematic interpretation of selected textual extracts, focusing on how representations of physical and cognitive disability are outlined and how these outlines reveal the hierarchies of disability and internalised ableism (Tyson, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Perceptions about Persons with Disabilities

O'Connor's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* stages externalised ableism and the birth of internalised ableism. The story centres on three characters: Mother Lucynell Crater, daughter Lucynell Crater, and Tom Shiftlet, all of whom are disabled. Daughter Lucynell and Tom Shiftlet are exposed to discriminatory and exploitative attitudes based on their medical conditions. Mother Lucynell's first assumption that Tom is a perfect fit to marry daughter

Lucynell shows how disability serves as a key criterion to determine social compatibility. Rather than considering the two characters' individual preferences or values, she reduced them to a collective disability identity. This demonstrates an ableist mindset that persons with disabilities belong together in a way that they should rely on one another in terms of companionship.

The above reflects Hosking's (2008) observation that disability is a social construct rather than a consequence of impairment, and that it is best characterised as a complex interrelationship among impairment, the individual's response to impairment, and the social environment. Mother Lucynell's conceptualised limitations about the disabled characters represent the societal imaginations and restrictions concerning persons with disabilities, excluding them from practices that their impairments do not necessarily prevent them from taking part in.

Following the above sentiment, Rohleder, Braathen, and Carew (2018, 1) asserts that persons with disabilities are often regarded as asexual where "many people believe that the disabled cannot perform sexually, although it is obvious that they are sexual beings like everyone else" and raising questions such as, "is it possible for someone in a wheelchair to have sex? Can she have children? Can they bring up a child?" (1). This scholar further affirms that "there is no evidence to suggest that people can't get these things just because they get around in a wheelchair, are blind, deaf or suffer from a mental illness" (1), underscoring Hosking's (2008) position that disability is often treated with social imagination rather than material fact. Mother Lucynell's ideal husband for her daughter, within the confines of the disabled community, unveils the silent discrimination, distancing the disabled from the abled in terms of negotiating intimacy. Zewude and Habtegiorgis (2021, 5) assert that "many young people without disabilities may doubt that people with disabilities can be fulfilling partners in any loving adult relationship," highlighting the fears that often haunt such relationships. It is this fear that also shapes Mother Lucynell's marital decision for her daughter, a decision that is both justifiable and stereotypical. This remark, "although the old woman lived in this desolate spot with only her daughter and she had never seen Mr Shiflet before, she could tell, even from a distance, that he was a tramp and no one to be afraid of. His left coat sleeve was folded up to show there was only half an arm in it, and his gaunt figure listed slightly to the side as if the breeze were pushing him," (1) reveals that Mother Lucynell had a preconception about Tom, one that unveils the extent to which she emasculated him based on his disability. She uses Tom's blatant physical disability to convince herself that he is as vulnerable as her daughter, thus qualifying him to marry her, among other factors.

The above is interpreted to mean that Tom's missing arm serves as a visual marker that led Mother Lucynell to assess his social worth and perceived harmlessness. In other words, this narrative implies that Tom's impairment is represented as being associated with perceived harmlessness and diminished masculinity. Therefore, Mother Lucynell's judgment unveils not only disability perception but also a mentality that men with disabilities have limited power in relation to masculinity. In essence, one's character and capability are hastily evaluated through disability lens.

Moreover, Rohleder et al. (2018) conducted an online survey utilising non-disabled participants who emphasised their reluctance to be in an intimate relationship with a disabled person, citing that the "disabled are different – they have less sexual desire and less need for sexual health services and sex education" (3) and this led to their finding that "disabled people are not only excluded from romantic relationships, but that in some

countries they are often also prevented from taking part in sex education at school or in programmes that focus on sexual health related to HIV/AIDS and sexual illnesses” (5). Thus, Mother Lucynell cites her daughter’s disability as a factor that reduces her chances of locating marriage, especially with an abled person: “You see that girl yonder? She asked, pointing to [daughter] Lucynell, who was sitting on the floor a foot away, watching him, her eyes blue even in the dark. If it was ever a man wanted to take her away, I would say, 'No man on earth is going to take that sweet girl of mine away from me!' but if he was to say, 'Lady, I don't want to take her away, I want her right here,' I would say, Mister, I don't blame you none” (4). This accentuates negative social constructs about the disabled without affording them a moment to prove otherwise. Mother Lucynell judged that any man would have reservations about marrying a disabled woman like daughter Lucynell.

