

LONDON
CHURCHILL
COLLEGE

A RESEARCH JOURNAL



Journal of Contemporary Development and Management Studies

JCD&MS

VOLUME 10 · ISSUE 2



Spring 2026

A national peer-reviewed journal

Official research journal of London Churchill College

Editorial Panel

Professor Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, PhD Principal Editor, *London Churchill College*,
t.anderson-jaquest@lcc.ac.uk

Michael Nieto, PhD. HE Consultant, U.K., michaellnieto@gmail.com

Salma Akter, PhD. East West University, Bangladesh, drsalma@ewubd.edu

Rahaman Hasan, PhD. Canterbury Christ Church University, rahaman.hasan@canterbury.ac.uk

Professor Nick Papé, PhD, *London Churchill College*, nick.pape@lcc.ac.uk

Nasser Amin. *London Churchill College*, n.amin@lcc.ac.uk

Ilias Mahmud, PhD *London Churchill College*, i.mahmud@lcc.ac.uk

Aims and scope

The *Journal of Contemporary Development and Management Studies (JCD&MS)* is a national peer-reviewed journal dedicated to connecting research to practice. *JCD&MS* recognises the value of qualitative, quantitative and mixed/interrelated methods in analysis of data. The journal seeks to be relevant both to a core disciplinary constituency of Alternative Providers of education, of Universities as well as a broader readership. It is the official research journal of London Churchill College (LCC) and actively encourages contributions from individuals and other educational institutes.

Manuscripts published in *JCD&MS* are reviewed by accomplished scholars in the subject area of the manuscript and in the disciplinary approach used.

Disclaimer

The Publisher, LCC and Editorial Panel cannot be held responsible for errors of any consequences arising from the use of information published in *JCD&MS*. The views expressed by the contributors are not necessarily the views of LCC.

Access, Copyright and Copying

JCD&MS is published annually in one or two issues. Current and Previous issues are available online and can be accessed via LCC's website: www.lcc.ac.uk/jcd&ms

JCD&MS places no restriction on copying or sharing any published material.

Contents

Volume 10, issue 2	Spring 2026
Overview of Articles	3
Professor Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, PhD	
Notes on Contributors	5
Professor Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, PhD	
Editorial. Organising Research in Teaching Intensive Higher Education: the Establishment of the Centre for Learning Innovation and Research (CLIR)	8
Contributions from Members of the CLIR. London Churchill College	
How have historians of the modern British Empire responded to the Insights offered by post-colonial theory.?	13
Teddy Wyrley-Birch	
Navigating Pluralistic Heal Systems: Healthcare-seeking behaviour among people with disabilities in Bangladesh	25
Ilias Mahmud, PhD	
Investigating the Impact of Cyber Security Awareness Training in the field of Deepfake on Students	42
Mohammad Shahadat Hossain	
Research Protocol. Navigating the Transition from Teaching to Educational Leadership in Higher Education – Motivation and Barriers	59
Professor Nick Papé, PhD; Rahaman Hasan, PhD; Gerry Takamura; Russel Kabir, PhD; Ilias Mahmud, PhD	
Situated Agency and Collective Meaning: Rethinking Development through Vygotskian Praxis, A Critical Inquiry into Collaborative Praxis. Political Engagement and Cultural-Historical Psychology	80
Professor Nick Papé, PhD	
Behind the Grade. What Students Learn That Is Never Recorded: The Silent Curriculum Identity, Emotion and the Reasons Students Stay	92
Professor Nick Papé, PhD; Abdur Rahim, PhD	
Guidelines for Submission	107
Professor Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, PhD	

Overview of articles.

In the **Editorial, Organising Research in Teaching Intensive Higher Education: The Establishment of the Centre for Learning Innovation and Research (CLIR)**, CLIR members reflect collectively on their experiences in establishing a dedicated research centre in London Churchill College. They posit that the knowledge and experience gained in centralising research structures, formalising processes for undertaking collective research projects and standardising publication practices in CLIR demonstrate how scholarly inquiry may be sustained effectively within institutions whose central purpose lies in teaching.

In the article **How have historians of the modern British Empire responded to the Insights offered by post-colonial theory?**, Teddy Wryley-Birch argues that post-colonial theories of decolonisation in the mid-twentieth century have fundamentally reshaped and challenged earlier Eurocentric and elite-focused narratives which marginalised the experience and agency of colonised people. In his view, post-colonial theory has not produced a uniform transformation of how decolonisation theory has been presented and interpreted over time, but it has profoundly reshaped the questions that historians ask and the perspectives they prioritise.

Ilias Mahmud's Research Report, **Navigating Pluralistic Health Systems: Healthcare-seeking behaviour among people with disabilities in Bangladesh**, provides a useful case study of the pluralistic health systems operating in low- and middle- income countries. The study examines how people with disabilities in Bangladesh navigate formal and informal health sectors before accessing specialised rehabilitation services. Findings indicate that delays in rehabilitation must take into account the existence of pluralistic health systems and their cultural, social and fragmented features. Dr Mahmud argues that to function effectively, disability inclusive health systems in low-and middle-income countries require earlier referral, decentralised rehabilitation and culturally competent communication with patients and families.

Mohammad Shahadat Hossain's article, **Investigating the Impact of Cyber Security Awareness Training in the field of Deepfake on Students**, is based on the content of his MSc Prize winning dissertation. His case study investigates how training about cybersecurity affects the capacity of students to identify Deepfake content, given its rapid expansion across digital information platforms. He argues that the production of synthetic media by AI threatens personal security and creates substantial concerns about the provision of false information and its adverse impact on social trust. Findings from his case study indicate that purposeful cybersecurity education can provide individuals with the necessary protective abilities to identify and face present and emerging AI security threats such as Deepfake.

In the **Research Protocol: Navigating the Transition from Teaching to Educational Leadership in Higher Education**, authors Nick Papé, Rahman Hassan, Gerry Takamura, Russel Kabir and Ilias Mahmud investigate the motivations behind lecturers' decisions to pursue or avoid management roles and the structural, psychological and social barriers they encounter. The project utilises a mixed-methods approach, with the quantitative phase identifying patterns, associations and predictions relating to lecturers' decisions to transition into leadership roles and the qualitative phase providing deeper insight into the motivations, perceptions and contextual factors influencing transition. Findings from surveys and interviews will inform discussions that will focus on what emerges from the data rather than recommending ideal models or pathways.

Nick Papé's article, **Situated and Collective Meaning: Rethinking Development through Vygotskian Praxis**, reconsiders Vygotskian psychology through the lens of collaborative praxis. He argues that learning is not only a cognitive process, but also a social, ethical and political act, and he questions the utility of institutional models which reduce learning to measurable outputs. The author uses empirical material drawn from mature learners and digital environments to illustrate the tension between student experience and institutional control. Findings indicate the importance of undertaking collaborative projects which offer alternative ways of organising knowledge and participation. Professor Papé argues that renewed attention should be given to memory, care and conflict and regarded as positive generative forces in the education process.

In **Behind the Grade. What Students Learn That Is Never Recorded: The Silent Curriculum**, authors Nick Papé and Abdur Rahim explore the forms of student learning in Higher Education that are often unseen, unmeasured and unrecorded. They argue that personal growth, emotional persistence, and identity shifts play a central role in educational experience, but remain largely invisible in curriculum design and institutional review. Drawing upon student testimony and relevant theory, they propose that that curriculum be considered not only as a structure for content but also as a site of human exchange where convention, care and recognition support deeper learning.

Notes on Contributors

Professor Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, PhD

Principal Editor, *JCD&MS*, Vice Chair, Audit Risk and Remuneration Committee and Non-Executive Member, College Oversight Board, London Churchill College | Email: t.anderson-jaquest@lcc.ac.uk | ORCID 0009-0005-6965-4795. Professor Anderson-Jaquest holds a PhD in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science. A Senior HE consultant, QAA Reviewer, former Dean of Quality Assurance and Principal Lecture, she specialises academic governance, institutional and curriculum review, and quality assurance. Her research interests include AI in higher education, access for mature learners and the evolving role of private HE providers in the UK.

Abdur Rahim, PhD

Senior Registrar, London Churchill College | Email: a.rahim@lcc.ac.uk | ORCID: 0009-0003-5500-1369, Dr Rahim holds a PhD in Business Economics from London South Bank University, where he has also held leadership roles and contributed to academic delivery, student services and institutional compliance. Throughout his career, he has driven initiatives to improve governance, strengthen compliance, enhance student experiences and deliver measurable efficiency gains in ways that deliver clear value to both students and stakeholders. Dr Rahim's expertise and current research interests span supply chain management, operations, quality assurance, student administration and regulatory frameworks.

Gerry Takamura, PhD Candidate

London Churchill College | Email: gerry.takamura@lcc.ac.uk | ORCID: 0000-0002-3107-1874. Gerry Takamura, Deputy Vice Principal, has more than 25 years in senior academic management, focusing on operations, quality, business development and start-ups within post-18 education. Originally working for the British Council in Japan and then returning to work in the UK, she was part of the start-up of INTO at the University of East Anglia. This was followed by time spent in the Third Sector for social enterprises, moving to Oxford and becoming a Principal of a Higher Education College until 2019. She has also been the Chair of London Churchill College's Oversight Board, and since 2024 joined the senior management of the College. The core to her work remains the student voice and making education available to all. In her own time, she is researching and writing about women educators in history as well as encouraging more women leaders in higher education. She is currently completing her PhD on Biography at the University of Buckingham, focusing on western women in Japan during the Meiji period (1868-1912).

Ilias Mahmud, PhD

Head of Programmes and Academic Monitoring, London Churchill College; Director, LCC Research Centre | Email: ilias.mahmud@lcc.ac.uk | ORCID: 0000-0003-2870-7715, Dr Mahmud's research interests focus on epidemiology, social determinants of health and inclusive public health interventions. He has coordinated multi-country research projects and authored more than 65 peer-reviewed publications. His academic experience spans Australia, Bangladesh, England and Saudi Arabia. He also works on inclusive programme design for widening participation students and serves on the editorial boards of journals including *PLOS ONE*.

Mohammad Shahadat Hossain, MSc

London Churchill College [Email: m.hossain@lcc.ac.uk] Mohammad Shahadat Hossain is a cyber security and higher education professional, with experience in networking, cyber security, education and student engagement. He completed his MSc in Cyber Security at the University of Staffordshire with Distinction. His dissertation received the Best Department of Computing Masters Dissertation Award, while his overall performance across the programme was recognised with the Department of Computing Masters Award. His research interests include cyber security awareness, deepfake technologies, social media fraud, online safety, misinformation, digital trust and the human factors of cyber security. He has professional experience in network engineering, cyber security practice and student-focused higher education roles, combining technical expertise with a strong interest in education, awareness and digital safety.

Professor Nazim Uddin

Company Secretary and Executive Director, London Churchill College | Email: n.uddin@lcc.ac.uk | ORCID: 0000-0002-0257-0491, Professor Uddin's academic work focuses on mature student motivation, tutor–student interaction and transnational education. He has co-authored several articles in the *Journal of Contemporary Development & Management Studies* and the *International Journal of Education Management*, focused on addressing learning needs and the expectations of adult learners. His recent work includes collaborative studies on performance management in teaching and active learning for widening access students. He is engaged in ongoing research on applied teaching practices in higher education.

Professor Nick Papé, PhD

Executive Director and Principal, London Churchill College | Email: Nick.Pape@lcc.ac.uk | ORCID: 0000-0003-1395-3751, Professor Papé's research interests centre on student motivation, mature learners, psychodynamic theory in education and widening participation. He has authored and co-authored multiple peer-reviewed articles, including studies on tutor behavioural characteristics, mature student motivation and psychoanalytic approaches to higher education. His earlier publications include *The Syrian Identity* (Parts 1 & 2), *Developing an Audit Trail for PhD Research* and *Using Twin Lenses from Psychodynamic and Sociocultural Theories to Interpret Student Engagement*. He has extensive experience in academic leadership and continues to supervise and publish research in higher education studies.

Rahaman Hasan, PhD

Non-Executive Member, College Oversight Board, London Churchill College | Email: r.hasan@lcc.ac.uk | ORCID: 0000-0003-1690-2458, Dr Hasan's research interests include entrepreneurship, higher education pedagogy and mature learner engagement. He has co-authored studies on tutor behavioural characteristics and student motivation, exploring how teaching practices can influence retention and success in adult learners. His work contributes to understanding the intersection between educational practice and entrepreneurial thinking in higher education settings.

Russell Kabir, PhD

Non-Executive Member, London Churchill College | Email: russell.kabir@aru.ac.uk | ORCID: 0000-0002-4510-0385, Dr Kabir is an Associate Professor of Public Health and Biostatistics

at Anglia Ruskin University. His research spans epidemiology, suicide and mental health, violence against women and the health effects of climate change. He has authored more than 200 peer-reviewed publications, including specialist texts on statistical software and epidemiology. He sits on various editorial boards of journals including *PLOS ONE* and *BMC Public Health*. His teaching combines quantitative research methods with applied public health practice, and he supervises postgraduate research in public health and epidemiology.

Teddy Wyrley-Birch, MA

London Churchill College. Senior Quality Assurance Officer and Secretary of the College Research Ethics Committee. [Email: t.wyrley-birch@lcc.ac.uk], Teddy Wyrley-Birch earned a BA (First Class Honours) and an MA (Distinction) in History from Queen Mary University of London. His undergraduate and post graduate dissertations examine Britain's role in the nation that is now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo (but previously known at different points in time as the Congo Free State, the Belgian Congo, and Zaire respectively). His BA dissertation examines the role of British supporters in the Congo Free State at the turn of the 19th - 20th centuries. His MA dissertation provides an analysis of British Foreign Policy in Zaire between 1990 and 1993: a period of massive change encountered as the Cold War was winding down. Teddy Wyrley-Birch's current research interests centre on the history of British, French, and Belgian colonialism and imperialism and their enduring impacts on regions formerly under colonial rule.

Editorial. Organising Research in Teaching Intensive Higher Education: The Establishment of the Centre for Learning Innovation and Research (CLIR)

Authors: Contributions from Members of the Centre for Learning Innovation and Research (CLIR), London Churchill College

Abstract

This editorial examines the organisation of research within teaching intensive higher education through the establishment of the Centre for Learning Innovation and Research at London Churchill College. Research activity in teaching-oriented institutions often develops through individual academic initiative rather than coordinated institutional structures. The creation of a research centre introduces organisational consolidation through central recording of research outputs, formal ethical governance and collaborative publication planning. These mechanisms convert dispersed scholarly activity into recognised institutional research practice while preserving the primary educational mission of a teaching focused provider. The research programme associated with the Centre addresses mature learner participation; vocational education connected with healthcare workforce preparation; institutional questions concerning academic engagement with research. By reflecting upon this experience the editorial contributes to wider discussion concerning the relationship between teaching and research in higher education and demonstrates how scholarly inquiry may be sustained within institutions whose central purpose lies in teaching.

Keywords

Research organisation; Teaching intensive higher education; Research governance; Independent higher education; Academic practice; Widening participation

All human beings by nature desire to know. A sign of this is the pleasure taken in the senses for even apart from their usefulness they are valued for themselves.

Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 980a21–24

Aristotle opens the *Metaphysics* with an observation that remains instructive for the intellectual purposes of higher education. Human beings possess an innate desire to know and the search for understanding arises not merely from practical necessity but from a deeper inclination toward inquiry and reflection. Institutions devoted to learning exist because this impulse requires organisation if it is to develop into disciplined scholarship rather than remain an expression of curiosity alone. Universities and colleges therefore create the conditions through which intellectual work may be sustained across time. Teaching introduces students to established bodies of knowledge and traditions of thought while research subjects inherit assumptions to critical examination and produces new understanding through systematic investigation. The relationship between these activities has long been recognised as central to academic life because it allows knowledge to be transmitted, questioned and extended across generations. This relationship has also been re-examined in relation to inquiry-based teaching, where research activity informs and enriches student learning within higher education (Brew, 2012). Yet the ways in which institutions organise this relationship vary considerably. In environments where teaching constitutes the principal professional

responsibility the cultivation of research requires deliberate institutional attention if scholarly activity is to develop alongside the substantial commitments associated with programme delivery and student support.

Teaching intensive institutions operate under conditions that differ markedly from those associated with research universities whose organisational structures are built around large research programmes and doctoral education. Within teaching-oriented providers the academic calendar is shaped primarily by curriculum delivery, assessment processes and the ongoing support of diverse student communities. Academic staff frequently combine responsibilities that include teaching, academic advising, programme leadership and regulatory compliance, each of which demands sustained attention throughout the academic year (Ylijoki, Kallio and Ursin, 2023). The increasing administrative burden associated with contemporary higher education further constrains the capacity of academic staff to sustain research activity alongside teaching responsibilities (Woelert, 2023). These conditions do not diminish the intellectual importance of research; yet they influence how scholarly work emerges within institutional life. In teaching intensive environments scholarly inquiry frequently develops through reflection upon classroom practice, programme design and professional engagement with external partners. These forms of inquiry may not always appear immediately as formal research projects; yet they constitute important intellectual activity that can generate publishable scholarship when supported through appropriate institutional structures. Recognition of this relationship between teaching practice and research activity therefore becomes essential for institutions seeking to sustain academic inquiry while maintaining a strong educational focus. Studies of academic practice have shown that research participation is closely connected with institutional recognition and professional identity because staff engagement increases when scholarly work is acknowledged as a legitimate dimension of academic labour rather than an activity undertaken in addition to formal responsibilities (Brew, 2012; Billot, 2010). When institutions lack structures that recognise research contributions, the cumulative intellectual work of academic staff may remain scattered across individual initiatives rather than forming a coherent body of scholarship. The question confronting many teaching intensive providers therefore concerns how research can be organised so that it becomes visible, supported and sustainable within an environment where teaching remains the dominant professional commitment.

The establishment of the Centre for Learning Innovation and Research (CLIR) at London Churchill College (LCC) offers one example of how a teaching intensive independent provider may address this organisational challenge. The significance of the Centre lies therefore in organisational consolidation rather than expansion (Kosmützky, 2026). Rather than attempting to emulate the research scale associated with large universities, the College has chosen to consolidate existing scholarly activity within a clearly defined institutional structure. The Centre brings together publication planning, ethical review and collaborative academic writing within a single organisational setting that records research outputs and encourages collective discussion of scholarly work. Through this arrangement, research becomes a recognised component of institutional life rather than an informal activity undertaken independently by individual lecturers. By providing a focal point for research activity the institution enables academic staff to situate their work within a shared intellectual endeavour while maintaining the central educational mission of a teaching focused provider.

Prior to the establishment of CLIR members of the academic staff had already produced peer reviewed work connected with questions arising from programme delivery and professional education. These publications addressed themes that included adult learner participation, pedagogic practice and vocational pathways into healthcare professions. Although these studies demonstrated serious engagement with higher education research, they emerged largely through individual initiatives, rather than through coordinated institutional planning. Articles and conference presentations appeared intermittently across programme areas, and the absence of central reporting meant that the cumulative scholarly activity of the academic community was not easily identifiable within institutional documentation. This situation was not unusual within teaching intensive institutions where research activity often developed through personal academic interest, rather than through structured research units.

The establishment of CLIR introduces procedures through which publications, research projects and conference participation can be documented and discussed collectively. Recording scholarly work in this manner ensures that academic contributions become part of institutional memory and encourages continuity in research engagement across successive academic years.

The research programme associated with the Centre illustrates how scholarly inquiry within teaching-oriented institutions frequently emerges from sustained reflection upon educational practice. One strand of research focuses upon the experiences of mature learners whose participation in higher education often follows periods of employment, caring responsibility or earlier interruption in formal education. These students bring diverse forms of professional and personal experience into the classroom; yet they may also encounter challenges associated with returning to academic study after long intervals. Research in this area examines questions of persistence, identity formation and academic confidence among adult learners and contributes to wider discussions concerning widening participation and social mobility in higher education (Bathmaker and Thomas, 2020). A second strand of inquiry addresses vocational education linked with healthcare workforce preparation including programmes designed to support entry into National Health Service roles between Band 2 and Band 4. These studies consider how curriculum design, professional placement and institutional support contribute to employment readiness within healthcare professions where workforce demand remains significant. A third strand examines institutional organisation through investigation of academic engagement with research activity, leadership transition from teaching roles into management positions and patterns of representation within the academic workforce. Current work on institutional guidance concerning generative artificial intelligence further shows that questions of research, teaching and administration are increasingly governed through formal policy development across higher education (An, Yu and James, 2025).

Together these areas demonstrate how applied higher education research may arise from institutional practice while also contributing to broader scholarly debates. Research emerging from teaching intensive institutions frequently combines empirical observation with reflective analysis of educational practice. Studies addressing mature learner participation provide insight into how adult students negotiate academic identity while balancing employment and family responsibilities. Investigations of vocational education contribute to discussion concerning the relationship between higher education and professional workforce preparation. Institutional research examining leadership transition and academic engagement with research activity provides valuable evidence concerning the organisation of academic labour

within contemporary higher education. Through these inquiries the research programme associated with the Centre contributes both to institutional improvement and to wider scholarly discussion of higher education practice.

Alongside the development of research themes, the Centre introduces formal ethical governance in order to ensure that scholarly work involving students, staff or professional partners is conducted according to recognised academic standards. Research that engages human participants requires careful attention to consent procedures, confidentiality and the responsible management of personal data. Contemporary higher education institutions therefore maintain research ethics committees that examine project proposals before empirical work begins. The establishment of a standing Research Ethics Committee within the Centre ensures that proposals are reviewed through documented procedures and that decisions are recorded within institutional governance systems. Ethical oversight not only protects research participants but also affirms the scholarly integrity of research conducted within the institution. By embedding ethical review within institutional practice, the College signals that research undertaken by its academic community meets the expectations associated with responsible scholarship and professional accountability.

The Centre also supports the organisation of scholarly writing through collective academic practice. Producing articles suitable for publication requires sustained engagement with literature, careful development of argument and willingness to revise work in response to editorial feedback. Within teaching intensive institutions academic staff frequently pursue writing alongside substantial teaching responsibilities, and opportunities for collaborative discussion may therefore be limited. Writing groups organised through the Centre provide a setting in which colleagues can exchange drafts, review each other's work and discuss appropriate journals for submission. These interactions encourage intellectual dialogue among staff whose disciplinary backgrounds may differ but research interests intersect through shared engagement with higher education practice. Through such collective efforts, the solitary labour of academic writing becomes part of a wider scholarly conversation that strengthens both the quality of research and the confidence of authors preparing work for publication.

The experience discussed here raises a broader question concerning how research may be sustained across diverse forms of higher education institutions. Policy discussions frequently focus upon universities whose reputations are built upon large research portfolios and doctoral training programmes. Recent work also indicates that higher education institutions are being reshaped by technological and pedagogic change in ways that heighten the importance of clear academic organisation and institutional purpose (Marshall *et al.*, 2024). Yet a substantial proportion of higher education provision occurs within institutions where teaching remains the primary institutional commitment. The continuing significance of higher education as a public good further reinforces the need to recognise diverse institutional contributions to knowledge production beyond research intensive universities (Marginson and Yang, 2025). The example of LCC demonstrates that research culture within these settings need not depend upon extensive funding or large disciplinary departments but upon organisational clarity and institutional recognition of scholarly work. When institutions acknowledge the scholarly dimensions of teaching practice and provide structures through which academic staff may develop research collaboratively, they create conditions in which inquiry becomes a shared institutional responsibility rather than an individual endeavour. When research activity is

recorded within governance structures, supported through collaborative writing practices and guided by established ethical procedures, it becomes part of the ordinary intellectual life of the institution. Through careful organisation and sustained academic commitment, even modest institutional settings may contribute meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge and ensure that the desire for understanding described by Aristotle continues to animate the intellectual purposes of higher education.

References

- An, Y., Yu, J.H. & James, S. (2025). Investigating the higher education institutions' guidelines and policies regarding the use of generative AI in teaching, learning, research, and administration. *International Journal of Education Technology in Higher Education* 22(10). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-025-00507-3>.
- Aristotle (1998). *Metaphysics*. Translated by H. Tredennick and G.C. Armstrong. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bathmaker, A.M. & Thomas, L. (2020). *Higher Education, Social Class and Social Mobility: The Degree Generation*. London: Routledge.
- Billot, J. (2010). 'The imagined and the real: Identifying the tensions for academic identity', *Higher Education Research and Development*, 29(6), pp. 709–721. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2010.487201>
- Brew, A. (2001). *The Nature of Research: Inquiry in Academic Contexts*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- _____. (2012). Teaching and research: new relationships and their implications for inquiry-based teaching and learning in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 31(1), 101–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2012.642844>
- Deem, R. & Lucas, L. (2007). Research and teaching cultures in two contrasting UK policy contexts: Academic life in Education Departments in five English and Scottish universities. *Higher Education* 54, 115–133, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-006-9010-z>
- Kosmützky, A. (2026). 'Competition as a catalyst for collaboration: how German universities navigate the paradox of organizational research governance', *Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-025-01616-8>
- Macfarlane, B. (2011). 'The morphing of academic practice: Unbundling and the rise of the para-academic', *Higher Education Quarterly*, 65(1), 59–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2010.00467.x>
- Marginson, S. and Yang, L. (2025). Higher education and public good in England. *Higher Education* 89, 183–203. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01339-2>
- Marshall, S., *et al.* (2024). The reshaping of higher education: technological impacts, pedagogical change, and future projections. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 43(3), 521–541. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2024.2329393>
- Morley, L. (2013). *The Rules of the Game: Women and the Leaderist Turn in Higher Education*. London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2012.740888>
- Woelert, P. (2023). Administrative burden in higher education institutions: a conceptualisation and a research agenda. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 45(4), 409–422. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2023.2190967>
- Ylijoki, O.-H., Kallio, K.-M. and Ursin, J. (2023). 'The future of academic work: global pressures and local responses', *Studies in Higher Education*, 48(8), 1251–1263.

How have historians of the modern British Empire responded to the insights offered by post-colonial theory?

Teddy Wyrley-Birch

Abstract

This article examines how the historiography of the modern British Empire has responded to the ideas and interventions of post-colonial theory. It defines the modern British Empire as the period from the emergence of 'New Imperialism' in the late nineteenth century to the era of decolonisation in the mid-twentieth century. The article argues that post-colonial theory has fundamentally reshaped how this period has been studied by challenging earlier Eurocentric and elite-focused narratives that marginalised the experiences and agency of colonised peoples. Focusing on the influential work of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, the study analyses how their ideas transformed historical approaches to imperial power, culture, and knowledge production. By tracing how these theoretical insights influenced historical writing on the modern British Empire, particularly within Western academia, this article demonstrates how post-colonial perspectives encouraged historians to reassess the structures, legacies, and lived experiences of empires. It also highlights the growing contribution of scholars from formerly colonised regions who have challenged Eurocentric imperial histories. Ultimately, the article argues that post-colonial theory has not produced a uniform transformation of imperial historiography, but has nonetheless profoundly reshaped the questions historians ask and the perspectives they prioritise.

Key words: post-colonial theory, imperialism, orientalism, subalternity, colonialism, legacy, agency, decolonisation.

Introduction

As the literary scholar Patrick Williams notes, the notion of the post-colonial has consistently been regarded as a "difficult and contested term" (Williams, 1993, p. 91). This is owing to the fact that there is not a clear-cut definition, and this idea can mean something distinct depending on the region that is being studied, with the Kenyan Professor D. A. Masolo at the University of Louisville elucidating that "the colonial experience is by no means monolithic" (Masolo, in Ahluwalia, 2001: 14). Despite the ambiguity of this concept and term, there are some shared characteristics within post-colonial studies. A principal framework for understanding this as a broad concept is the discipline's engagement with the "vast and horrific social and psychological suffering, exploitation, violence and enslavement" of colonised peoples, alongside its challenge to "the superiority of the dominant Western perspective" (Parsons and Harding, 2011, p. 2).

The Ghanaian-Canadian literary critic Ato Quayson argued that this concept must be understood as a multifaceted and open process. He argues that this discipline should not be seen as something that is static, but as a "process of postcolonizing" an intellectual engagement with the evolving links between the colonial period and current or modern day inequalities" (Quayson in, Hiddleston, 2009: 4). Post-colonial methodological approaches have attempted to "shift the dominant ways in which the relations between western and non-western people and their worlds are viewed" (Young, 2003: 2).

Literature Review

Post-colonial approaches to the study of the modern British Empire are not reducible to critiques of British imperialism, thereby distinguishing them from anti-colonialist literature. Early critical analyses of empire frequently reduced European imperial wars and conquests to purely economic motivations, overlooking other political, ideological, and cultural factors, with J.A. Hobson's 1902 publication *Imperialism* providing a prime example (Louis, 1999: 16) (Hobson, 2011). Moreover, as Jane Hiddleston points out, whilst "anti-colonialism" names specific movements of resistance to colonialism, postcolonialism refers to the wider, multifaceted effects and implications of colonial rule" (Hiddleston, 2009: 1). Post-colonial theory as an area of academic study has been beneficial as it provides a foundation for scholars and literary critics to capture the voices and experiences of the "silenced parts of the world" (Mishra and Hodge, 2005: 375). Nevertheless, the field has attracted criticism, even from among postcolonial theory's foundational and preeminent scholars. The Indian literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose insights will be analysed in this article, wrote "I find the word post-colonialism just totally bogus", because he objected "to the implication of an achieved state beyond colonialism" (Childs and Williams, 1997: 16). The English-American philosopher and writer Anthony Appiah attacked the discipline's authenticity as a school of thought when it claims to recover the voice of the colonised. Appiah wrote that post-colonialism was created by a "small, Western-style, Western trained group of writers and thinkers" who created "an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa" (Appiah in, Childs and Williams, 1997: 18).

From Anti-Colonialism to Post-Colonial Critique

Post-colonial historiography has evolved from an initial challenge to imperial and nationalist historical narratives into a multidisciplinary field concerned with the relationship between power, knowledge and historical representation. The work of early anti-colonial thinkers, most notably the Trinidadian historian and scholar C. L. R. James and the Martiniquais scholar and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, foregrounded the centrality of colonial violence and indigenous agency. Fanon, in particular, conceptualised colonialism as a system of "violence in its natural state", thereby emphasising its structural dimensions rather than viewing it as merely a political phenomenon (Fanon, 1963: 61). A decisive historiographical shift occurred with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which demonstrated that colonial domination was sustained through systems of knowledge that "helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image" to the rest of the world, prompting historians to interrogate and analyse the power and legitimacy of colonial archives (Said, 1979: 2).

This cultural turn was followed by the Subaltern Studies collective, which criticised both colonial and nationalist historiography for privileging elite politics and excluding popular agency, arguing that subaltern politics possessed an 'autonomous domain' irreducible to elite leadership. This was outlined in Ranajit Guha's seminal work *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983) which argued strongly that peasants were not simply passive followers of elite-led national independence movements but had obtained their own political consciousness and agendas. (Guha, 1983: 9). However, post-structuralist critiques exposed the limits of such recovery projects, most notably in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's assertion that "the subaltern cannot speak" within elite academic and scholarly frameworks (Spivak, 1988: 308).

From the early 2000s onwards, postcolonial historiography has increasingly converged with global and decolonial approaches, notably in Dipesh Chakrabarty's work that calls for the "provincializing" or 'decentring' of Europe as the universal foundation of historical inquiry (Chakrabarty, 2000, pp. 3–4), while others have questioned the field's earlier emphasis on discourse at the expense of material and political analysis (Cooper, 2005: 33).

'Selective Engagement': British Imperial Historiography after the Cultural Turn

Since the late 1980s, the historiography of the modern British Empire has been greatly reshaped by engagement with post-colonial theory; however, the adoption has been more selective than wholesale. Earlier histories of the British Empire, particularly those produced before the 1970s, tended to focus on high politics, administrative structures, and imperial governance, often narrating empire from the perspective of metropolitan elites and treating imperial expansion as a largely functional or progressive process. Such approaches frequently marginalised colonial subjects and paid limited attention to questions of culture, power, and representation. For example, earlier imperial histories such as Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher's *Africa and the Victorians* (1961) framed the British Empire primarily through the actions of metropolitan policymakers and strategic interests, largely marginalising the experiences of those communities who were colonised. (Gallagher and Robinson, 1961).

Post-colonial critiques have been greatly influenced by Edward Said's insistence that empire operated through systems of cultural representation and "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1979: 3), and this has challenged older imperial histories that privileged elite scholarship, institutions and narratives. In response, historians of the modern British Empire, have reconceptualised empire as constitutive of British society itself, emphasising the connection between the metropole and the colony. As Catherine Hall has argued, empire was "not something that happened elsewhere," but was instead "deeply embedded in the making of modern Britain" (Hall, 2002:15), while Antoinette Burton has shown how progressive metropolitan politics, including feminism, were "produced through imperial power rather than in opposition to it" (Burton, 1994: 2). At the same time, many historians have pushed back against post-colonial theory's focus on texts and abstract ideas, warning that this could lead the discipline to ignore important issues like politics, violence, and historical records. John Darwin, for example, cautions against treating empire primarily as "a cultural construct detached from the material structures that sustained it" (Darwin, 2013: 255). The resulting historiography has been shaped more by tension than agreement. Post-colonial theory has changed how scholars think about power, knowledge, and marginalised groups, demonstrating the ways in which these scholars have responded to the insights offered by post-colonial theory, even if these responses have not always universal.

Research Plan

This research article analyses the ways in which studies of the modern British Empire have been shaped, challenged, and reoriented by the insights of postcolonial theory. This article will argue that whilst the reshaping of the historiography has not been universally altered, historians of the modern British Empire have responded to insights of post-colonial theory in several ways. Using post-modernist methods, these scholars strive to recover the voice and agency of those left out of the archive and examine the true legacy of empire. In this article, the 'modern British Empire' delineates the period from 'New Imperialism' of the late 19th century up to the era of decolonisation which originated in the aftermath of the Second World

War, a period which saw both the British Empire reach its gargantuan height as well as seeing the crumbling of Europe's hegemonic empires. It is important to mention that due to the breadth of the historiography it is impossible to include all of the different schools of modern British Empire historiography in this article. The British imperial historian C. A. Bayly contended that, from the 1980s onwards, the influence of postcolonial theory, especially the increasing politicisation of imperial history and regional historians' engagement with subaltern studies, has profoundly shaped scholarly approaches to the study of the modern British Empire (Bayly in Winks (ed.), 1999, p. 68). The over-politisation of imperial history over the past decade is untangled in an article by Dr. Robert Saunders, a lecturer in Modern British History at Queen Mary University of London. Saunders's article "offers a new reading of the relationship between Brexit and imperial memory", outlining how Britain's legacy of empire has massively impacted political decisions (Saunders, 2020: 1143). One of the article's central arguments is that "imperial modes of thought could shape the views of supporters, as well as opponents, of European integration" (Saunders, 2020, p. 1144).

This article analyses how the ideas of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon have influenced what historians have written about the modern British Empire, as their ideas and concepts are commonly viewed as foundational in post-colonial thinking. However, it is also very important to note that these scholars do not have a monopoly over post-colonial concepts and ideas, and a larger study would include a wider array of scholars and academic critics. It is also important to note that it is often hard to explicitly highlight key points when a historian is trying to reject post-colonial theory. One of the examples in the historiography is from the British historian John Darwin, who in his book *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain*, criticised Orientalism, as it assumed that during the era of empire there were no debates that "upset the smooth ideological mould" (Darwin, 2013: 267).

Analyses

'Orientalism': The Legacy of the Perception of Western 'Superiority'

Edward Said's 1978 publication, *Orientalism*, is widely regarded as the foundational text of post-colonial theory as an academic field. Edward Said (1935-2003) was a Palestinian-American academic and political activist whose concern and interest in colonial relationships and power structures originated with "the Israel[i] occupation in his birthplace of Palestine" (Rudolph and Sriprakash, 2025: 1156). Said argued that despite the end of 'formal' empire, the idea rooted in colonial ideology of 'western' superiority was still prevalent in both political and academic discourse. Said was "flabbergasted" to discover on a trip to the Middle East in 1985 that literature courses were "rigorously orthodox, and that young Arabs in Arab universities were dutifully reading Milton, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Austen, and Dickens", instead of writers from the Middle East or Africa (Xie, 1997: 19). For Said, *Orientalism* was "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient[s] special place in the European Western experience" (Said, 1979: 1).

One notable example of a study that attempts to respond to these insights is Wendy Webster's *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965* which illustrates a cultural history. She analyses how ideas of western superiority persisted in Britain, even during the historical moment of decolonisation. Webster constructs a rich narrative situated in an archive of press, radio, feature films, and television that would have influenced the lives of Britons of all races and classes. The author engages with the ideas presented by Said in *Orientalism* noting that British newsreels emphasised "British stability, order, continuity, and history" in the context of the

British withdrawal from India (Webster, 2005: 59). Although the decolonisation of India involved extensive sectarian violence, these events were rarely understood in Britain as consequences of imperial governance. Webster points out that “Violence following independence was seen not as the product of a particular historical event – partition – but as an essential characteristic of the East” (Webster, 2005: 61). Through this example, she demonstrates that, even during the period of imperial decline, colonial tropes depicting social order as being contingent upon British imperial authority, and threatened by its withdrawal, continued to be pervasive. To further solidify this point, Webster asserts that the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi “was used in the Daily Express as further evidence of what happens when the ‘impartial rule of Britain’ was abolished” (Webster, 2005: 61). This illustrates that the violence at the moment of independence was not perceived solely because of Britain’s divide-and-rule tactics or its disastrous partition of India, which created enduring tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities. Rather, it was framed as the end of a supposedly superior ‘Western’ rule, to be replaced by what was perceived as an ‘inferior’ form of independent Indian governance.

Alongside this example of historiography that focuses on British India, Gardner Thompson’s *Legacy of Empire: Britain, Zionism and the Creation of Israel*, illustrates how British actions in the Middle East have left a legacy which has contributed greatly to creating an image of the region being inherently violent and unstable. Although not solely the outcome of Britain’s actions in the region, Thompson argues how “The new Israel was – and remains – scarred by an inter-communal conflict provoked by Zionist colonisation fostered by the British during an ill-judged administration of Palestine tied to the Balfour Declaration” (Thompson, 2019: xiii). A central focus of Thompson’s book is to emphasise that historical events should not be understood as predetermined, as they assert that the present configuration of the Israel–Palestine conflict should not be understood as an inevitable outcome. (Thompson, 2019, p. x). His argument highlights the contingency of historical processes and the role of human agency in shaping outcomes and challenging deterministic interpretations of the past. Thompson is responding to Said’s idea that the representation of the ‘East’ in the western imagination as being an inferior and war-torn area of the globe is not an inevitability, but a result of external intervention by European colonial powers and the United States of America. In doing so, Thompson reinforces the argument that perceptions of the Middle East as inherently violent or unstable are not the product of historical inevitability, but rather the consequence of contingent imperial interventions that continue to shape both material realities and representational frameworks.

Said’s family experienced first-hand the consequences of these events as they were forced to flee Jerusalem at the outbreak of this internal communal conflict with the creation of the state of Israel in 1947. Said, whilst arguing in favour of the political legitimacy for a Jewish Homeland, saw the subjugation of the Palestinian people as akin to Western-style imperialism. In *Blaming the Victims* which he co-authored with Christopher Hitchens in 1988, Said argued that the suppression of the Palestinians was being made possible by US imperialist support for Israel (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 2009: 128). Both of these studies engage with Edward Said’s concept of ‘Orientalism’, seeking to explain and challenge Western academic and political discourses that construct notions of inherent and inevitable “Eastern” instability and inferiority. Beyond this, they further develop the argument that Western colonial powers have historically sought, and continue to seek, to dominate other regions of the world not only through military and economic means but also through cultural, written, and verbal forms of authority, often underpinned by coercion and violence.

The 'Subaltern': Looking Beyond the Archive

Alongside *Orientalism*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* is widely regarded as one of the most influential and controversial interventions within post-colonial theory, described by some scholars as "the most influential work in the field of post-colonial theory" (Maggio, 2007: 419). In this essay, Spivak interrogates whether those positioned at the lowest levels of colonial and patriarchal power structures, particularly women in the Global South, can meaningfully represent their own interests within dominant intellectual and institutional frameworks. Spivak's intervention fundamentally challenged historians' assumptions about recovery, voice, and agency, particularly when working with colonial archives produced overwhelmingly by elite, male, and European historical actors.