4.2 Hierarchies of Disability and Exploitation

During the marital negotiation of Tom and daughter Lucynell, both Tom and the mother actively lead the talks, whereas daughter Lucynell remains passive. In this case, it is Tom who is able to make a choice to participate in the marital union that Mother Lucynell proposes between him and daughter Lucynell. His impairment does not pose a hindrance towards his ability to make life choices; unlike daughter Lucynell, whose impairment interferes with her ability to make decisions about her future. This variation reveals that disability in this context is perceived as a ranked social category rather than a uniform condition, in which Tom’s disability does not impose limitations on him in terms of negotiations of economic benefits and freedom, as compared to daughter Lucynell, who has a cognitive impairment that imposes limitations on social independence. Thus, this narrative reflects a hierarchy of disability where social systems assign unequal value to impairment.

Relatedly, Lucynell is technically being married off to Tom against her will, due to her inability to consent or not consent to the marriage. This positions daughter Lucynell as the most exploited disabled character, underscoring the prevalence of hierarchies in the ableist underpinnings. Her impairment makes her prone to externalised and internalised discrimination, being reduced to domesticity: “Is she your baby girl? He asked. My only, the old woman said, and she's the sweetest girl in the world. I wouldn't give her up for nothing on earth. She's smart, too. She can sweep the floor, cook, wash, feed the chickens, and hoe. I wouldn't give her up for a casket of jewels” (3). This reflects Hosking’s (2008) notion that the social disadvantage that affects persons with disabilities is occasioned by the physical, institutional and attitudinal environment which fails to meet the needs of people who do not match the social expectation of normalcy.

Notably, despite disability, Tom appears to be able to match the dominant social expectations especially as a man, making Mother Lucynell to go to extreme lengths to persuade him to marry her daughter so that she, amongst other reasons, can benefit from having him work on the farm: “The next morning he began on the roof of the garden house while Lucynell, the daughter, sat on a rock and watched him work. He had not been around a week before the change he had made in the place was apparent. He had patched the front and back steps, built a new hog pen, restored a fence” (4). This narrative suggests that because Tom is able to engage in productive labour, it confers social validity on him over Lucynell. Thus, the text links value not only to disability status but also to the ability to meet able-bodied norms of productivity and independence. In other words, disability hierarchy is framed around social functioning rather than disability itself.

The above-mentioned also echoes Sauder's (2015) sentiments that the hierarchy of disability is a social construct that makes certain kinds of disabilities more acceptable than others, and it is an arbitrary system through which disabled people are judged and categorised. Consequentially, daughter Lucynell's impairment that handicaps her from meeting social expectations of normalcy that Tom can meet notwithstanding his impairment, results in a belonging crisis for a disabled person of daughter Lucynell's nature. Sauder (2015, 3) affirms that "the basic idea behind the hierarchy is the prejudicial idea that disability is equated with being a burden or public nuisance (by this I mean that people are immediately forced to deal with the fact that the disabled person exists and might interact with them unexpectedly)." Thus, Mother Lucynell even went to the extent of buying Tom into marrying her daughter: "You'd be getting a permanent house and a deep well and the most innocent girl in the world. You don't need no money" (5), substantiating Sauder's (2015) aforementioned view as the passage presents her value as passive and dependent.

While disability hierarchy offers a central analytical lens in this study, daughter Lucynell's exploitation cannot be solely associated with disability. Her vulnerability can also be influenced by other factors such as commodifying logic behind marriage arrangements, economic dependence, gender and other factors. As a young woman, daughter Lucynell is not encouraged to work, which portrays patriarchal expectations more especially that mother Lucynell is willing to trade her for labour and security, which depicts economic imperatives. However, these factors coexist with disability rather than replacing it since Lucynell's cognitive impairment increases her vulnerability to exploitation and boosts dependency opinions.

4.3 Internalised Ableism

The enduring position of daughter Lucynell as passive and Tom as active during their marital negotiation unravels the hierarchies of disability, which give way to internalised ableism. It is the external forces that mould these hierarchies, setting a precedent that stretches to the internal site. For instance, Mother Lucynell exposed daughter Lucynell's helplessness to Tom, convincing him that he is marrying a woman whom he will be able to control. Her extreme efforts to have her daughter Lucynell married suggested desperation to get rid of her, especially when she did not even require a bride price for her, the money or gifts usually paid as a token of appreciation to the bride's family by the bridegroom. This corresponds with Adhikari, Aryal, and Khatiwata's (2024) finding that most of the early marriages of persons with disabilities took place among the females, and they were married off at an early age by the parents, who no longer wanted to take their responsibility and were concerned about their ineligibility as wives. It is the mother's emasculating contemplations that set a negative precedent against the mentally disabled daughter Lucynell, framing her as a "cheap", "passive" and "innocent", thus opening a portal of exploitation in her marital life. This description further reduces Lucynell's personhood and positions her as an object in a financial transaction, thereby presenting marriage as a mechanism of exchange rather than an interpersonal commitment. In essence, Lucynell is situated within the ableist economy of value, in which she is assessed according to her manageability.

In similar sentiment, it is because of such depictions demonstrated above that "disabled people do buy into this idea that they should avoid and shun other people with disabilities or deny themselves accommodations to be perceived as less of a burden" (Sauder, 2015, 3), more especially in the case of daughter Lucynell who is shunned by her

own mother who perceives marriage as the perfect opportunity to get rid of her. Tom agrees to marry daughter Lucynell, but he does this for his own benefit: "On Saturday the three of them drove into town in the car that the paint had barely dried on, and Mr Shiftlet and Lucynell were married in the Ordinary's office while the old woman witnessed" (5). He shows no affection, emotional care, or commitment to daughter Lucynell. This collapses Mother Lucynell's belief that her disabled daughter could find affection from a disabled man who shares in her vulnerability. She said to him, "Lemme tell you something: there ain't any place in the world for a poor disabled friendless drifting man" (5), and this accentuates that she perceived him as vulnerable due to his disability. Adhikari et al. (2024, 53) assert that "marriage seems to be an unattainable goal to many persons with disabilities. The persons with all kinds of physical disabilities have a hard time finding a partner for marriage because many people in society cannot look beyond the appearance of a disability," with scholars like Rohleder et al. (2018) finding that most abled persons do not prefer to marry a disabled person. This, according to Jalal and Gabel (2014) and Hassounah-Phillips and McNeff (2005), even escalates to the degree that persons with disabilities, particularly men, prefer marrying a non-disabled woman over a disabled one who could actually compensate for and complement their disability.

Returning to the narrative, on their wedding day, Mother Lucynell said, "Don't Lucynell look pretty? Like a baby doll...You got a prize! But Mr. Shiftlet didn't even look at her" (6), demonstrating regret, unhappiness and disapproval. The term "prize" serves as significant evidence, as it portrays daughter Lucynell as an object of reward rather than a spouse in a mutual relationship. This metaphor of "prize" also reveals an ableist hierarchy of value, presenting Lucynell as a controllable, exchangeable object, as her marriage demonstrates no aspect of affection. Therefore, the language in this narrative reveals how disability is turned into something valuable when it is manageable or possessed by others.

Furthermore, Tom's affection and commitment to the marriage are tested more when he and his wife have to participate in public activities as a married couple, and also his reaction when his wife - daughter Lucynell's mental challenges manifest in the public domain. This demonstrates internalised ableism in practice and even more when Tom becomes frustrated by his wife's mental problems, such as "pulling the cherries off the hat one by one and throwing them out the window" (5) and would get embarrassed when they are in open spaces such as restaurants. For instance, "there was no one in The Hot Spot but Mr Shiftlet and the boy behind the counter, a pale youth with a greasy rag hung over his shoulder. Before he could dish up the food, she was snoring gently" (6). This incident resulted in Tom abandoning her in the restaurant, leaving her behind, and this highlights the internalised ableism, as Tom proves his lack of affection for the fellow disabled character due to her condition. This restaurant incident unmasks the hierarchical patterns of disability as daughter Lucynell's behaviour due to her medical condition makes her stand out or be more visible as a disabled person in public, and Tom dissociates himself from her to fit into patterns of the abled.