Spivak's intellectual formation and lived experience shaped these concerns. Born in Calcutta, British India, in 1942, five years before independence, Spivak later emerged as "among the foremost feminist critics who have achieved internal eminence" (Landry and Maclean (eds), 1996: 2). Drawing on Marxism, feminism, and post-structuralist theory, Spivak questioned whether academic attempts to recover subaltern voices risked reproducing the very power relations they sought to dismantle. Central to Spivak's argument was the concept of the 'subaltern', a term originally coined by the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci to describe groups of an "inferior rank" excluded from hegemonic power (May and Asharagovind, 2024: 88–89). From the 1980s onwards, the term became closely associated with South Asian historiography and came to refer to "third world women and men and the working-class people and those disenfranchised by the western culture" (May and Aksharagovind, 2024: 91).

Spivak's most provocative claim, that 'the subaltern cannot speak', did not deny the existence of subaltern resistance or consciousness, but instead highlighted the structural impossibility of unmediated representation within elite academic discourse. Spivak's work was particularly influential in post-colonial feminist scholarship, where she argued that Western feminist movements frequently universalised women's experiences while marginalising or misrepresenting those of women in the Global South. Spivak further criticised Western economic and philosophical frameworks for ignoring crucial social distinctions within colonised societies. For instance, Spivak argued that Karl Marx's theory of labour disregarded gender roles and caste structures in colonial and post-colonial India (Maggio, 2007). As a result, even radical theoretical traditions could obscure the lived realities of subaltern women. These interventions raised profound methodological challenges for historians, calling into question whether subaltern women's experiences could ever be fully recovered from archives that had systematically excluded them.

Despite Spivak's scepticism, historians of the modern British Empire have increasingly sought to engage with their insights by experimenting with alternative sources, methodologies, and narrative strategies. Clare Midgley's chapter in *Bringing the Empire Home* offers a significant example of this response. Midgley demonstrates how women from colonised societies, though often marginalised within imperial and metropolitan contexts, have nonetheless been able to find a voice and "challenge hegemonic discourses" (Midgley, 2011: 230). By examining the presence of colonised women within Britain itself, Midgley shows how their participation unsettled "essentialised notions of ethnic and racial difference" (Midgley, 2011: 236), thereby complicating dominant narratives of empire and gender.

One of the most prominent figures analysed by Midgley is Pandita Ramabai, a widowed woman from a Hindu Brahmin family in British India. Ramabai travelled to Britain and emerged

as a vocal advocate for women's education following the 1882 Hunter Commission's assessment of Indian schooling. Her campaign was sufficiently influential to gain the support of Queen Victoria, resulting in Indian women in Britain being granted access to medical colleges. However, Midgley's analysis remains attentive to the constraints Ramabai faced. She was pressured by white supporters to avoid public speaking in order to "safeguard her respectability" and subjected to "attempts to remould her into a Christian missionary to Indian women" (Midgley, 2011: 238). Nevertheless, Ramabai resisted these expectations, as Midgley shows that "she sought her own path, questioning Anglican orthodoxy and asserting her own agenda of social reform" (Midgley, 2011: 238). This example illustrates how historians have attempted to navigate Spivak's concerns by acknowledging both agency and constraint, rather than presenting subaltern women as either silent victims or fully autonomous actors.

Midgley further extends this analysis through her examination of women involved in the Pan-Africanist movement during the first half of the twentieth century. Amy Ashwood Garvey, wife of Marcus Garvey, played a central role in the radical wing of the movement, contributing to the formation of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and supporting Ethiopia during the invasion of Ethiopia by Benito Mussolini's Italian forces in 1935. Garvey even went so far as to accompany the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie to the League of Nations in his ill-fated attempt to seek international assistance (Midgley, 2011: 248–249). In contrast, Midgley also explores the career of the Jamaican playwright and journalist Delia Jarrett-Macauley, a reformist figure who opposed communism and worked within British women's organisations such as "the British Commonwealth League, formed in 1925 to encourage the development of women's groups within the Commonwealth" (Midgley, 2011: 248). Despite their ideological differences, both women sought to introduce "feminist ideas into black-led organisations" while also pressing "the white-dominated British and international women's movement to treat black women on terms of equality and take their concerns seriously" (Midgley, 2011: 248).

Through these case studies, Midgley's work illustrates how historians of the modern British Empire have responded to Spivak's theoretical intervention not by claiming to fully 'recover' subaltern voices, but by critically examining the conditions under which those voices emerged, were constrained, or were mediated. This approach reflects a cautious engagement with Spivak's insights, acknowledging the limits of representation while still foregrounding subaltern women as active historical agents. In doing so, such scholarship challenges earlier imperial and feminist historiographies that marginalised colonised women, while remaining attentive to the methodological and ethical problems that Spivak herself so forcefully identified.

'Double Consciousness' and Agency: The Reclaiming of Identity

Lastly, the work of the Martiniquais psychiatrist and political philosopher Frantz Fanon has greatly influenced both post-colonial studies and the historiography of the modern British Empire. Historians influenced by Fanon now write about empire as something resisted and destabilised from below, not dismantled by metropolitan goodwill, and they emphasise both the psychological damage of colonialism and the agency of colonised peoples in reclaiming identity and independence. Fanon's writings challenges the idea that independence was something 'bestowed' upon formerly colonised peoples by the European and American colonial powers. Born in Martinique in 1925 during French colonial rule and fighting for France in the Second World War before training as a psychiatrist in Lyon (London School of Economic and Political Science (LSE), n.d.). Fanon's work has profoundly shaped a historiography that rejects narratives of imperial benevolence by foregrounding colonised peoples as conscious

political agents whose resistance to psychological, cultural, and military intervention, was central to the collapse of empire.

As a psychiatrist, Frantz Fanon produced a collection of writings and essays, posthumously published in *Alienation and Freedom* (2018), in which he argued that the effects of colonialism were closely intertwined with the causes of mental illness, contending that the only way to alleviate these harmful effects was to dismantle the colonial system itself (Fanon, 2018, pp. 73–74). He saw how colonialism had destroyed local cultures and how colonised populations could only ‘rise to the status of the coloniser’ if they assimilated into the cultural norms and practices of the dominant power. In *Black Skin and White Masks* (1952), which is a founding text of post-colonial theory, Fanon wrote that a colonised person has been created “by the death and burial of its local cultural originality” (Fanon, 1986: 18). This text further “explores how racism and colonialism force marginalised people to suppress their true identities, producing internal conflict and feelings of inferiority, while also pointing toward ways of reclaiming identity and dismantling oppressive systems” (Khatun, 2025: 54). This suppression of identity should be understood not only as a psychological effect of colonial domination, but as a deliberate strategy through which colonial power is sustained. By encouraging the internalisation of inferiority, colonialism operates at both structural and subjective levels, shaping how colonised subjects understand themselves and their position within the imperial order.

Fanon further develops this argument by showing how colonial rule encouraged the adoption of the coloniser’s cultural practices. Fanon wrote that “the colonised is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards” (Fanon, 1986: 9). This process of cultural mimicry reinforces colonial hierarchies by associating European norms with civilisation and value, while devaluing indigenous cultures. Consequently, attempts at social mobility within colonial society require a form of self-alienation, in which colonised subjects are pressured to reject aspects of their own identity in order to gain recognition. Building on this, Fanon’s engagement with W.E. B. Du Bois’s concept of ‘double consciousness’ further clarifies the psychological fragmentation produced by colonial domination. Through this framework, Fanon shows how colonial subjects develop a divided sense of self, “attempting to see themselves through both native and colonial perspectives” (Khatun, 2025: 54–55). This dual awareness creates an ongoing tension between self-understanding and external judgement, demonstrating how colonial power persists not only through political and economic control, but also through its capacity to shape consciousness itself.

A study where the influence of Fanon’s writing is clearly demonstrated is Priyamvada Gopal’s, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*, which is an impressive study that charts anti-colonial resistance from the Indian Mutiny in 1857 to the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya from 1952 to 1960. Gopal, the Professor of post-colonial studies at the University of Cambridge, explores the role of the colonised in anti-colonial resistance. His study of anti-colonial resistance movements is extensive, but does not directly focus on the crises generated by Irish resistance, which are frequently used to critique anti-colonial resistance in post-colonial studies (Gopal, 2020: 36). With the aim of empowering those who have been colonised, Gopal takes issue with the claim that the abolitionist movement and decolonisation derived “chiefly from the campaigning consciences of white British reformers or as the logical outcome of the liberal and liberalizing projects that empire ostensibly always was” (Gopal, 2020: 3). The author and activist Akala also augmented his argument when he wrote that “It’s

rather odd, then, that if what the British Empire was offering was so evidently a good deal for all, the restless natives so often picked up their guns to fight against it" (Akala, 2018: 146). Gopal is responding to Fanon's ideas through his desire to grant agency back to those communities and civilisations that were colonised during era of European empires. His idea contrasts with Bernard Porter whose 2007 publication, *Critics of Empire: British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge*, focuses primarily on domestic white British activists who were critical of empire. (Porter, 2008). However, many of the historical figures Porter writes about, whilst being critical of certain elements of empire, were very rarely strong anti-imperialist supporters. Gopal links domestic resistance to those on the periphery of empire. He argues that it was the dissidents of India, Africa, and the wider diaspora that inspired the radicals that Bernard Porter talks about. For Gopal, the ideas and notions that inspired legislation around universal human rights and economic and social injustice owe just as much to these dissidents and activists as to those in the metropole.

To support his argument, Gopal uses the case study of Kenya, and the Indian born British MP for Leyton East, Fenner Brockway. Brockway had a close relationship with the Indian National Congress (INC) in India, and Brockway's support for radical liberationist politics in Kenya was driven by his visits to Kenya "where he witnessed the material underpinnings of the racial oppression" (Gopal, 2020: 408). He saw that it was the conditions of British rule that had created the Mau Mau uprisings in the 1950s, but although a supporter of Kenyan independence, he did not give his backing to the actions and ideas of the Mau Mau rebels. Brockway was not the only pioneer that could see that it was the nature of British rule that had created the conditions for the anti-colonial movements to independently form without any influence from the coloniser. Others figures in Britain like Barbara Castle, Eileen Fletcher and the reformist advisor to the Colonial Office Margery Perham saw that the "persistence of the insurgency drove home the fact that imperial resistance to anticolonial resistance might well have been futile" (Gopal, 2020: 398). Gopal and Akala take the view that colonised people were active agents in the process of decolonisation. They challenge the idea and the notion that the independence for the colonised parts of the globe was something gifted to them by the colonising powers.

Antoinette Burton's *The Trouble with Empire*, exemplifies how historians have sought to reclaim the agency of indigenous peoples, emphasising their active role in achieving liberation from colonial rule through the analysis of colonial warfare. Burton pushes back on the assertion that the late 19th century was a period of unbridled domination for Britain militarily, highlighting that "The Somme was not the first time British colonial subjects witnessed imperial military failure" (Burton, 2015: 25-26). Burton exemplifies how military campaigns that were "won but badly bungled", as well as successive but difficult and costly campaigns against the Zulu Kingdom and the Emirate of Afghanistan "are evidence of the fitful, halting character of imperial supremacy in its heyday" (Burton, 2015: 18). Burton is foregrounding how indigenous people were active agents in fighting back against colonialism to defend their land and societies and further stresses how Britain was not always militarily commanding during the peak of empire. Barabara Bush's publication *Imperialism and Post-Colonialism*, contains a chapter towards the end which focuses on and examines how indigenous people still are campaigning against systematic discrimination in the 21st century (Bush, 2006), highlighting issues like discrimination through disproportionate police violence, as well as western 'modernity' continue to negatively affect indigenous communities' way of life: for example, the 2004 Sydney riots and the 1995 riots in Ontario caused by the killing of young boys from indigenous communities by the law enforcement (Bush, 2006: 208-209). Moreover, Bush

points out that many indigenous communities in regions that were former British colonies still continue to struggle with aspects of modernity. For example, in Canada the Innu peoples' forced "dislocation from homelands and their traditional way of life resulted in alcoholism and substance abuse", and treaties protecting the lands of indigenous communities are often breached in favour of stipulations from oil and gas companies (Bush, 2006: 208). Both authors emphasise that imperial rule has always been, and continues to be, contested by those marginalised under such governance. It is the actions of these communities and societies that bring about 'independence', even if this independence is, in practice, only nominal.

Conclusions:

Historians of the modern British Empire have responded to the insights offered by post-colonial theory by attempting to dispel the myth of 'eastern inferiority', regaining the agency of those who lived under colonial rule, and coming to terms with Empire's legacy. Both Webster and Thompson have responded to Said by looking at the legacy of Empire and how ideas of western superiority persisted. Midgley responds to Spivak's insights around 'subaltern women' by analysing how subaltern women's voices can be recovered in a western dominated world, and what can be achieved by researching and studying history beyond and outside the archive. Finally, historians have responded to the insights offered by Fanon by outlining the role of colonised people in anti-colonial resistance and how this helps these marginalised groups to reclaim their identity stolen by colonialism.

Areas of British imperial history still remain that underscore the limitations and impediments of post-colonial theory. For example, many studies only focus on non-white resistance, which is something Gopal acknowledges; so a future study, for example, on resistance in Ireland would help to plug this gap. Additionally, studies that are more focused on gender histories, especially regarding the experiences of indigenous women in Britain's imperial territories, is a further promising and imperative future topic of study.

Ultimately, the engagement between post-colonial theory and the historiography of the modern British Empire should be understood less as a completed transformation and more as an uneven, ongoing process. While historians have not universally adopted post-colonial theory, its core insights have nonetheless reshaped the questions that imperial historians ask, the sources they privilege, and the power relations they seek to expose. In this sense, post-colonialism's greatest contribution to the study of the modern British Empire lies not in offering a single interpretative model, but in unsettling older certainties and insisting that empire be understood as a lived, contested, and enduring historical experience whose consequences extend well beyond the moment of formal decolonisation.

References

- Ahluwalia, P. (2001), *Politics and Post-colonial Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Akala (2018), *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire*. London: Two Roads.
- Ashcroft, B. and Ahluwalia, P. (Eds.) (2009), *Edward Said*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bayly, C.A. (1999), 'The Second British Empire', In: Winks, R.W. (Ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V – Historiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 54–72.

- Berlin May, S. and Aksharagovind, U.S. (2024), 'Frameworks of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on Subaltern Literature', In: Ravichandran, K. and Kannadhasan, M. (Eds.), *Cultural Diversity and Social Reality in Contemporary Literature*. Chennai: Emerald Publishers, pp. 87–95.
- Burton, A. (2015), *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burton, A.M. (1994), *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press.
- Bush, B. (2006), *Imperialism and Post-Colonialism: History, Concepts, Theories and Practice*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2000), *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Childs, P. and Williams, R.J.P. (Eds.) (1997), *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Cooper, F. (2005), *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Darwin, J. (2013), *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain*. London: Penguin.
- Fanon, F. (1963), *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- _____(1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press.
- _____(2018), *Alienation and Freedom*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Gopal, P. (2020), *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*. London: Verso.
- Guha, R. (1983), *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, C. (2002), *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hiddleston, J. (2009), *Understanding Postcolonialism*. Stocksfield: Acumen.
- Hobson, J.A. (2011), *Imperialism: A Study*. Nottingham: Spokesman.
- Khatun, J. (2025), 'Treatment of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, *International Journal of Science and Development*, 2(2): 53–59.
- Landry, D. and Maclean, G. (Eds.) (1996), 'Introduction', In: Spivak, G.C., *The Spivak Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–16.
- London School of Economics (2026), 'Frantz Fanon', *Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa* [Online]. Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/africa/hub-for-african-thought/thinkers/frantz-fanon> (Accessed: 10 January 2026).
- Louis, W.R. (1999), 'Introduction', In: Winks, R.W. (Ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V – Historiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–42.
- Maggio, J. (2007), '"Can the Subaltern Be Heard?": Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 32(4): 419–443.
- Midgley, C. (2011), 'Bringing the Empire home: women activists in imperial Britain, 1790s–1930s', In: Hall, C. and Rose, S. (Eds.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 231–252.

- Mishra, V. and Hodge, B. (2005), 'What was Postcolonialism?', *New Literary History*, 36(3): 375–402.
- Parsons, J. and Harding, K. (Eds.) (2011), 'Post-Colonial Theory and Action Research', *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 2(2): 1–6.
- Porter, B. (2008), *Critics of Empire: British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Robinson, R. and Gallagher, J. (1961), *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*. London: Macmillan.
- Rudolph, S. and Sriprakash, A. (2025), 'On justice and education: a conversation with Edward Said's work', *Globalisation, Society and Education*, 23(5): 1156–1162.
- Said, E. (1979), *Orientalism*. New York: Random House.
- Saunders, R. (2020), 'Brexit and Empire: "Global Britain" and the Myth of Imperial Nostalgia', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 48(6): 1140–1174.
- Spivak, G.C. (1988), 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', In: Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L. (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, pp. 271–313.
- Thompson, G. (2019), *Legacy of Empire: Britain, Zionism and the Creation of Israel*. London: Saqi Books.
- Webster, W. (2005), *Englishness and Empire, 1939–1965*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, P. (1993), 'Problems of post-colonialism', *Paragraph*, 16(1): 91–102.
- Xie, S. (1997), 'Rethinking the Problem of Postcolonialism', *New Literary History*, 28(1): 7–19.
- Young, R.J.C. (2003), *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Navigating pluralistic health systems: Healthcare-seeking behaviour among people with disabilities in Bangladesh

Ilias Mahmud, PhD

Abstract

Healthcare-seeking behaviour among people with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries remains insufficiently understood, particularly in contexts where biomedical, traditional and religious systems of care coexist. This study examines how people with disabilities in Bangladesh navigate formal and informal healthcare sectors before reaching specialised rehabilitation services. A sequential exploratory mixed-methods design was employed. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 individuals with disabilities and four caregivers of children with disabilities, together with one focus group discussion with five individuals with disabilities. These findings informed a cross-sectional survey of 100 participants, comprised of people with disabilities and caregivers of children with cerebral palsy attending the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed in Savar, Dhaka. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, and quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests and Fisher's exact tests. Most participants initiated some form of treatment promptly after recognising illness; yet access to appropriate rehabilitation was often substantially delayed. Care pathways were dynamic and pluralistic: 82% of participants used both formal and informal sectors, and 36% used both concurrently. Healthcare-seeking decisions were shaped by illness interpretation, the influence of close kin, perceived treatment failure, gendered constraints and weak referral systems. Supernatural explanations of illness were significantly associated with informal healthcare utilisation. The findings suggest that delayed rehabilitation should not be understood simply as individual delay, but as the cumulative outcome of iterative therapeutic pathways produced through the interaction of cultural meanings, social relations and fragmented health-system responses. Disability-inclusive health systems require earlier referral, decentralised rehabilitation and culturally competent communication with patients and families.

Keywords

healthcare-seeking behaviour, disability, medical pluralism, rehabilitation, Bangladesh

Introduction

Disability is a major public health, development and equity issue. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 1.3 billion people, or around 16% of the global population, experience significant disability (WHO, 2022). Earlier estimates from the *World Report on Disability* placed global disability prevalence at approximately 15%, while also highlighting the disproportionate burden experienced in low- and middle-income countries (WHO and World Bank, 2011). Disability is closely linked to poverty, social exclusion and reduced access to education, employment and healthcare. A systematic review by Banks, Kuper and Polack (2017) found strong evidence of an association between disability and economic poverty across low- and middle-income countries, suggesting a mutually reinforcing relationship in which poverty increases the risk of disability and disability increases the risk of poverty.

In Bangladesh, disability must be understood within a broader context of poverty, uneven service distribution, limited rehabilitation provision and socio-cultural interpretations of illness and impairment. Estimating disability prevalence remains challenging because disability measurement varies across surveys, definitions and data collection tools (Mont, 2007; Mitra, *et al.* 2021). However, there is broad agreement that people with disabilities in Bangladesh, as in many other low- and middle-income countries, face barriers to timely, appropriate and affordable healthcare. These barriers include cost, limited availability of specialist services, inadequate referral pathways, physical inaccessibility, stigma and poor communication with providers (Bright, *et al.* 2018; Hashemi, *et al.* 2022).

Healthcare-seeking behaviour provides a useful lens through which to understand how people interpret illness, evaluate treatment options and move through healthcare systems. In pluralistic health systems such as Bangladesh, individuals may seek care from multiple therapeutic sectors, including biomedical practitioners, hospitals, traditional healers, religious healers, homeopaths and informal providers. Medical pluralism is not merely the coexistence of multiple forms of care; it also refers to the ways people actively move between these sectors, often combining them in response to illness severity, perceived efficacy, cost, trust, accessibility and social advice (Leslie, 1980; Sudhinaraset, *et al.* 2013).

For people with disabling conditions, healthcare-seeking behaviour may be particularly complex. Conditions such as stroke, spinal cord injury and cerebral palsy may involve sudden or poorly understood symptoms, long-term functional limitations and uncertain expectations about recovery. Families may therefore move repeatedly between providers in search of a cure, an explanation or hope. Existing healthcare-seeking literature in Bangladesh and other low- and middle-income contexts has often focused on general illness, maternal health or acute conditions, with less attention to disability-specific trajectories. Evidence on access to healthcare for people with disabilities shows that they experience interacting barriers across attitudinal, informational, logistical and service-availability domains (Bright, *et al.* 2018; Hashemi, *et al.* 2022), but less is known about how these barriers shape sequential and concurrent movement between formal and informal care before accessing specialised rehabilitation.

This study addresses that gap by examining the healthcare-seeking behaviour of people with disabling conditions attending a specialised rehabilitation centre in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Specifically, the study explores patterns of healthcare utilisation, sequences of care, determinants of treatment choice and transitions between formal and informal sectors. The paper is theoretically informed by Kleinman's explanatory model of illness, which emphasises culturally shaped understandings of illness causation and treatment through medical pluralism, by explaining how people move between multiple therapeutic systems within the same health context (Kleinman, 1980; Leslie, 1980; Sudhinaraset, *et al.* 2013). The contribution of the paper is to extend these frameworks to disability-related healthcare-seeking by showing that pathways to rehabilitation are not only pluralistic, but also iterative, relational and temporally prolonged. The study uses the term *iterative therapeutic pathways* to describe repeated and non-linear movement across care sectors, shaped by changing illness interpretations, family decision-making, perceived treatment failure and fragmented referral arrangements. It argues that delayed access to rehabilitation is not simply the result of individual delay or lack of knowledge, but emerges from the interaction between cultural interpretation, social relations and health-system fragmentation. In doing so, the paper contributes to medical pluralism scholarship by showing that, in the context of disabling

conditions, pluralistic healthcare-seeking is not merely a matter of choosing between therapeutic systems, but a temporally extended process in which families repeatedly re-evaluate illness in terms of meaning, treatment efficacy and hope for recovery.

Methods

Study design

This study adopted a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, in which qualitative data collection and analysis preceded and informed the development of the quantitative instrument. This design was appropriate because healthcare-seeking behaviour among people with disabling conditions remains under-researched in Bangladesh, and initial qualitative exploration was needed to identify locally meaningful categories, experiences and pathways. The qualitative component explored lived experiences, illness interpretation and treatment trajectories, while the quantitative component examined patterns and associations in healthcare-seeking behaviour (Creswell and Clark, 2018).

Study setting

The study was conducted at the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) in Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh. CRP is a specialised rehabilitation facility providing multidisciplinary services for people with disabilities, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy and social reintegration support. As a referral centre serving people from different geographical and socio-economic backgrounds, CRP provided an appropriate setting to examine how people with disabling conditions reach specialised rehabilitation after navigating other forms of care. The facility-based design means that the study captures the experiences of people who reached CRP, rather than the experiences of all people with disabilities in Bangladesh, including those who never reach specialised rehabilitation.

Study population and sampling

The study population comprised people with disabling conditions (spinal cord injury and stroke) and caregivers of children with cerebral palsy attending CRP for treatment and rehabilitation. Individuals requiring emergency care and those unwilling to participate were excluded.

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to ensure variation by gender, age, socio-economic background and type of disability. Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with participants or caregivers, including people with spinal cord injury, people with stroke and mothers of children with cerebral palsy. One focus group discussion was also conducted with five men with spinal cord injury to explore collective experiences and shared interpretations of healthcare-seeking. Sampling continued until no substantially new themes were emerging from the qualitative interviews, consistent with the principle of thematic saturation (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006).

For the quantitative component, a cross-sectional survey was conducted with 100 participants, including people with spinal cord injury, stroke, and caregivers of children with cerebral palsy. Random sampling was used for participants with spinal cord injury where feasible, while participants with cerebral palsy and stroke were recruited consecutively due to service access patterns. This pragmatic approach reflects the constraints of facility-based research in low-resource rehabilitation settings. Because participants were recruited from a specialised

rehabilitation centre, the sample should be interpreted as representing people who successfully reached rehabilitation services, not the wider population of people with disabilities who may remain outside such services.

Data collection

Data were collected through a triangulated approach comprising one focus group discussion, in-depth interviews and a structured survey. The focus group discussion was conducted first and informed the development of the interview guide. Semi-structured interviews then explored illness recognition, treatment choices, family influence, transitions between providers, costs and pathways to CRP. Interviews were conducted in Bangla at times and locations convenient to participants within the CRP setting. Interviews and discussions were documented through detailed field notes and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were reviewed for completeness and, where feasible, validated with participants.

The survey questionnaire was developed from the qualitative findings to ensure contextual relevance. It included structured and semi-structured questions on socio-demographic characteristics, diagnosis, treatment options used, sequence of care, reasons for selecting providers, costs, family influence and time taken to reach rehabilitation. The questionnaire was pre-tested and refined before administration. Trained research assistants administered the survey under the supervision of the principal investigator.

Data analysis

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic content analysis. Transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve immersion in the data. Codes were developed to capture treatment choices, illness interpretations, social influence, provider experiences, referral pathways and expectations of cure or rehabilitation. Codes were then grouped into broader categories and interpreted in relation to the social and cultural context of healthcare-seeking behaviour. This approach was informed by interpretive qualitative analysis, which emphasises the meaning of action within context (Dey, 1993).

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for socio-demographic variables, treatment options and reported reasons for healthcare-seeking. Associations between healthcare-seeking behaviours and explanatory variables, including gender, diagnosis, education, residence, perceived economic status and perceived cause of disability, were examined using Chi-square tests or Fisher's exact tests where appropriate. A p -value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant. Data were analysed using SPSS version 14.

Integration occurred at both instrument development and interpretation stages. Qualitative findings informed the survey instrument, while quantitative patterns were interpreted in light of interview and focus group data. For example, statistical associations between supernatural attribution and informal care use were interpreted alongside qualitative accounts of how families explained illness causation and evaluated treatment options. Similarly, quantitative findings on limited physiotherapy access were interpreted in relation to interview accounts describing weak referral, unclear communication and repeated movement between providers. This enabled the study to combine numerical patterns with contextual explanations of why participants moved between providers and sectors.

No multivariable modelling was conducted. The statistical analysis therefore identifies bivariate associations rather than independent predictors or causal relationships. This limitation is considered in the interpretation of findings.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health and from CRP. Informed verbal consent was obtained from all participants, with study procedures explained in Bangla. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and secure storage of field notes and transcripts. Where participants had communication difficulties or where children with cerebral palsy were involved, caregivers were interviewed as appropriate.

Results

The results are presented by integrating quantitative patterns with qualitative interpretation. Survey findings describe the distribution of healthcare-seeking practices and associated factors, while qualitative accounts are used to interpret the social and cultural mechanisms underlying these patterns. The analysis therefore does not treat the qualitative and quantitative components as separate datasets, but as complementary evidence for understanding healthcare pathways.

Sample characteristics

The study included 100 participants, comprising individuals with disabling conditions and caregivers of children with cerebral palsy attending the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP). Participants were drawn from 36 districts across Bangladesh, reflecting broad geographical representation among those who accessed CRP services.

As shown in Table 1, the sample was predominantly male (83%) and rural (69%). Over half (56%) had been primary earning members prior to disability, indicating substantial socio-economic disruption. The age distribution was concentrated among economically productive adults (20–57 years: 56%), alongside a substantial proportion of children (30%), primarily those with cerebral palsy.

Participants were socio-economically disadvantaged. Most were engaged in manual labour, service work or agriculture prior to disability, and household income levels were low. Among households reporting income (n=84), the median monthly income was BDT 3,500 (146.14 PPP dollars), with 75% earning BDT 5,000 (208.77 PPP Dollars) or less, while 16% reported no current income. These characteristics indicate a population facing significant financial vulnerability, likely shaping healthcare access and decision-making.

Overall, the sample represents a socio-economically disadvantaged group of rehabilitation users, characterised by rural residence, reliance on manual occupations and limited financial resources. Because all participants had reached CRP, the sample should not be interpreted as representative of all people with disabilities in Bangladesh.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants (n=100)

Variable	Category	%/Stat	Variable	Category	%/Stat
Age group	≤12 years	30	Education (n=70*)	None	24
	13–19 years	7		Primary	20
	20–57 years	56		Secondary	30
	>57 years	7		Higher secondary	16
Gender	Male	83	Occupation (n=70*)	Bachelor+	10
	Female	17		Manual labour	31
Diagnosis	Spinal cord injury	42		Service	21
	Stroke	28		Farmer	13
	Cerebral palsy	30		Small business	10
Role before disability	Earning member	56	Key earner education (n=68†)	Housewife	11
	Housewife	3		Student	7
	Dependent	41		Other	7
Residence	Rural	69		None	22
	Urban	31		Primary	19
Religion	Muslim	91	Key earner occupation (n=68‡)	SSC	37
	Hindu	8		HSC	13
	Christian	1		Bachelor+	9
Perceived economic status	Poor	31		Manual labour	28
	Non-poor	69		Service	28
Household monthly income (BDT) (n=84‡)	Mean	5435.7		Farmer	19
	Median	3500		Small business	16
				Other	9

*CP excluded; † no additional earner; ‡ 16% no income.

Illness recognition, care initiation and financial burden

Most participants initiated some form of treatment promptly after recognising illness, with 83% seeking care within 24 hours. However, prompt initiation did not necessarily mean timely access to appropriate care. Qualitative accounts suggested that recognition of disabling conditions could itself be delayed, particularly in children with cerebral palsy. Families often interpreted early signs through non-biomedical explanations, and some reported that providers did not adequately explain the nature

or prognosis of the condition. Thus, delay was not located only at the point of deciding whether to seek care, but also in recognising the condition and being directed towards appropriate rehabilitation.

Healthcare financing imposed a substantial burden. Participants used multiple sources to pay for treatment, including current income, savings, loans, sale of assets and support from relatives. The median expenditure on treatment was BDT 50,000 (2,087.7 PPP dollars), with some participants reporting substantially higher costs. Qualitative narratives indicated that families were often willing to incur severe financial hardship in pursuit of cure, particularly when prognosis was unclear and social expectations of recovery remained strong.

These findings suggest a distinction between early care initiation and timely access to appropriate rehabilitation. Most participants were not delaying care in the sense of doing nothing; rather, many entered a sequence of treatment attempts that did not immediately connect them to rehabilitation.

Patterns of healthcare utilisation: medical pluralism

Participants reported extensive engagement with both formal and informal healthcare providers prior to admission for rehabilitation (Table 2). Within the informal sector, treatment from traditional healers (kabiraj) (60%) and religious venues (57%) was highly prevalent, while a smaller proportion engaged in self-care (9%).

In parallel, utilisation of the formal sector was widespread, particularly independent allopathic practitioners (92%) and government hospitals (64%), followed by private clinics (44%). Access to rehabilitation-related services remained limited, with only 26% of participants reporting physiotherapy use prior to admission. Homeopathic treatment was also utilised by a minority (19%).

Importantly, healthcare utilisation was not confined to a single sector. A substantial majority of participants (82%) reported using both formal and informal healthcare systems at some point, while over one-third (36%) engaged with both concurrently (Table 2). These findings demonstrate a pronounced pattern of medical pluralism, characterised by overlapping, sequential and sometimes simultaneous engagement across multiple therapeutic systems. Qualitative accounts helped explain this pattern: participants and families often moved between providers when recovery was slower than expected, when explanations were unclear, or when relatives and neighbours recommended alternative options.

Table 2. Utilisation of formal and informal healthcare sectors prior to admission to CRP (n = 100)

Healthcare sector	Treatment modality	% of participants
Informal sector	Kabiraj (traditional healer)	60

Healthcare sector	Treatment modality	% of participants
Formal sector	Religious venue (spiritual healing)	57
	Self-care	9
	Allopathic practitioner	92
	Government hospital	64
	Private clinic/hospital	44
	Physiotherapy services	26
	Homeopathic practitioner	19
Cross-sector utilization	Used both formal and informal sectors	82
	Concurrent use of formal and informal care	36

Note: Multiple responses were allowed.

Determinants of healthcare-seeking behaviour

Healthcare-seeking behaviour was shaped by a dynamic interaction between illness interpretation, family and community influence, perceived treatment effectiveness, cost, access and referral practices. Across all treatment modalities, the influence of close kin emerged as one of the most consistent determinants (52–90%) (Table 3). Illness causation was also central: biomedical interpretations tended to direct participants towards formal care, whereas spiritual or supernatural explanations were strongly associated with informal care.

Self-care was uncommon (9%) and was primarily associated with the perception that the illness was not serious (67%) and with suggestions from close kin (78%). This pattern reflects initial misrecognition of illness severity rather than deliberate avoidance of care. Participants who were not earning members of the household were more likely to report self-care than earning members ($p = 0.041$), suggesting that social role within the household may influence early care decisions.

Use of kabiraj (60%) was shaped by close kin advice (90%), perceived effectiveness (68%) and beliefs in spiritual or supernatural causation (64%) (Table 3). Kabiraj use was significantly associated with gender ($p = 0.039$), diagnosis ($p = 0.009$) and supernatural illness causation ($p = 0.003$). Qualitative findings indicated that conditions with less visible or less clearly understood biomedical causes—particularly cerebral palsy and stroke—were more likely to be interpreted through supernatural frameworks, whereas traumatic conditions such as spinal cord injury were more readily understood in biomedical terms. This integration of statistical and qualitative evidence indicates that informal care use was not simply a matter of low formal-service access, but was embedded in explanatory models of illness and family interpretation.

Religious healing (57%) was similarly driven by religious belief (88%) and close kin influence (53%), with additional contributions from perceived spiritual causation (21%) (Table 3). Its use was significantly associated with gender ($p = 0.047$) and diagnosis ($p = 0.033$), suggesting

that engagement with religious care is shaped both by social norms and by the perceived nature of the condition. These findings indicate that informal care forms part of a culturally embedded therapeutic system rather than functioning as a simple alternative to biomedical care.

Formal healthcare utilisation was widespread. Independent allopathic practitioners were the most frequently used providers (92%), driven by perceived effectiveness (79%), close kin advice (72%) and perceived severity (44%). Notably, no significant socio-demographic predictors were identified for allopathic practitioner use, suggesting that this form of care was broadly used across population groups. However, access to higher-level formal care was more socially differentiated. Use of private clinics or hospitals (44%) was significantly associated with diagnosis ($p = 0.001$), urban residence ($p = 0.001$) and higher education ($p = 0.020$), and was driven by perceptions of better service quality (55%) and provider referral (36%). Government hospital utilisation (64%) was significantly associated with diagnosis ($p = 0.002$), with individuals with spinal cord injury more likely to access these services. Participants reported choosing government facilities due to accessibility (42%), referral (39%) and lower cost (16%), although qualitative findings highlighted dissatisfaction with service quality in some cases.

Homeopathic treatment (19%) was influenced by perceived effectiveness (68%) and close kin advice (63%), and was more commonly used for children, particularly those with cerebral palsy (Table 3). This pattern reflects caregiver perceptions that homeopathic medicines are milder and more suitable for children. Statistically, homeopathy use was significantly associated with diagnosis ($p = 0.002$) and education of the key earning family member ($p = 0.036$).

Access to rehabilitation-related care prior to admission to CRP was limited. Only 26% of participants had accessed physiotherapy, and this was overwhelmingly driven by referral from doctors or healthcare facilities (92%) (Table 3). Physiotherapy use was significantly associated with diagnosis ($p < 0.001$), with children with cerebral palsy more likely to receive such care. This indicates that rehabilitation services were not routinely integrated into earlier stages of care and were typically accessed only after prolonged engagement with other providers. Qualitative accounts suggested that participants often encountered formal providers without receiving clear explanation or timely referral to rehabilitation.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that healthcare-seeking behaviour was not determined by a single factor but emerged from the interaction of explanatory models of illness, social influence, prior treatment experience and structural features of the health system. These mechanisms are synthesised in Table 3 and further illustrated in Figure 1, which shows how illness interpretation and family influence shape entry into formal or informal care, while perceived treatment failure, search for cure and social recommendation drive movement between sectors before eventual access to specialised rehabilitation.

Table 3. Key determinants of selected health-seeking behaviours

Health-seeking behaviour	Main reported determinants (% of respondents)	Significant associations
Self-care	Close kin advice (78%); illness perceived as	Previous household role ($p = 0.041$)

Health-seeking behaviour	Main reported determinants (% of respondents)	Significant associations
	negligible (67%); lower cost (11%)	
Kabiraj / traditional healer	Close kin advice (90%); perceived effectiveness (68%); spiritual/supernatural causation (64%); low cost (5%)	Gender ($p = 0.039$); diagnosis ($p = 0.009$); supernatural causation ($p = 0.003$)
Religious healing	Religious belief (88%); close kin advice (53%); perceived effectiveness (22%); spiritual causation (21%)	Gender ($p = 0.047$); diagnosis ($p = 0.033$)
Homeopathy	Perceived effectiveness (68%); close kin advice (63%); easy access (21%); low cost (5%)	Diagnosis ($p = 0.002$); key family earner's education ($p = 0.036$)
Allopathic practitioner	Perceived effectiveness (79%); close kin advice (72%); perceived severity (44%); prior treatment failure (14%)	No significant socio-demographic association identified
Private clinic / hospital	Perceived good service (55%); close kin advice (52%); referral (36%); easy access (30%)	Diagnosis ($p = 0.001$); residence ($p = 0.001$); education ($p = 0.020$)
Government hospital	Close kin advice (59%); easy access (42%); referral (39%); perceived good service (25%); low cost (16%)	Diagnosis ($p = 0.002$)
Physiotherapy	Referral from provider (92%); close kin advice (12%); prior treatment failure (12%); perceived effectiveness (8%)	Diagnosis ($p < 0.001$); previous household role ($p < 0.001$)

Note: Multiple responses were allowed.

Determinants of initial treatment choice

Initial treatment choice reflected illness interpretation and family-level decision-making rather than structural access factors alone (Table 4).

Participants who attributed their condition to biomedical causes were significantly more likely to initiate care within the formal sector ($p < 0.001$), particularly when these interpretations were shared by close kin. Conversely, spiritual or supernatural interpretations were associated with initial use of informal care.

Diagnosis influenced entry pathways ($p = 0.014$), with traumatic conditions more likely to be interpreted biomedically. Previous household role was also significant ($p = 0.004$), with earning members more likely to initiate formal care.

These findings suggest that entry into the health system is governed by collective interpretation of illness, rather than socio-demographic position alone. However, because these are bivariate associations, they should not be interpreted as independent predictors.