4.4 Power relations and intra-disability hierarchies in Critical Disability Theory (CDT)

The CDT theorists, such as Devlin and Pothier (2006, 2), state that "disability is not fundamentally a question of medicine or health, nor is it just an issue of sensitivity and compassion; rather, it is a question of politics and power(lessness), power over, and power to." In this study context, power not only functions as dominance asserted by the abled persons over the disabled ones but also as a social force that operates within marginalised

groups, affording some persons with disabilities the ability to approximate normative ideals while positioning others as disposable. O'Connor's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own* sees the hardships against persons with disabilities meted out by other persons with disabilities due to holding more power and ability than the others, highlighting the consequential effects of disability hierarchies within the community. In this case, the CDT shifts from the individual pathology of disability (based on the biomedical model), and beyond liberalism and a social model of disability, towards a human rights approach that argues for equal access to all aspects of social life (Barnes & Oliver, 1993). The call for equal access extends beyond inequalities between disabled and abled persons to include disparities within disability communities. Hence, Garland-Thomson (2002) affirms that CDT explores heritage and disability identity construction, which is in flux and connected to the very nature of human embodiment.

In O'Connor's *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*, the daughter Lucynell Crater experiences an identity and belonging crisis; she is neither desired by the abled nor by the fellow disabled community, resulting in various tactics emerging in the story to get rid of her from all communities. She moves from the abled to the disabled community, only to be still exploited and rejected. Her exclusion by both abled and disabled communities illustrates the compounded marginalisation of those with severe impairments. Williams (2001, 134) states that "If disability is seen as a personal tragedy, disabled people are treated as the victims of circumstance. If disability is defined as social oppression, disabled people can be seen as the collective victims of an uncaring, discriminatory society." This study argues that O'Connor's text exposes disability hierarchies as mechanisms of internalised ableism, where exploitation and exclusion are perpetuated within the disabled community itself.

5. Conclusion

This study has critically examined internalised ableism, a dimension often overlooked in disability scholarship. The analysis demonstrates that marginalisation arises not only from external forces but also from intra-community dynamics, where persons with disabilities themselves perpetuate discrimination. O'Connor's text delineates manifestations of internalised ableism, pointing out the diverse severities of disabilities as the driver of discrimination for specific groups within the disabled community. This creates an identity and belonging crisis as portrayed through the disabled characters, Tom and his daughter Lucynell, who experience discrimination from the abled persons. Mother Lucynell, who embodies ambivalence, arranges marriage both as a hopeful act of inclusion and as a discriminatory attempt to rid herself of her daughter. She called for the marriage due to her discriminatory perception of persons with disabilities. Yet these hopes are undermined by internalised ableism, as Tom, less severely disabled, exhibits discriminatory attitudes toward Lucynell. Tom's physical impairment did not prevent him from negotiating marriage terms and asserting autonomy, unlike Lucynell, with cognitive and communicative impairments, who remained passive throughout the negotiations, unable to exercise agency over her future. This dynamic exposes entrenched hierarchies within disability communities, revealing how differing severities of impairment shape power, agency, and vulnerability. This study contributes to disability scholarship by foregrounding internalised ableism as a critical dimension of marginalisation, demonstrating how literary texts can illuminate intra-community hierarchies and their social consequences. By highlighting how literary text represents ranked disability experiences, this study increases scholarly understanding of how hierarchy and internalised ableism are formed and maintained. This study further

contributes towards practical implications on disability awareness, advocacy, and education in general, as it demonstrated how ableist hierarchies can be formed even within disability community. Also, underlining the significance of challenging the notion of dependency in line with family structures, education, and care practices. Therefore, future studies may expand this phenomenon by assessing internalised ableism across a wide range of Southern Gothic texts or by comparing representations of disability hierarchies in contemporary fiction.

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