Table 4. Determinants of initial treatment choice (formal vs informal first contact)

Determinant	Association with initial treatment choice	p-value
Perceived biomedical causation (patient)	↑ Likelihood of formal care as first option	$p < 0.001$
Perceived biomedical causation (close kin)	↑ Likelihood of formal care as first option	$p < 0.001$
Diagnosis	Variation by condition (SCI → formal; CP/stroke → mixed/informal)	$p = 0.014$
Previous household role	Earning members → more likely formal; non-earning → more likely informal/self-care	$p = 0.004$
Gender	No significant association	NS
Education	No significant association	NS
Residence (rural/urban)	No significant association	NS
Perceived economic status	No significant association	NS

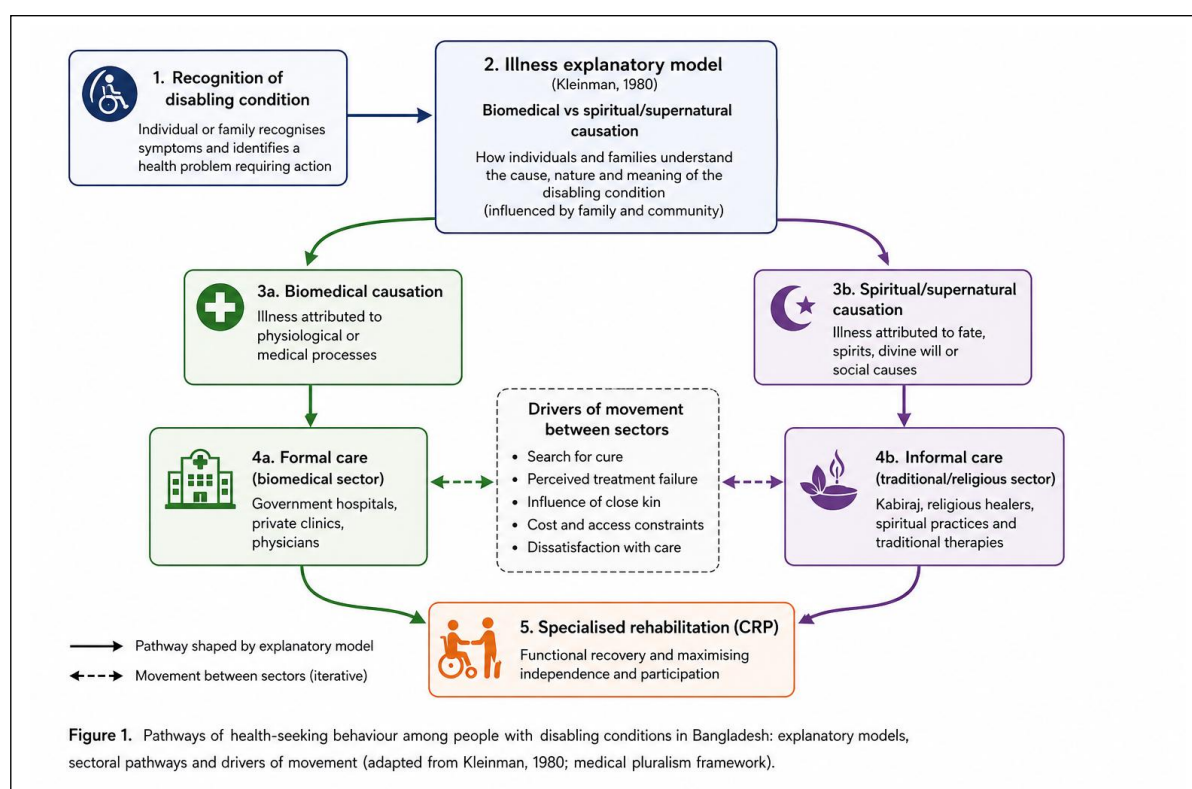
Note: Associations based on Chi-square and Fisher's exact tests, as appropriate. NS indicates non-significant ($p > 0.05$).

Care pathways and sectoral movement

Analysis of treatment sequences revealed that healthcare-seeking behaviour was highly dynamic and iterative. Although a majority of participants initiated care within the formal healthcare sector, many subsequently transitioned to informal providers before eventually accessing specialised rehabilitation services. This pattern indicates that initial engagement with biomedical care did not necessarily result in sustained utilisation or timely access to appropriate services.

Movement between formal and informal sectors was not unidirectional. Participants frequently navigated back and forth between these sectors, often simultaneously, reflecting ongoing uncertainty and the search for effective treatment. These transitions were shaped by illness interpretations, social influence and prior treatment experiences. This pattern is best understood as an iterative therapeutic pathway: participants did not simply move from no care to formal care to rehabilitation, but cycled through multiple systems as explanations, expectations and assessments of treatment effectiveness changed.

Figure 1 synthesises these pathways, illustrating how illness recognition is mediated through explanatory models (Kleinman, 1980), which guide entry into either formal (biomedical) or informal (spiritual/supernatural) care. The figure further highlights the iterative nature of movement between sectors and the key drivers underpinning these transitions, including search for cure, perceived treatment failure and influence of close kin.



Delayed access to appropriate healthcare

Despite early initiation of some form of care, many participants experienced prolonged delays before reaching appropriate rehabilitation. More than half reported delays exceeding three months. Participant accounts suggest gaps in referral and communication, limited awareness of specialised rehabilitation, and continued engagement with multiple providers, all of which appeared to prolong access to rehabilitation. These delays increased financial burdens and prolonged uncertainty for families.

The findings suggest that delay should be understood in three interrelated ways. First, there may be delays in recognising a condition as requiring biomedical or rehabilitative intervention, particularly when symptoms are gradual, ambiguous or interpreted through supernatural explanations. Second, there may be delays in accessing appropriate care, where treatment is sought promptly but does not address rehabilitation needs. Third, there may be delays in referral, where contact with formal healthcare does not lead to timely direction towards

rehabilitation. This distinction is important because the data show that most participants were not inactive; rather, they were active care-seekers within a fragmented and pluralistic system.

Discussion

This study contributes to the literature on healthcare-seeking behaviour in low- and middle-income countries by showing that people with disabling conditions are not passive recipients of care, but active navigators of complex, socially embedded and pluralistic health systems. The key finding is not simply that participants delayed care. Rather, most initiated treatment rapidly after recognising illness, but their subsequent pathways were prolonged, iterative and often poorly aligned with appropriate rehabilitation. This shifts the analytical focus from individual delay to the wider problem of misalignment between illness trajectories, social interpretation and health-system responsiveness.

The findings are usefully interpreted through Kleinman's explanatory model of illness, which emphasises that patients and families interpret illness through culturally situated understandings of causation, severity, prognosis and appropriate treatment (Kleinman, 1980). In this study, explanatory models were not fixed. They changed over time as participants encountered different providers, received conflicting advice, experienced treatment failure and were influenced by close kin and community members. Biomedical explanations often supported entry into formal care, whereas supernatural or spiritual explanations, including beliefs such as *batash laga*, were associated with traditional healers and religious venues. This shows that care-seeking cannot be adequately understood as a simple matter of knowledge deficit. Rather, people acted within locally meaningful systems of interpretation while also responding to the practical limitations of health-system encounters.

The study also demonstrates the continuing relevance of medical pluralism, while extending it in the context of disability-related rehabilitation. Participants did not treat biomedical, traditional and religious care as mutually exclusive. Instead, they moved across these sectors sequentially and sometimes simultaneously. This finding is consistent with classic work on medical pluralism (Leslie, 1980), but also with more recent empirical work showing that therapeutic itineraries in pluralistic settings are shaped by perceived efficacy, access, trust, illness severity and social recommendation (Sudhinaraset, *et al.* 2013; Sundararajan, *et al.* 2020). The additional contribution of this study is to show that, for disabling conditions, pluralistic care-seeking is often temporally extended and repeatedly reworked. The concept of *iterative therapeutic pathways* captures this process: families moved between providers not as a single choice between systems, but as an ongoing response to uncertainty, unsatisfactory explanations, high expectations of cure and limited access to rehabilitation.

A central contribution of the study is that early formal-sector contact did not ensure appropriate care. Most participants accessed what they perceived to be formal healthcare, but many were not referred promptly to rehabilitation. Participant accounts suggest gaps in referral pathways, patient-provider communication and availability of rehabilitation services, which may have contributed to repeated movement between providers. This aligns with global evidence that people with disabilities face interacting barriers to healthcare, including informational, attitudinal, logistical and service-availability barriers (Bright *et al.*, 2018; Hashemi *et al.*, 2022). WHO similarly argues that health inequities for people with disabilities are generated by health-system barriers, including inaccessible services, inadequate provider training, poor coordination and exclusion from health planning (WHO, 2022). The findings therefore support a structural interpretation, although this must be stated cautiously. Because the study is based

on patient and caregiver accounts rather than provider- or system-level data, it indicates perceived and experienced fragmentation rather than directly measuring health-system performance.

The role of close kin was particularly important. Decisions about care were rarely individualised; they were negotiated within families and communities. Close kin shaped the interpretation of symptoms, recommended providers, financed treatment and influenced transitions between formal and informal sectors. This challenges individualistic models of healthcare-seeking behaviour and supports a more relational understanding of care. In contexts of uncertainty, family and community networks can provide emotional, informational and financial support. However, when biomedical communication is weak, these same networks may reinforce supernatural explanations or prolong engagement with ineffective treatment. The issue is therefore not whether family influence is beneficial or harmful, but how it interacts with uncertainty, trust and the quality of formal healthcare encounters.

Gendered patterns in the findings also require sociological interpretation. Women were more likely to use traditional healers, whereas men were more likely to use religious venues. This may reflect gendered differences in mobility, financial autonomy, social prioritisation of illness and acceptability of travelling to providers outside the home. Prior research from Bangladesh has shown that gender, poverty and social position shape healthcare-seeking behaviour and access to care (Ahmed, *et al.* 2000). In disability contexts, these inequalities may be compounded, as women with disabling conditions may face both gendered devaluation and disability-related exclusion. Disability-related healthcare-seeking should therefore be analysed not only through service access, but also through intersecting social relations of gender, dependency, mobility and household decision-making. However, given the small number of female participants in this study, these gendered interpretations should be treated as suggestive rather than definitive.

The findings further highlight the marginal position of rehabilitation within the wider health system. Despite extensive use of biomedical services, only a minority of participants had accessed physiotherapy before admission to CRP. This suggests that rehabilitation was not sufficiently integrated into earlier points of care for many participants. Recent evidence indicates that people with disabilities continue to face substantial inequities in access to general healthcare and rehabilitation services across income settings (Gréaux *et al.*, 2023; Kuper *et al.*, 2024). The World Health Assembly resolution WHA76.6 calls for rehabilitation to be expanded and integrated into health systems as part of universal health coverage (WHO, 2023). The present findings provide empirical support for this policy agenda by showing how delayed referral and limited early rehabilitation access may contribute to prolonged therapeutic wandering, unnecessary expenditure and delayed functional support.

Another important finding is the transformation of expectations over time. Many participants initially sought a complete cure, and this expectation drove repeated provider-switching. However, after engagement with specialised rehabilitation, expectations shifted towards maximising independence and learning to live with impairment. This shift reflects a reconfiguration of illness meaning through interaction with rehabilitation professionals. It also shows the importance of communication in shaping realistic expectations. Evidence on patient–clinician communication suggests that effective communication can influence understanding, trust, adherence and health outcomes (Street, *et al.* 2009). In this study, weak

communication earlier in the pathway appears to have created a vacuum in which alternative explanations and repeated provider-switching became more likely.

The implications are both cultural and structural. Interventions should not simply attempt to replace local beliefs with biomedical information. Such approaches risk misunderstanding the social logic of pluralistic care-seeking. Instead, disability-inclusive health systems should combine culturally competent communication with practical referral mechanisms. Providers need to explain diagnosis, prognosis and rehabilitation options clearly and early. Referral systems should be standardised so that people with stroke, spinal cord injury and cerebral palsy are directed promptly to appropriate rehabilitation. Rehabilitation should also be decentralised beyond specialist centres and integrated into district-level and primary healthcare systems.

This study has limitations. As participants were recruited from a specialised rehabilitation centre, the findings may not represent people with disabling conditions who never reach such services. This is not a minor limitation; the study captures the experiences of people who successfully reached rehabilitation, and therefore may underestimate barriers among those who remain outside specialised care. Recall bias is possible because participants reconstructed past treatment pathways retrospectively. In addition, the boundaries between formal and informal care were sometimes blurred, particularly where participants perceived providers as formal even if their qualifications were uncertain. The quantitative analysis was limited to descriptive and bivariate statistics; without multivariable analysis, the study cannot establish independent predictors of care-seeking behaviour or control for confounding. The study also did not include provider interviews or health-system data; so claims about referral weakness and service fragmentation are based on participant experience rather than direct assessment of provider practices. Nevertheless, the mixed-methods design, inclusion of participants from 36 districts and integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence provide a nuanced account of care-seeking trajectories among people who reached specialised rehabilitation.

This case study indicates that healthcare-seeking behaviour among people with disabling conditions in Bangladesh is dynamic, relational and pluralistic. Participants moved across care sectors not because they were passive or irrational, but because they were attempting to make sense of disabling conditions in the context of uncertainty, social pressure and limited rehabilitation access. For health systems, the challenge is not simply to increase service use, but to ensure that early contact with care leads to timely, coordinated and disability-appropriate rehabilitation. This requires a shift from individualised explanations of health-seeking behaviour towards a broader analysis of how cultural meanings, social relations and health-system structures jointly produce pathways to care.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that people with disabling conditions and their caregivers in Bangladesh actively seek care across multiple therapeutic systems, but they often experience delayed access to appropriate rehabilitation. The findings show that care pathways are shaped by explanatory models of illness, social influence, gendered constraints, perceived treatment failure and fragmented referral systems. The paper contributes to medical pluralism scholarship by conceptualising disability-related healthcare-seeking as an iterative therapeutic pathway rather than a linear sequence of treatment decisions. For disability-inclusive health systems, improving outcomes requires more than increasing formal healthcare contact. It

requires ensuring that early contact leads to appropriate explanation, referral and rehabilitation. Policies should prioritise decentralised rehabilitation services, provider training in disability and communication, and culturally competent engagement with families and communities.

References

- Ahmed, S.M., *et al.* (2000). Gender, socioeconomic development and health-seeking behaviour in Bangladesh. *Social Science & Medicine*, 51(3), 361–371. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536\(99\)00461-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(99)00461-X)
- Banks, L.M., Kuper, H. & Polack, S. (2017). Poverty and disability in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review. *PLOS ONE*, 12(12), e0189996. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0189996>
- Bright, T. & Kuper, H. (2018). A systematic review of access to general healthcare services for people with disabilities in low and middle income countries. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(9) 1879. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15091879>
- Creswell, J.W. & Plano Clark, V.L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative data analysis: A user-friendly guide for social scientists*. London: Routledge.
- Gréaux, M., *et al.* (2023). Health equity for persons with disabilities: A global scoping review on barriers and interventions in healthcare services. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 22, 236. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-023-02035-w>
- Guest, G., Bunce, A. & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>
- Hashemi, G., *et al.* (2022). Barriers to accessing primary healthcare services for people with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries: A meta-synthesis of qualitative studies. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 44(8), 1207–1220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2020.1817984>
- Kleinman, A. (1980). *Patients and healers in the context of culture: An exploration of the borderland between anthropology, medicine, and psychiatry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kuper, H., *et al.* (2024). Building disability-inclusive health systems. *The Lancet Public Health*, 9(5), e316–e325. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(24\)00042-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(24)00042-2)
- Leslie, C. (1980). Medical pluralism in world perspective. *Social Science & Medicine. Part B: Medical Anthropology*, 14B(4), 191–195. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7987\(80\)90044-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7987(80)90044-7)
- Mitra, S., *et al.* (2021). *Inclusive statistics: Human development and disability indicators in low- and middle-income countries*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Mont, D. (2007). *Measuring disability prevalence*. World Bank Social Protection Discussion Paper No. 0706. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Street, R.L., *et al.* (2009). How does communication heal? Pathways linking clinician–patient communication to health outcomes. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 74(3), 295–301. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2008.11.015>
- Sudhinaraset, *et al.* (2013). What is the role of informal healthcare providers in developing countries? A systematic review. *PLOS ONE*, 8(2), e54978. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0054978>

Sundararajan, R., *et al.* (2020). Conceptual model for pluralistic healthcare behaviour: Results from a qualitative study in southwestern Uganda. *BMJ Open*, 10(4), e033410.
<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2019-033410>

World Health Organization (2022). *Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities*. Geneva: WHO.

_____ (2023). *Strengthening rehabilitation in health systems: WHA76.6*. Geneva: WHO.

World Health Organization and World Bank (2011). *World report on disability*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

Investigating the Impact of Cyber Security Awareness Training in the field of Deepfake on Students

Mohammad Shahadat Hossain

Abstract

This research investigates how training about cybersecurity affects students' capacity to identify deepfake content during its rapid expansion across digital information platforms. The production of synthetic media by AI threatens personal security at the same time that it creates substantial concerns about false information and declining social trust. The research design employs hypothetico-deductive principles through a pre-post assessment approach which studies 21 graduate students at the University of Staffordshire who are enrolled at Level 7. Research data was collected by two questionnaires before and after training which were evaluated using paired sample t-tests. The results demonstrated a significant statistical improvement across several domains. Subsequent research should utilise a variety of comprehensive data sets and develop longitudinal study approaches to ascertain long-term outcomes, as well as explore how deepfake literacy integrates into digital literacy programmes. The research findings establish that purposeful cybersecurity education can provide the necessary protective abilities to individuals specifically including students so they can face present and emerging security threats effectively.

Keywords— Deepfake, Cyber Security, Training.

Introduction

The dynamics of new technology show that communication and information sharing have made notable improvement. However, it has also made some new types of malicious cyber activities possible, with Deepfake technology. According to Olan, *et al.* (2024), fake news constantly changes people's beliefs about significant issues and their social values. According to Mekhail, *et al.* (2023), Deepfakes always employ artificial intelligence to synthesize what may look like real audios and video and can be indistinguishable from the original. Kaur, *et al.* (2023) noted that it was rather startling to come into contact with Deepfakes and to find out that the approach taken to demoralize influential persons damaged the reputation of so many people unknowingly and unwillingly.

Deepfakes have emerged as a major technological development. According to Rami, *et al.* (2023), the Deepfake technology developed from AI allows users to produce thoroughly fake, realistically convincing digital content such as video and photographs along with audio recordings. Students serve as one of many targeted demographic groups impacted by deepfake media appearing in the digital environments that they encounter for educational purposes. Cybersecurity awareness training represents an important method for students to gain detection abilities toward deepfakes by teaching them how to identify and avoid digital threats.

The main objective of this research is to assess how structured cybersecurity training enhances postgraduate students' detection and response abilities with respect to deepfake content. Participants demonstrated their understanding of deepfake technology through their

knowledge about its creation process and its dangers for individuals and the overall societal environment. The training session led participants to develop self-confidence regarding their skills to detect deepfake content. From the student perspective, the use of computers, the internet and social networks as key sources of education materials, communication tools and information acquisition respectively make it absolutely critical for such threats to be identified and addressed. Designing cybersecurity awareness training programmes to address this group not only promotes critical thinking but also readies employees for what exists in the digital space manipulation. The research aims to investigate the impact of cybersecurity awareness training on students' ability to detect deepfake content.

Literature Review

Here, I provide a review of the most recent and high impact scholarly articles addressing cybersecurity awareness training with a focus on deepfake threats. The review focuses on studies which demonstrate the impact of such training on students: a population that is progressively at higher risk of being coerced into processing fake information. Preu, *et al.* (2022) maintain that Cybersecurity awareness training is needed to help college students detect sophisticated deepfake media. Their research indicates that further training programs need continual development to enhance human identification of synthetic media. Hongmei Chi, *et al.* (2021) advocate Integrating deepfake detection techniques into a cybersecurity curriculum to educate students on identifying deepfakes. The study undertaken by Belghazi, *et al.* (2023) evaluates the impact of training on human capability to differentiate real images from deepfakes. Their study indicates that training provides moderate advancement in relation to users' recognition skills of synthetic faces, but major challenges are still faced in deepfake detection. Bhalli, *et al.* (2024) advocates specialized training of deepfake detection through expert-defined linguistic features used to detect audio deepfakes. Research undertaken by Maram, *et al.* (2022) indicates that enhancing cybersecurity awareness among university students is important to reduce cyber threats. In order to lessen cybersecurity dangers, their survey report highlights the importance of raising cybersecurity awareness among Saudi Arabian university students. Research findings by Tahir, *et al.* (2021) indicate that the detection abilities of deepfake videos among vulnerable users can be enhanced through training. To determine what kind of training is needed, after studying the different abilities needed for production, Hwang Y, *et al.* (2021) conclude that training which provides comprehensive information about disinformation by focusing deeply on deepfakes as examples of synthetic media is effective. Their views are reinforced by Nguyen, *et al.* (2022) who noted that the term "deepfake," which had first been coined from "deep learning" and "fake," had subsequently advanced as artificial intelligence along with machine learning techniques, typically involving the manipulation of images, videos, or audios. In 2023, Victor Murillo-Ligorred and his colleagues introduced deepfake education through artistic education programs for university students, focusing their efforts on senior students.

Since their inception in 2017, deepfake technologies have rapidly advanced. According to Mekhail, *et al.* (2023), their potential to produce hyper-realistic yet fabricated content has markedly increased. Given these factors, cybersecurity awareness has become increasingly critical, particularly among vulnerable populations like students who may be less equipped to identify and protect themselves against digital threats (Rami, *et al.*, 2023). Research has outlined numerous potential risks associated with deepfakes, from defamation and bullying to identity theft and democracy destabilization by researchers (DAMI, 2022). Studies like these categorise the dangers and emphasise their severe implications. Defamation and reputational

harm are well-documented risks, as a convincing deepfake can lead to wrongful associations or false confessions. The research undertaken by Bray, *et al.* (2023), however, shows that humans struggle to detect deep-fake human face images even when using basic quality improvements and indicates the immediate need to confront this security risk.

According to Fattah, *et al.* (2023), cybersecurity awareness training has a beneficial effect on university students' knowledge, attitude and behavior towards cybersecurity. Studies undertaken by Zuriani, *et al.* (2020) indicate that instruction is a useful substitute for imparting cybersecurity expertise. Research on how well training programs can manage these dangers, particularly for student populations, however, is limited. Rami, *et al.* (2023) classify three types of deepfakes (text, audio, and visual) and provide a helpful summary of their uses, but they do not investigate how effective interventions are at thwarting their appearance and recognition across various demographic groups. As noted by Nguyen, *et al.* (2022), educational interventions have historically been measured by changes in awareness levels among participants and, focused primarily on threats, rather than identification. Consequently, as noted by Nanjundaswamy, *et al.* (2022), there is a growing call for training programs that go beyond basic awareness to enhance critical thinking and digital literacy.

While cybersecurity training has been extensively researched, few studies specifically address deepfake detection, and even fewer investigate its effectiveness within a student demographic. This gap suggests a need for targeted training programs that address the unique features of deepfake technology and their specific impact on students, who may lack the advanced digital literacy required to recognize manipulative media. Research that has been carried out has also made heavy use of subjective measures, namely self-reported increases in awareness or in confidence which are in themselves biased. According to Bondi, *et al.* (2021), the effectiveness of deepfake video detectors depends on training approaches and data augmentation techniques. For example, Groh, *et al.* (2021) proved that untrained humans excel above the top computer vision model in deepfake detection through facial processing capability. According to Shiohara and Yamasaki (2022), self-blended image training enhances deepfake detection capabilities particularly when identifying unknown manipulations and working with datasets. The authors introduce self-blended images (SBIs) as new synthetic training data for deepfake detection. Additionally, Nguyen, *et al.* (2022), have also recognised that existing approaches to cybersecurity training tend not to be demographic specific, rendering them less relevant for younger audiences. Younger users, for example, already use social media extensively, which is where deepfakes flourish most virulently, and they may lack the experience or digital literacy skills to spot them. According to Kurt, *et al.* (2017), having a good ideal security awareness program for younger audiences is one of the best ways to enhance security. Khamzina, *et al.* (2022) has identified security problems and advocates that awareness training to be provided to university students, in particular. In the study undertaken by Naffe, *et al.* (2023), for example, the learning experience gained through deepfake training allowed participants to advance from deepfake ignorance into digital qualification skills.

While existing studies provide valuable insights into the technical and social dimensions of deep fakes, several critical gaps remain unaddressed. Given the above gaps, this study aims to fill a unique niche in cybersecurity research by examining the specific effectiveness of a cybersecurity awareness training program focused on deepfake awareness within a student

population. The objective is to investigate the impact on the effectiveness of the cyber security awareness training scheme in fighting against the deepfake threats among students.

Research Methods

This research examines how cybersecurity awareness training affects student abilities to identify deepfake content in their environment decreases and the extent to which training decreases the risks for misinformation and cybersecurity threats in the digital era. The research methodology of this study follows hypothetico-deductive principles to create hypotheses testing and to gather statistical data regarding the influence of independent training factors on dependent variables of student detection capabilities (perception, confidence, performance, engagement, and behaviour). The chosen methodology enables effective examination of the educational impact of the training programme between the intervention and assessment of student abilities to recognise deepfakes, as it provides a structured hypothesis for validation and testing capabilities. Training effectiveness receives a complete assessment through combining quantitative research with qualitative methods. The research is guided by the following hypotheses: **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):** Cybersecurity awareness training has no significant effect on students' confidence, performance, perception, changes in behaviour (in terms of media consumption), or engagement in detecting deepfake content. **H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):** Cybersecurity awareness training significantly improves students' confidence, performance, perception, changes in behaviour, and engagement in detecting deepfake content.

Research Design

A pre-post intervention design was employed, involving 21 matched Level 7 student participants who completed both pre-training and post-training surveys. This quasi-experimental design enabled direct comparison of dependent variables before and after training, by isolating its impact. The absence of a control group due to logistical constraints limits causal inferences but aligns with the study's exploratory nature. To provide a thorough grasp of the training's impact, a mixed-method approach was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses.

The sample was comprised of 21 students: **Age:** Mean=25.8 years, SD=2.7, range=21–31; 71.4% (n=15) aged 23–27. **Gender:** 90.5% male (n=19), 9.5% female (n=2). **Education:** 100% Level 7 (postgraduate). The small, male-dominated sample is sufficient for paired sample t-tests (power≈0.8, $\alpha=0.05$, medium-to-large effect size) but limits generalizability. The homogeneous educational level ensures consistency.

Data was collected via Microsoft Form-based surveys: **Pre-Training Survey:** Administered March 19–April 3, 2025, with 18 questions capturing baseline metrics (e.g., perception, awareness, confidence, behaviour, and verification frequency). **Post-Training Survey:** Conducted April 3–9, 2025, with 23 questions (18 pre-training plus 5 post-training specific questions, e.g., training satisfaction). Questions included Likert scales (e.g., confidence: 1=Not at all confident, 5=Very confident), multiple-choice (e.g., indicators), and open-ended responses (e.g., concerns). Participants were matched via email IDs, ensuring data integrity.

A one-hour training session was delivered between March 27 and April 7, 2025, via mixed methods (live Zoom, in-person, recorded video, PowerPoint slides). It covered: **Introduction:**

Deepfake definition, history, examples (e.g., political misinformation). **Technical Skills:** Indicators (unnatural blinking, inconsistent lighting, audio-visual mismatch) and tools (reverse image search, trusted news sources). **Critical Thinking:** Exercises to foster scepticism, source evaluation and proactive behaviours.

Quantative and Qualitative Methods for Data Analysis

Quantitative

Descriptive Statistics: Means, standard deviations, and percentages were calculated for each question to summarize response distributions. (e.g., % selecting “Yes” for awareness).

Paired sample t-tests: Used to compare pre- and post-training scores for continuous variables (confidence, threat perception, number of indicators). The paired t-test assumed normality of differences, which was reasonable given the sample’s consistency and Likert-scale data. T-Tests conducted on confidence (Q5), threat perception (Q9), and performance (Q6): number of indicators) to test significance ($\alpha=0.05$). Normality of differences was assumed based on Likert-scale consistency. **Significance Level:** Set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Qualitative

Open-ended responses (Q17, Q18, Q22) were thematically explained, identifying themes (e.g., misinformation, critical thinking).

Ethical Considerations

Participants provided informed consent and participated voluntarily. The study complied with university ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality and all data will be deleted after completion of this research.

Research Findings.

Here is the descriptive analysis of the pre- post training data and responses to key questions aligned with variables:

Demographic Information:

Age: Mean=25.8, SD=2.7, range=21–31; distribution: 21 (4.8%, n=1), 23 (14.3%, n=3), 24 (9.5%, n=2), 25 (28.6%, n=6), 26 (9.5%, n=2), 27 (19.0%, n=4), 29 (4.8%, n=1), 30 (4.8%, n=1), 31 (4.8%, n=1); Most (71.4%, n = 15) were 23–27, reflecting a young adult cohort. **Gender:** 90.5% male (n = 19/21), 9.5% female (n = 2/21, suggesting a male-dominated sample. **Education:** 100% Level 7 (n = 21), indicating uniform academic capability.

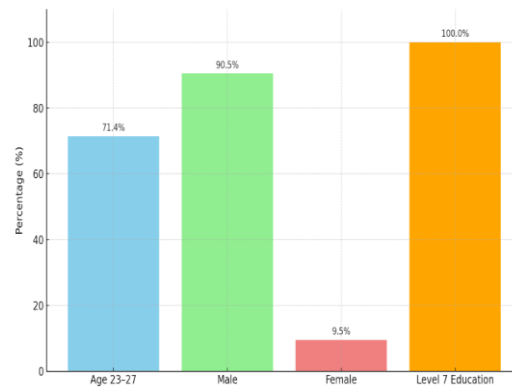


Fig. 1. Participant Demographics Overview.

Results/Pre- and Post-Training Responses:

TABLE 1: Pre- and Post-Training Responses/Results Summary:

Question No	Variables/ Focus	Pre-Training Responses	Post-Training Responses	Insight
Q4	Perception/ Awareness	52.4% Yes, 47.6% No	100% Yes	Knowledge gap closed
Q5	Confidence	Mean=2.24 (SD=1.18); Most rated 1–3	Mean=4.48 (SD=1.03); Most rated 4–5	Strong confidence gain
Q6	Performance/ Indicators	Mean=1.0 (SD=0.0); Mostly incorrect indicators	Mean=2.81 (SD=0.75); Mostly correct indicators	Improved identification skills
Q7	Perception/ Encountered Deepfake	33.3% Yes, 38.1% Not Sure	76.2% Yes, 19.0% Not Sure	Recognition skill improved
Q8	Perception/ Perceived Uses	Cybercrime: 61.9%; Entertainment: 33.3%	Cybercrime: 95.2%; Broader recognition overall	Greater awareness of malicious uses
Q9	Perception/ Threat Perception	Mean=3.29 (SD=1.52); Mixed threat awareness	Mean=4.76 (SD=0.54); Stronger agreement on threat	Heightened threat perception
Q10	Perception/ Vulnerable Industries	28.6% selected all four; 47.6% selected one	90.5% selected all four	Near-complete awareness
Q11	Engagement/ Fallen for Fakes	28.6% Yes, 38.1% Not Sure	61.9% Yes, 19.0% Not Sure	Higher reporting, not necessarily higher risk
Q12	Behaviour/	28.6% Never; 14.3% Always	81.0% Always	Big behavioral shift

Question No	Variables/ Focus	Pre-Training Responses	Post-Training Responses	Insight
	Verification Frequency			
Q13	Performance/ Verification Tools	47.6% used none; 23.8% used all three	76.2% used all three	Significant tool adoption
Q14	Engagement/ Information Sources	57.1% Social Media	71.4% Academic/News	More credible sources adopted
Q15	Behaviour/ Actions Taken	66.7% Ignore; 0% Discuss	85.7% Verify; 23.8% Discuss	Proactive action post-training
Q16	Perception/ Future Difficulty	61.9% Yes, 23.8% Not Sure	90.5% Yes, 9.5% Not Sure	Growing concern about detection
Q17	Perception/ Concerns	47.6% Not Sure	Misinformation: 57.1%, Social Impact: 38.1%	More specific concerns emerged
Q18	Confidence Needs	52.4% Not Sure	71.4% cited training	Clear preference for further education
Q19–Q23	Post-Only	N/A	95%+ satisfied, more skeptical, confident, and aware	Training well-received and impactful

Descriptive Narrative:

Q4: Have you heard of deepfake technology before?

Prior to training, participants showed a split in awareness regarding deepfakes, with only just over half reporting any familiarity. After the session, all participants confidently affirmed awareness, suggesting a full closure of the initial knowledge gap. **Insight:** Knowledge gap closed: 100% awareness achieved in post-training.



Fig. 2. Pre-Post Training Awareness of Deepfake Technology (Q4).

Q5: How confident are you in identifying deepfake videos? (Scale: 1 = Not at all confident, 5 = Very confident).

Confidence levels (Q5) saw a significant shift. The students gave ratings between 1 and 3 on a scale from 1 to 5 for confidence levels prior to the training program. Test subject ratings of their deepfake detection abilities shifted strongly towards the highest rating points after receiving training. **Insight:** Significant shift from low (1–3) to high (4–5) confidence in post-training.



Fig. 3. Pre- and Post-Training Confidence in Identifying Deepfake Videos (Q5).

Q6: Which of the following are common indicators of deepfake videos? (Select all that apply.) When asked about specific indicators of deepfakes pre-training responses showed reliance on inaccurate cues. Post-training, participants overwhelmingly identified correct signs such as unnatural blinking and inconsistent lighting. This demonstrated a tangible increase in analytical skill. **Insight:** Enhanced skill, meeting expected deepfake indicators post-training.

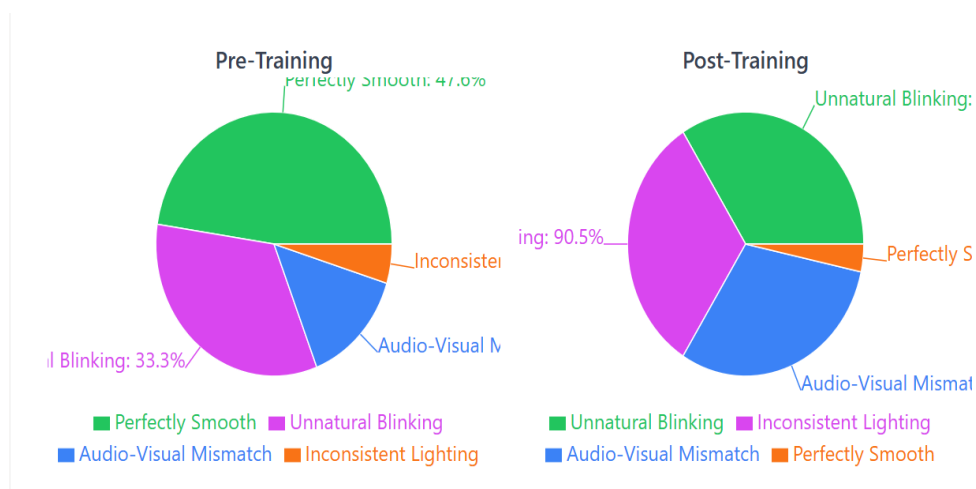


Fig. 4. Pre and Post Training Selection of Deepfake Indicators (Q6).

Q7: Have you ever encountered a deepfake video online?

In terms of actual encounters with deepfakes, there was a noticeable increase in self-reported recognition—from 33.3% to 76.2%. This suggests better identification rather than more exposure. **Insight:** Increased recognition due to improved identification skills.

Q8: What do you think deepfake technology is primarily used for?

Perceptions of how deepfakes are used shifted dramatically. Initially, most saw them as a tool for cybercrime and entertainment, but post-training, more participants acknowledged their political and academic implications, indicating an expanded understanding. **Insight:** Broader recognition of malicious uses.

Q9: On a scale of 1 to 5, how much of a cybersecurity threat do you think deepfake technology poses? Perceived threat levels rose substantially, with most respondents rating the threat at the highest level (5) after training, compared to a wide spread of opinions beforehand. **Insight:** Significantly increased the perceived threat level.

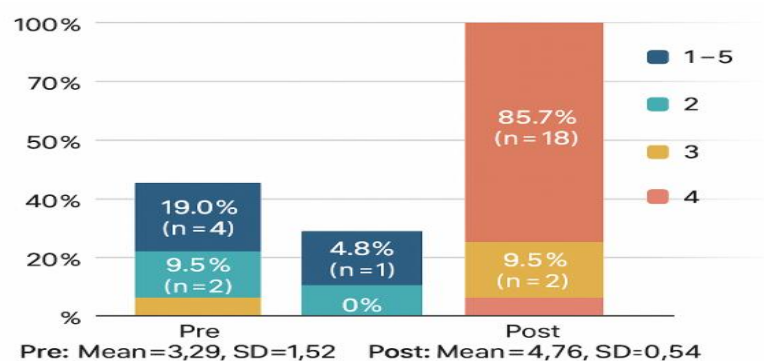


Fig. 5. Perceived threat levels Q9

Q10: Which industries are most vulnerable to deepfake threats?

Awareness of vulnerable industries was limited at first, with fewer than a third identifying all four key sectors. This changed dramatically post-training, with over 90% recognizing the full scope of impact. **Insight:** Near-complete awareness.

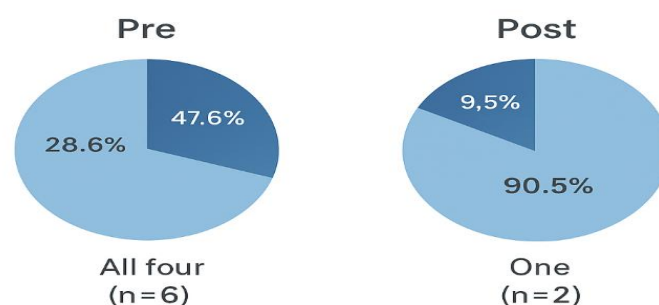


Fig. 6. Awareness of vulnerable industries- Perception (Q10)

Q11: Have you ever fallen for a fake or manipulated video/image online?

An interesting change was seen in reported susceptibility. More people admitted to falling for fake content. Rather than reflecting vulnerability, this likely reflects increased self-awareness and willingness to report past mistakes. **Insight:** Increased reporting may reflect awareness, not susceptibility.

Q12: How frequently do you verify the authenticity of videos before sharing them?

Verification behaviours changed the most drastically. The majority who never or rarely verified information switched to "always". Doing so, showing a strong behavioural impact of the training. **Insight:** Dramatic shift to proactive behaviour.

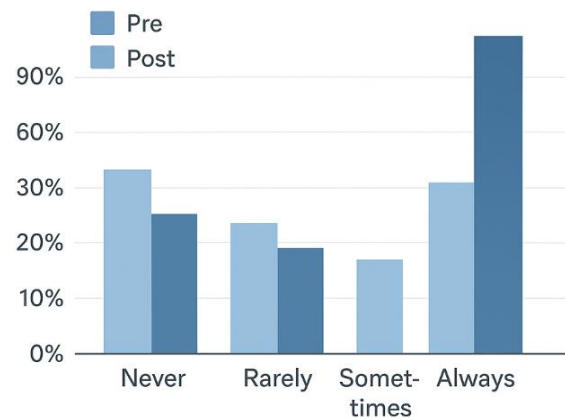


Fig. 7. Verification behaviours (Q12).

Q13: Which tools or methods do you currently use to verify the authenticity of online content?

This is supported by the jump in use of verification tools (Q13), especially those who used all three methods discussed (e.g., reverse image search, news, and video analysis). **Insight:** Significant tool adoption.

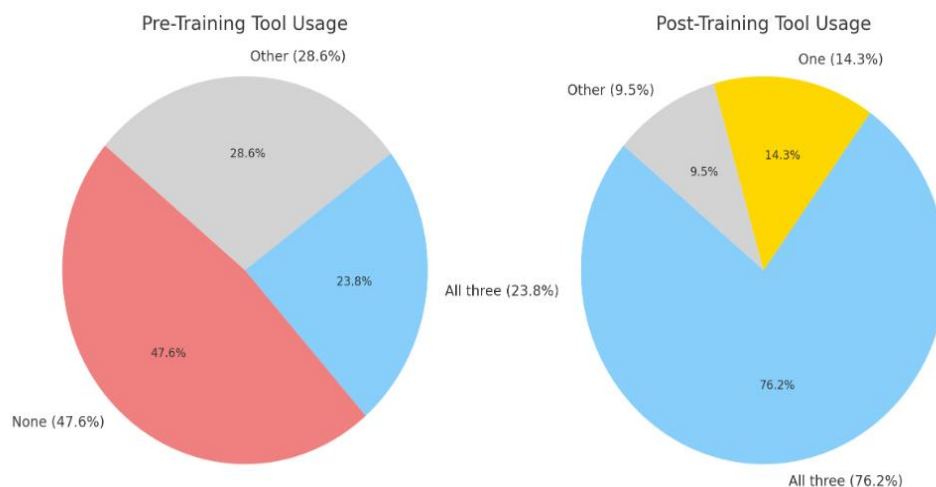


Fig. 8. Verification Tools (Q13. Performance)

Q14: What is your main source of information about deepfake technology?

When asked about their sources of information (Q14), the majority had relied on social media before training. After training, academic and news sources took precedence, indicating a turn towards more credible platforms. **Insight:** Shift to credible sources.

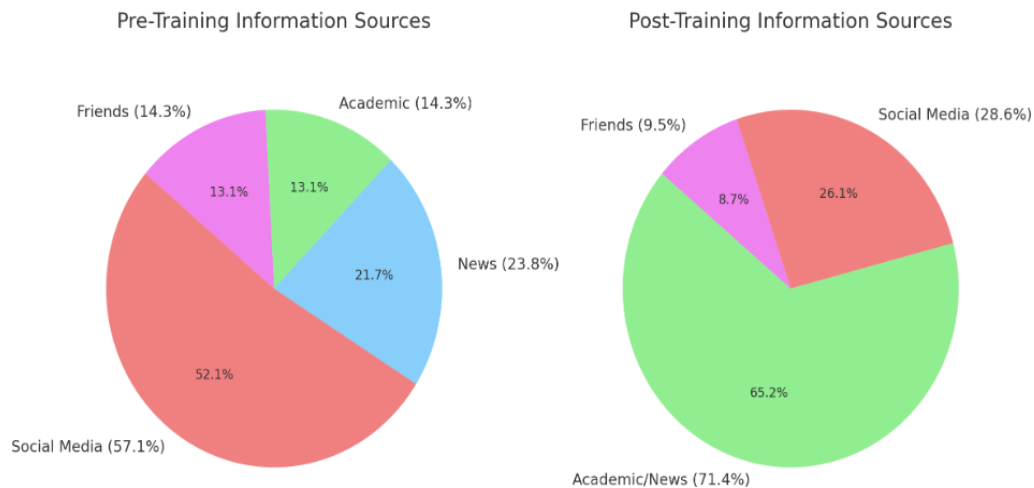


Fig. 9. Sources of information (Q14) Engagement

Q15: If you suspect a deepfake, what action would you take?

Response actions (Q15) also improved. Where previously most ignored suspicious content, post-training, the majority now verify and report—some even engage in discussions. **Insight:** Shift to proactive actions.

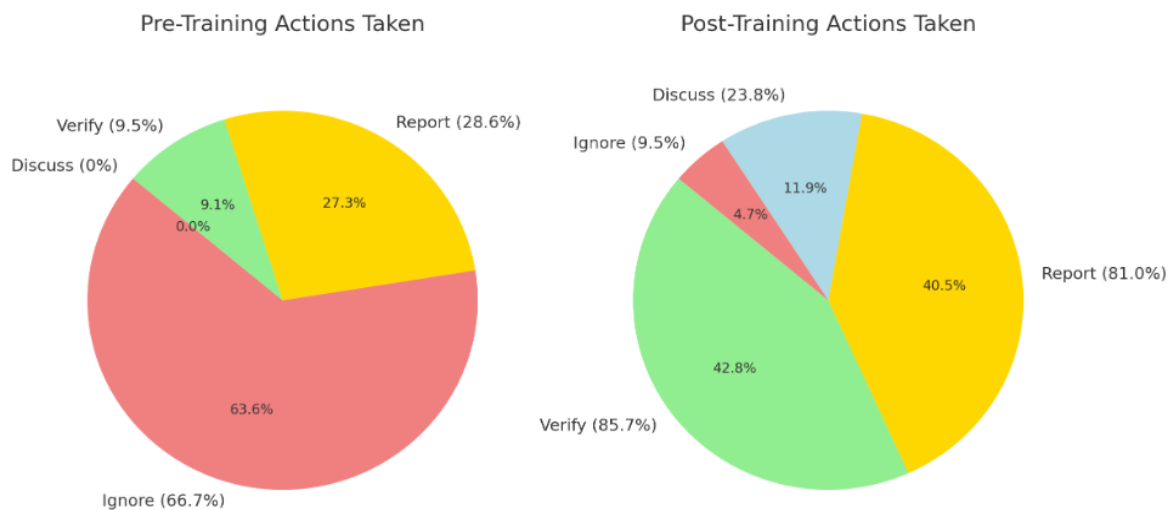


Fig.10. Response actions (Q15) Behaviour.

Q16: Do you believe deepfake technology will become more difficult to detect in the future? Participants also expressed heightened concern about future detection (Q16) and moving from vague uncertainties to concrete issues like misinformation and social impact. **Insight:** Increased concern.

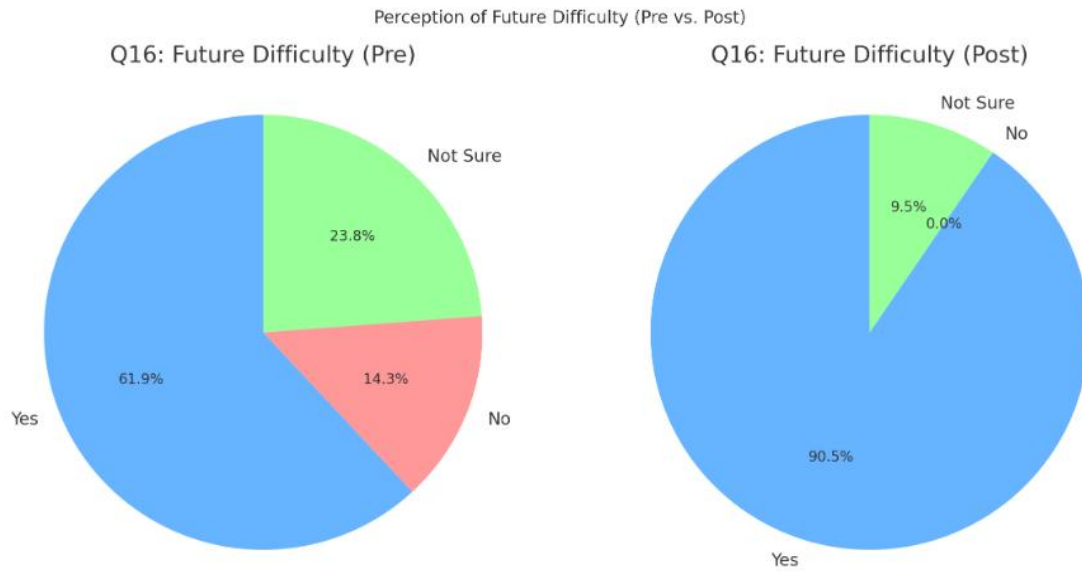


Fig. 11. Future Difficulty Q16 (Perception).

Q17: What concerns you the most about deepfakes?

Participants also expressed heightened concern about future detection and became more articulate about what worries them most (Q17), moving from vague uncertainties to concrete issues like misinformation and social impact. **Insight:** More specific concerns post-training.

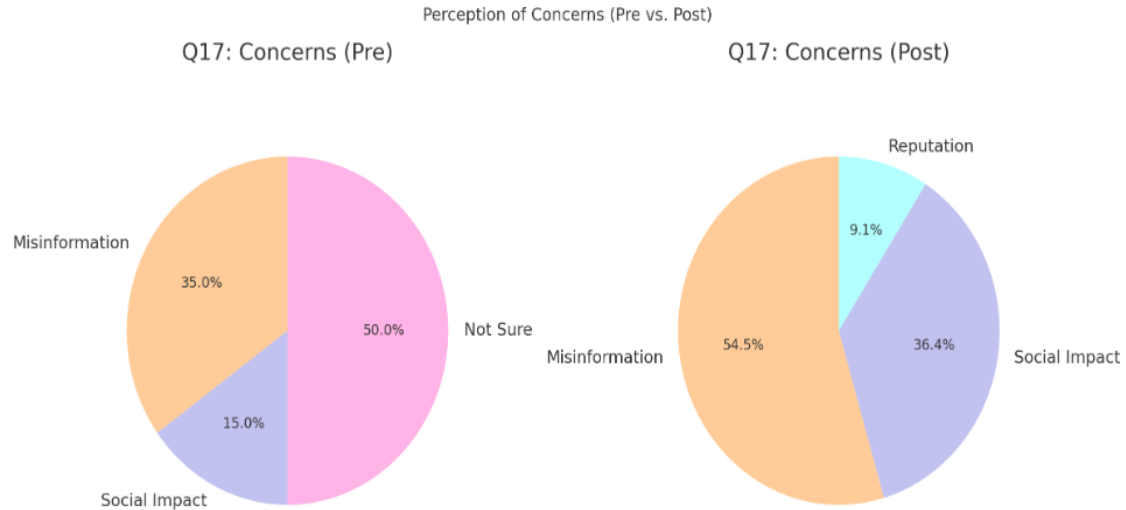


Fig. 12. Perception of concerns (Q17).

Q18: What would help you feel more confident in detecting deepfake videos?

When discussing what would increase their confidence (Q18), more than two-thirds emphasized the importance of training, reinforcing the value of continued education. **Insight:** Training increasingly cited to made them confident to identify deepfake.

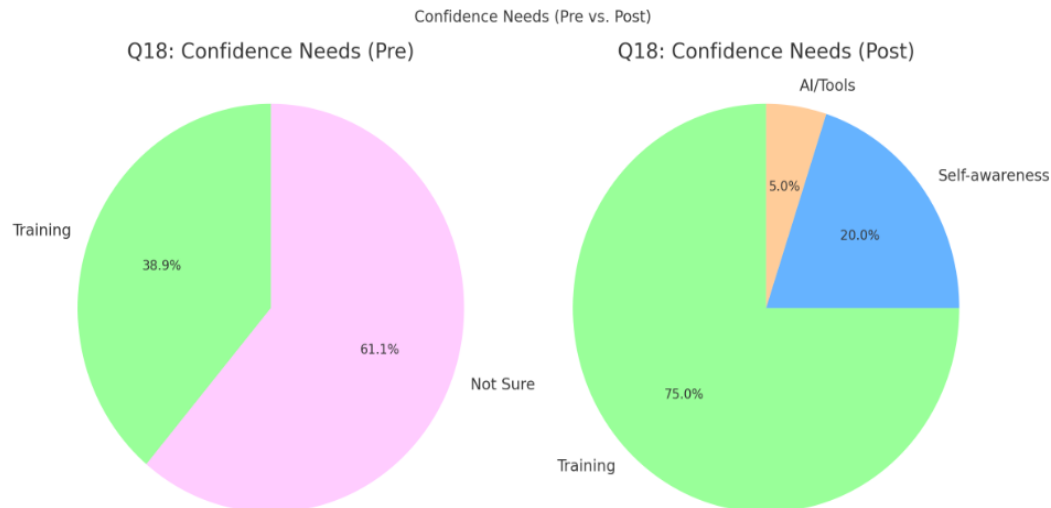


Fig. 13. What can be made them confident to identify deepfakes – Q18.

Post-only Responses:

Lastly, post-only questions (Q19–Q23) showed overwhelmingly positive feedback. Over 95% felt more confident, sceptical, and capable of identifying deepfake images. They found the most useful techniques to be critical thinking and video analysis, and almost all reported satisfaction with the training.

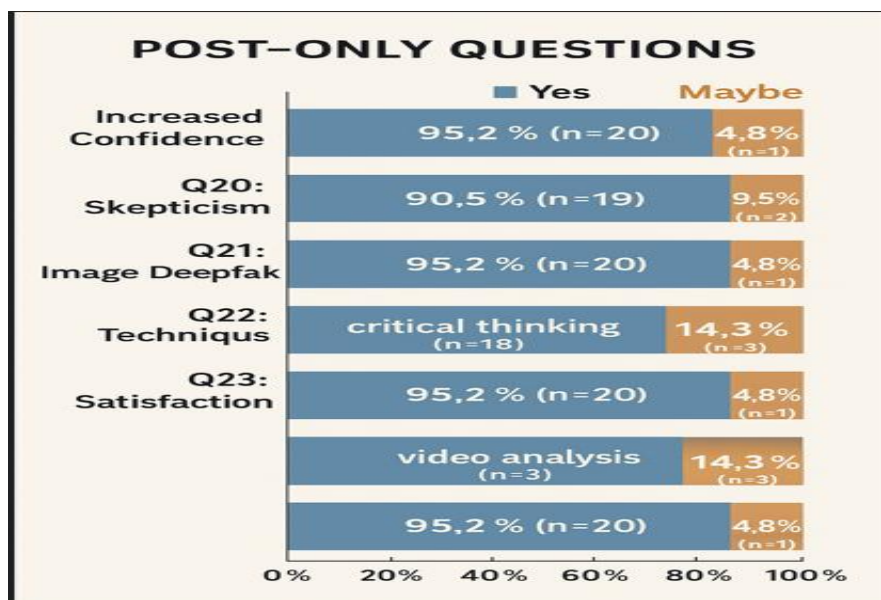


Fig.14. Post-Training responses.

Statistical Analysis Using Paired T-tests

To rigorously evaluate the impact of the cybersecurity awareness training program on students' ability to detect deepfake content, paired sample t-tests were conducted for key

variables: confidence (Q5), performance (number of indicators identified, Q6), and threat perception (Q9). Paired t-tests are suitable for assessing changes over time within the same individuals, ensuring a robust within-subjects comparison.

Q5: Confidence (Confidence):

Pre-training: Pre: Mean=2.24, SD=1.18; 47.6% (n=10) rated 1, 14.3% (n=3) rated 2, 28.6% (n=6) rated 3, 9.5% (n=2) rated 4, 0% rated 5.

Mean = 2.24, SD = 1.18. Distribution of responses:

47.6% (n=10) rated 1, 14.3% (n=3) rated 2, 28.6% (n=6) rated 3, 9.5% (n=2) rated 4, 0% rated 5.

Post-training: Post: Mean=4.48, SD=1.03; 4.8% (n=1) rated 1, 4.8% (n=1) rated 2, 0% rated 3, 14.3% (n=3) rated 4, 76.2% (n=16) rated 5.

Mean = 4.48, SD = 1.03. Distribution of responses:

4.8% (n=1) rated 1, 4.8% (n=1) rated 2, 0% rated 3, 14.3% (n=3) rated 4, 76.2% (n=16) rated 5.

Paired t-test:

To assess whether the improvement in performance was statistically significant, a **paired t-test** was conducted comparing the pre- and post-training results.

Pre-training mean = 2.24, Post-training mean = 4.48, t-value = -8.36, p-value = < 0.001.

Insight: Significant gain, nearing expected 5. For confidence levels (Q5), the pre-training mean score was 2.24 (SD = 1.18), while the post-training mean rose substantially to 4.48 (SD = 1.03). The paired t-test produced a t-value of -8.36 with a **p-value < 0.001**, indicating a statistically significant improvement in students' confidence in identifying deepfakes after the training.

Q6: Indicators (Performance):

Pre-training: Pre: Mean=1.0, SD=0.0; 47.6% (n=10) perfectly smooth (incorrect), 33.3% (n=7) unnatural blinking, 14.3% (n=3) audio-visual mismatch, 4.8% (n=1) inconsistent lighting.

Mean = 1.0, SD = 0.0. Distribution of responses: 47.6% (n=10) identified **perfectly smooth facial expressions** (incorrect), 33.3% (n=7) identified **unnatural blinking patterns** (correct), 14.3% (n=3) identified **audio-visual mismatch** (correct), 4.8% (n=1) identified **inconsistent lighting** (correct). In the pre-training responses, students largely focused on **incorrect indicators** like **perfectly smooth facial expressions** (which is not typically a reliable indicator of deepfakes). The more **accurate indicators**, such as **unnatural blinking** and **audio-visual mismatch**, were only identified by a smaller percentage of students.

Post-training: Post: Mean=2.81, SD=0.75; 95.2% (n=20) unnatural blinking, 90.5% (n=19) inconsistent lighting, 85.7% (n=18) audio-visual mismatch, 9.5% (n=2) perfectly smooth.

Mean = 2.81, SD = 0.75, Distribution of responses: 95.2% (n=20) identified **unnatural blinking patterns** (correct), 90.5% (n=19) identified **inconsistent lighting** (correct), 85.7% (n=18) identified **audio-visual mismatch** (correct), 9.5% (n=2) identified **perfectly smooth facial expressions** (incorrect)

After the training, there was a **significant improvement** in the ability to identify the correct indicators of deepfakes. The most frequently selected indicators were the correct ones, such as **unnatural blinking patterns**, **inconsistent lighting**, and **audio-visual mismatch**. Only a small number of students (9.5%) still selected **perfectly smooth facial expressions**, which is not a reliable indicator.

Paired t-test:

To assess whether the improvement in performance was statistically significant, a **paired t-test** was conducted comparing the pre- and post-training results.

Pre-training mean = 1.0, post-training mean = 2.81, Standard deviation of post-training = 0.75, t-value = -11.24, p-value = < 0.001.

The **t-value of -11.24** indicates a strong negative difference between the pre- and post-training means. A higher negative t-value suggests a larger improvement in the students' ability to identify deepfake indicators. The **p-value of < 0.001** is very small, meaning that the probability that the observed difference between pre- and post-training performance occurred by random chance is extremely low (less than 0.1%). This confirms that the observed improvement is statistically significant. The findings from the **paired t-test, $p < 0.001$** , is very strong evidence that the cybersecurity awareness training resulted in an extremely significant improvement of the students' ability to identify deepfake indicators. The pre-training mean of 1.0 and post-training mean of 2.81 meaning that the practical skills of students on identifying deepfakes improved according to the expected indicators.

Q9: Threat Perception (Perception):

Pre-Training Analysis:

Pre: Mean=3.29, SD=1.52; 19.0% (n=4) rated 1, 9.5% (n=2) rated 2, 28.6% (n=6) rated 3, 4.8% (n=1) rated 4, 38.1% (n=8) rated 5.

Mean = 3.29, Standard Deviation (SD) = 1.52, Percentage Distribution: 19.0% (n = 4) rated 1, 9.5% (n = 2) rated 2, 28.6% (n = 6) rated 3, 4.8% (n = 1) rated 4, 38.1% (n = 8) rated 5.

Post-Training Analysis:

Post: Mean=4.76, SD=0.54; 0% rated 1–2, 4.8% (n=1) rated 3, 9.5% (n=2) rated 4, 85.7% (n=18) rated 5.

Mean = 4.76, Standard Deviation (SD) = 0.54, Percentage Distribution: 0% rated 1-2, 4.8% (n = 1) rated 3, 9.5% (n = 2) rated 4, 85.7% (n = 18) rated 5,

Paired T-test Result:

t-value = -5.87, p-value = $p < 0.001$. Insight: For threat perception (Q9), participants' mean rating increased from 3.29 (SD = 1.52) pre-training to 4.76 (SD = 0.54) post-training. The t-test value of -5.87 (**$p < 0.001$**) again confirmed that students perceived a greater cybersecurity threat from deepfakes following the intervention. The assumptions underlying the paired t-tests, including the approximate normality of difference scores, were considered reasonable

based on the relatively symmetrical distributions and the nature of the 5-point Likert scale measurements used. There is a **significant increase** in students' perception after the training (rating 5).

Validation

Quantitative: Achieved expected outcomes (e.g., 76.2% confidence = 5, 81.0% always verify), closely aligning with target.

Qualitative: Themes like “critical thinking” (85.7%, n = 18, Q22) and “social impact” (71.4%, n = 15, Q17) validated the training’s practical relevance.

Limitation

Small sample (n=21) limits generalizability. Male-dominated sample may skew results. No control group allows external influences. Self-reported data may reflect social desirability. Short-term post-training surveys (1–2 weeks) lack long-term insight.

Conclusion and future work

This study investigated the impact of a cybersecurity awareness training program on 21 Level 7 students’ abilities to detect deepfake content, using a hypothetico-deductive methodology and mixed-methods analysis. The findings decisively reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and support the alternative (H_1), demonstrating significant improvements across all dependent variables.

The results confirmed that the training effectively closed knowledge gaps (awareness: 52.4% to 100%), boosted confidence, aligned perceptions, fostered cautious media consumption and contributed positively to its practical focus on indicators, tools, and critical thinking. While the study achieved its objectives, several avenues for future research and development emerge including Larger and Diverse Samples, Longitudinal Assessment, Integration of AI Tools, Objective Testing, Tailored Interventions, and Broader Contexts.

References.

- Belghazi, Nadia, *et al.* (2023). *Is Training Useful to Detect Deepfakes? : A Preliminary Study..* Aveiro, Portugal, IEEE.
- Bhalli, Nashaba, *et al.* (2024) Listening for Expert Identified Linguistic Features: Assessment of Audio Deepfake Discernment among Undergraduate Students. Research Gate Preprint. DOI 10.48550/arXiv/2411.14586.
- Bond, Luca, *et al.* (2020). *Training Strategies and Data Augmentations in CNN-based DeepFake Video Detection.* New York, USA, IEEE.
- Bray, S. D., Johnson, S. D., & Kleinberg, B. (2023). Testing Human Ability To Detect Deepfake Images of Human Faces. *ArXiv*, Volume <https://arxiv.org/abs/2212.05056>.
- DAMI, L. (2022). Analysis and conceptualization of deepfake technology as cyber threat. *Researchgate*, DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.21862.50246.

- Fattah, A., Wagimin, W. & Nurlia (2023). Enhancing Cybersecurity Awareness among University Students: A Study on the Relationship between Knowledge, Attitude, Behavior, and Training. *Jurnal System Informasi (E-Journal)*, Volume 15, <https://ejournal.unsri.ac.id/index.php/jsi/article/view/21812>, 2023.
- Groh, M., *et al.* (2021). Human Detection of Deepfakes: A Role for Holistic Face Processing. *ARVO*, Vol.21, 2390 (doi:<https://doi.org/10.1167/jov.21.9.2390>).
- Hongmei Chi, *et al.* (2021). Integrating Deepfake Detection into Cybersecurity Curriculum. *Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing*, Vol 1288, 588–598.
- Hwang, Y., Ryu, J. Y., & Jeong, S.-H. (2021). Effects of disinformation using deepfake: The protective effect of media literacy education. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 24(3) (<https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2020.0174>), 188–193.
- Kaur, Parveen, *et al.* (2023). The Perception of Deepfake Technology Among University Students in Malaysia. *International Journal of Membrane Science and Technology*, Volume 10, 1720-1731.
- Khamzina, Botagoz, *et al.* (2022). Determination of Cyber Security Issues and Awareness Training for University Students. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)*.
- Kurt, Yesem, *et al.* (2017). Raising Cybersecurity Awareness among College Students. Colloquium for Information Systems Security Education (CISSE)
- Maram, M., Bamasoud, & Doaa, M. (2022). The Impact of Enhancing awareness of cybersecurity on university students: a survey paper. *Little Lion Scientific*, pp. 4756 - 4766.
- Mekhail, Mustak, *et al.* (2023). Deepfakes: Deceptions, mitigations, and opportunities. *Journal of Business Research*, Volume 154 (2) DOI 10.10.16/jbusres.2022 113368
- Murillo-Ligorred, Victor, *et al.* (2023). Integration and Scope of Deepfakes in Arts Education: The Development of Critical Thinking in Postgraduate Students in Primary Education and Master's Degree in Secondary Education. *MDPI*, Volume Educ. Sci. 2023, 13(11), 1073. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13111073>.
- Naffi, Nadia, *et al.* (2023). Empowering Youth to Combat Malicious Deepfakes and Disinformation: An Experiential and Reflective Learning Experience Informed by Personal Construct Theory. *Research Gate*, www.researchgate.net/publication/376678537.
- Nanjundaswamy, Vasist, P. & Krishnan, Satish (2022). Deepfakes: An Integrative Review of the Literature and an Agenda for Future Research. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 51(1), 556 - 602.
- Nguyen, Thanh T., *et al.* (2022). Deep learning for deepfakes creation and detection: A survey. *Computer Vision and Image Understanding*, Volume 223, 103525.
- Olan, Femi, *et al.* (2024). *Fake News on Social Media: The Impact on Society*. Springer.
- Preu, E., Jackson, M. & Choudhury N. (2022) Perception vs. Reality: Understanding and Evaluating the Impact of Synthetic Image Deepfakes over College Students. *IEEE*, 547–553.
- Rami, Mubarak, *et al.* (2023). A Survey on the Detection and Impacts of Deepfakes in Visual, Audio, and Textual Formats. *IEEE Access*, pp. 144497 - 144529.
- Shiohara, K & Yamasaki, T. (2022). *Detecting Deepfakes with Self-Blended Images*. New Orleans, LA, USA, IEEE.
- Tahir, Rashid, *et al.* (2021). Seeing is Believing: Exploring Perceptual Differences in DeepFake Videos. *ACM*, Article No 172(<https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445699>), 1 - 16.
- Yesem Kurt, *et al.* (2017). Raising Cybersecurity Awareness among College Students. Colloquium for Information Systems Security Education (CISSE).
- Zuriani, A.K., *et al.* (2020). Impact of training on cybersecurity awareness. *Gading Journal for Science and Technology*, Volume 3, 114-20.

Research Protocol: Navigating the Transition from Teaching to Educational Leadership in Higher Education – Motivations and Barriers

Nick Pape; Rahaman Hasan; Gerry Takamura; Russell Kabir, Ilias Mahmud

Abstract

This research protocol outlines a mixed-methods study exploring the transition from teaching roles to management positions within higher education in England. The study responds to growing sector interest in academic leadership development, staff retention and inclusive career progression. While existing literature acknowledges the occurrence of such transitions, it often fails to capture the lived experiences and institutional conditions that shape them. This project investigates the motivations behind lecturers' decisions to pursue or avoid management roles, as well as the structural, psychological and social barriers they encounter.

The study employs a sequential explanatory design, beginning with a structured online survey to collect demographic data and information on motivation, career stage and perceived obstacles. These findings will inform a series of semi-structured interviews aimed at deepening understanding of how professional identity, self-efficacy, institutional culture and peer support influence decision-making. Particular attention will be paid to the experiences of women and individuals from under-represented backgrounds, whose leadership pathways remain uneven and often undocumented.

Rather than assuming leadership to be a natural or desirable career endpoint, this study focuses on how opportunities arise, how they are interpreted and why some professionals choose not to pursue them. By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, the project aims to inform future research and support more inclusive leadership development practices across the higher education sector. Findings will be of value to academic developers, policy-makers and institutional leaders interested in widening participation in educational leadership.

Key words: educational leadership, higher education, career transition, teaching professionals, motivation, management roles, gender and leadership, professional identity, barriers to progression, academic careers

Introduction

The transition from teaching into educational management represents a significant career shift for many professionals working within higher education. This movement is not only a personal development milestone but also carries wider implications for leadership continuity, staff retention and institutional strategy. Despite widespread recognition of the need for effective leadership within colleges and universities, the processes by which individuals move from classroom roles into managerial posts are often under-explored. While academic literature acknowledges that transitions take place, it often fails to interrogate the personal, social and organisational conditions that shape them. Transitions are more likely to be sustained when leadership is framed in instructional or transformational terms that allow for identity continuity rather than rupture, especially when women are able to negotiate professional identity and exercise agency within institutional constraints (Aiston and Fitzgerald, 2024). This research sets out to examine the conditions under which teachers move into management, what motivates them to do so and what challenges they face along the way. It aims to offer clarity on why some educators actively pursue leadership opportunities while others, even when well qualified and capable, hesitate or withdraw from the possibility altogether.

Career motivations that lead to the decision to enter management are rarely uniform. For some individuals, the move may emerge from dissatisfaction with day-to-day teaching responsibilities or a desire to influence educational outcomes more broadly. Others may seek greater autonomy, professional recognition or career stability. A number of teachers begin to consider management after receiving encouragement from senior staff or through exposure to leadership roles during departmental responsibilities or cross-institutional projects. Previous studies suggest that these decisions often involve a complex balance between personal ambition and perceived opportunity. Intrinsic factors may include a sense of responsibility for shaping educational quality or commitment to continuous improvement. Extrinsic drivers may relate to improved remuneration, job security or the prestige associated with managerial roles (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Herzberg, 1959). Some may also view leadership as the natural endpoint of a teaching career, particularly in institutions where upward progression is tightly coupled with administrative responsibility. In this respect, motivations cannot be treated in isolation from the professional environments in which they emerge.

Barriers to transition are equally significant and may take many forms. Some are structural, including limited access to leadership training, lack of succession planning or unclear criteria for advancement. Institutional policies around hiring, promotion and appraisal may favour candidates who already possess leadership experience, thereby excluding many highly capable teachers from consideration. Gender and ethnic disparities remain a particular concern, with women and individuals from under-represented backgrounds often facing fewer opportunities to move into senior roles (Coleman, 2007; Johnson and Delmas, 2022). A lack of mentoring, exclusion from informal networks and prevailing stereotypes around leadership style may all contribute to these disparities. In some institutions, the very concept of leadership is framed in ways that deter rather than attract teaching staff, particularly when leadership is associated more with operational management than educational vision. These challenges can result in qualified individuals choosing to remain in teaching roles despite being approached to consider management or delaying their transition until later in their careers.

Social and psychological influences on the decision to pursue leadership are often overlooked, yet play a vital part in shaping individual choices. Confidence in one's ability to manage people, make decisions and influence change can strongly affect whether a teacher is willing to apply for a leadership role (Bandura, 1977; Alves *et al.*, 2025; Predoiu *et al.*, 2025; Tampus-Judaya and Escote 2025). Perceptions of leadership are often formed early in a teacher's career and may be shaped by the examples set by senior colleagues, the encouragement received from peers or mentors and the extent to which the institutional environment fosters career development. Teachers who lack visible role models or do not see leaders who reflect their own background may feel that management is not a realistic or welcoming space for them, contributing to what Eddy (2020) describes as reluctant leadership among faculty. At the same time, many transitions are not the result of formal applications but arise through informal processes, including temporary responsibilities, secondments or acting roles. These can be both opportunities and risks. While they provide experience, they may also lead to burnout or disillusionment if not properly supported. Furthermore, some educators express concern that moving into management risks distancing them from the teaching practice that originally drew them into the profession.

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to capture the complex and varied nature of the transition from teaching to management. A structured survey will collect quantitative data across several domains including demographic background, years of experience, prior

exposure to leadership, motivational factors and perceived barriers. This will allow patterns to be observed and relationships between variables to be tested. Alongside this, qualitative interviews will provide a more detailed account of how individuals experience the decision to move into leadership, how they interpret their own career journeys and how their aspirations are shaped by institutional and social influences. These interviews will also explore personal reflections on readiness, identity, satisfaction and career direction. By combining both forms of data, the study seeks to move beyond generalisations and, instead, offer a detailed understanding of what supports or impedes the shift from classroom teaching to educational leadership. The research does not assume that leadership is inherently desirable nor inevitable but instead recognises the need to understand the wide range of experiences and expectations that shape the decisions of teaching professionals.

This inquiry is timely and relevant to ongoing discussions around leadership capacity, succession planning and equality of opportunity in higher education. Institutions face growing pressure to develop internal leadership pipelines while also addressing issues of staff retention and morale. Understanding the motivations and obstacles encountered by educators can inform the design of more effective professional development programmes and ensure that talented individuals are not overlooked or discouraged. Furthermore, recognising the psychological and social factors involved in leadership transitions may help institutions to reimagine how they support staff throughout their careers, particularly those who may not fit the dominant profile of existing leadership. Rather than viewing leadership as the endpoint of a career, institutions might begin to see it as one of many possible professional pathways, allowing for more flexible, inclusive and sustainable approaches to staff development. Through its combination of empirical analysis and lived experience, this study will provide evidence to inform practice, policy and future research on career progression in higher education.

Literature Review

The literature indicates that effective transitions into management require more than capability or aspiration. They demand enabling environments that recognise teaching as a valuable foundation for leadership rather than a separate domain. The transition from a teaching-focused academic role into management within higher education continues to attract scholarly attention, not least due to its implications for professional development, leadership pipelines and institutional governance. However, the literature reflects a diversity of interpretations and theoretical orientations. Scholars have conceptualised this move not simply as an occupational upgrade but as a shift that demands reconfiguration of identity, authority and agency (Gibbons *et al.*, 2021; Bathmaker and Thomas, 2020).

This review explores current theories and evidence relating to motivations, structural influences, social and psychological dimensions and the broader educational environment that shapes these transitions. It draws on career-stage theory, self-determination theory, professional identity, scholarship and sociological analyses of capital. These are used to interrogate the ways in which institutional structures, policy regimes and workplace cultures interact with individual agency to either support or obstruct progression into leadership roles.

Career-Stage and Professional Maturity

Career-stage theory provides one of the earliest structured models for understanding professional transitions in education. Huberman's (1989) cyclic model suggested that educators pass through phases of experimentation, stabilisation and reassessment. More recent iterations argue that career transitions tend to occur during points of professional

consolidation, when teaching staff have accrued credibility and institutional familiarity (Day and Gu, 2019). Professional maturity is often accompanied by informal invitations to take on leadership responsibilities, especially in contexts where formal succession planning is weak (Kumar *et al.*, 2025).

However, readiness for leadership is not merely chronological. Research has shown that teachers at mid-career stages are most likely to feel caught between responsibilities and ambitions, especially in institutions that fail to support flexible career pathways (Courtney and McGinity, 2021; Normore and Tschannen-Moran, 2019). The assumption that leadership naturally follows teaching experience often fails to account for those who resist or delay progression due to personal, cultural or institutional concerns (Moynihan, 2025).

Motivation and Self-Determination

Motivational factors continue to be a key area of focus (Papé *et al.*, 2022a; 2022b), with self-determination theory widely used to differentiate between internal and external drivers of career progression (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In high-pressure educational environments, management roles may also be perceived as offering greater autonomy or protection from classroom burnout (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Harris and Jones, 2020). Intrinsic motivations include desires to influence educational policy, improve learner outcomes or exercise intellectual leadership (Leithwood *et al.*, 2020). External motivations range from increased remuneration to role prestige or a perceived reduction in workload intensity (Fitzgerald and Gunter, 2019). However, these categories are not always clear-cut. The interaction between motivation and opportunity can produce hybrid motivations that evolve over time (Kumar, Thaliyan and Priya, 2025). For instance, teachers disillusioned with classroom autonomy may pursue management not out of aspiration but as a mechanism for survival in environments perceived as restrictive or overly bureaucratic (Courtney and McGinity, 2021). Gender continues to influence how motivation is experienced and articulated. Several studies have found that women are more likely to cite institutional culture and lack of encouragement as deterrents, even when they demonstrate high levels of competence and ambition (Alshdiefat *et al.*, 2024; Gaikwad and Pandey, 2026.; Blackmore, 2013).

Social Capital and Institutional Cultures

Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of capital (1986), many scholars have argued that the transition into management is highly contingent upon access to social networks, legitimacy and recognition within institutional hierarchies (Lumby and Coleman, 2007). Mentorship and professional exposure to managerial practices have been consistently linked to successful transitions (Bush and Glover, 2016; Torrence *et al.*, 2021). Leadership development programmes, when offered early in careers, tend to foster greater confidence and preparedness among staff. However, such initiatives are not evenly distributed, as teachers from minority backgrounds or those based in regional institutions frequently report limited access to these forms of social and professional capital (Gaikwad and Pandey, 2026; O'Connor, 2021). Informal pathways into leadership, through acting roles or project-based assignments, may offer experience but often lack clear validation or career progression routes. This can result in frustration, particularly where these roles are viewed as testing grounds rather than legitimate appointments (Ljungberg *et al.*, 2025; Thomson, 2020).

Identity and Psychological Readiness

Professional identity theory has become increasingly influential in exploring how teachers interpret the prospect of management. Many report ambivalence, viewing leadership as incompatible with teaching values or as requiring a departure from relational practices central to their pedagogic identity (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Sachs, 2001). Psychological readiness is not simply a matter of self-confidence; it is shaped by how individuals perceive the culture of leadership within their institution. Leadership that appears managerial or compliance-oriented is often rejected by teachers who value innovation or collaboration (Hallinger *et al.*, 2022). Conversely, institutions that frame leadership in terms of educational values are more likely to attract aspirants from teaching ranks (George *et al.*, 2025).

Self-efficacy remains an important determinant of willingness to apply for leadership roles. Academics who receive positive feedback and encouragement are more likely to see themselves as potential leaders (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2004). Role models do matter as the absence of leaders from diverse ethnic or gender backgrounds can contribute to a belief that certain identities are less welcome in management (Rossi *et al.*, 2026).

Barriers and Structural Challenges

Barriers to progression are well documented, ranging from opaque promotion procedures to entrenched leadership stereotypes. In many cases, management is seen as requiring a break from teaching, not an evolution of it (Mizrahi-Shtelman and Drori, 2022). Policies often fail to reward leadership work carried out informally or without title, leading to disillusionment among those who contribute without formal recognition (Añez and Gosálbez, 2025). Leadership preparation remains inconsistent across institutions. Some staff report being offered senior roles without adequate support or training, while others are blocked from applying due to perceived lack of experience. This has prompted calls for more coherent talent development systems that recognise diverse entry points and professional trajectories (Alshdiefat *et al.*, 2024; Torrence *et al.*, 2023). The pandemic also exacerbated existing inequalities, as rapid shifts in delivery models exposed gaps in digital leadership competencies and underscored the importance of distributed leadership structures (Zhukabayeva *et al.*, 2025; Zawacki-Richter *et al.*, 2019).

Institutional Environments and Sectoral Trends

Macro-level trends in higher education are altering the nature of leadership. Accountability regimes, competition for funding and changing student expectations have expanded the administrative load placed on academic managers (George and Mathew, 2025), which has resulted in some staff avoiding leadership, perceiving it as a departure from intellectual or pedagogical work (Townsend *et al.*, 2025). Organisational policies related to promotion, appraisal and professional development significantly shape access to leadership roles and perceptions of preparedness (Bush, 2011; Morley, 2021). Research shows that institutions that prioritise wellbeing, mentoring and career flexibility report greater satisfaction and leadership engagement among staff (Ferro-Soto and Vila-Alonso, 2025; Hafiz *et al.*, 2025). On the other hand, those that embed leadership within rigid hierarchies or performance metrics tend to discourage participation (Corcoran, 2025; Roark, 2025).

Methodology

Study Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, employing a sequential explanatory design (QUAN → QUAL). The quantitative phase will identify patterns, associations and predictors related to lecturers' transition into educational leadership roles, while the qualitative phase will provide deeper insight into the motivations, perceptions and contextual factors influencing these transitions. Integration of findings will occur at the interpretation stage to develop a comprehensive understanding of pathways into educational leadership.

Quantitative Component

Survey Design and Instrument Development

A structured questionnaire (Appendix 1) is developed to collect quantitative data examining demographic characteristics, career stage, motivations, perceived barriers and structural influences associated with transition into management roles.

The questionnaire is informed by:

- a) Existing literature on educational leadership pathways and career motivation;
- b) Established theoretical distinctions between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation;
- c) Prior empirical instruments used in studies of leadership aspiration and career progression in higher education.

Where possible, items will be adapted from validated scales reported in the literature. The questionnaire items will be subjected to expert review by at least two academics with expertise in higher education teaching and leadership to establish content validity of the questionnaire. A pilot study will be conducted with a small sample of eligible participants ($n \approx 15-20$) to test clarity, reliability and feasibility. A convenience sampling strategy will be employed to recruit participants for the pilot study. Pilot study data will be analysed using the SPSS version 29. Internal consistency will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Participants and Sampling

Participants will include current and former lecturers of higher education institutions in England.

First, a non-probability purposive sampling strategy will be employed to target individuals with direct experience of the transition under study. Second, snowball sampling will be used to extend participation by inviting respondents to refer other eligible participants within their professional networks.

Quantitative Data Collection

The survey will be administered electronically using an online survey platform. Participation will be voluntary and informed consent will be obtained prior to data collection.

Key variables measured will include:

- a) Demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, highest qualification, years of teaching experience);
- b) Motivational factors (intrinsic and extrinsic drivers);
- c) Perceived barriers (e.g. lack of leadership training, work–life balance, gendered expectations);

- d) Structural influences (e.g. institutional support, mentoring, leadership development opportunities).

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analysed using SPSS version 29.

Analytical procedures will include:

- a) Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, medians and standard deviations) to summarise participant characteristics and key variables;
- b) Cross-tabulations and chi-square tests to explore associations between demographic variables and leadership transition patterns;
- c) Logistic regression analysis to examine predictors of transition into leadership roles, including years of experience, motivation, access to training and institutional support.

Qualitative Component

Interview Design and Instrument

The qualitative phase will employ semi-structured interviews to explore participants' lived experiences of transitioning from teaching to management. A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 2) is developed based on the study's conceptual focus on social, psychological and structural influences. This semi-structured interview guide will be further refined based on the quantitative findings.

Interview questions will explore:

- a) Personal motivations for pursuing leadership roles;
- b) Psychological factors such as confidence, self-efficacy and leadership identity;
- c) Social influences, including peer networks, mentoring relationships and professional communities;
- d) Structural conditions shaping career progression, including institutional culture, policies and access to leadership development.

Participants and Sampling (Qualitative)

A sub-sample of survey respondents who indicate willingness to participate in interviews will be selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in career stage, gender and institutional context. Approximately 15–25 interviews will be conducted, or until data saturation is achieved.

Qualitative Data Collection

Interviews will be conducted online or in person, depending on participant preference and will be audio-recorded with consent. Interviews will be transcribed verbatim and anonymised prior to analysis.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data will be analysed using thematic analysis, following established procedures of familiarisation, coding, theme development and refinement. Elements of a grounded theory approach will be incorporated to allow concepts and relationships related to leadership transition to emerge inductively from the data.

Analytical attention will focus on:

- a) Social influences, including peer support, mentorship and workplace culture;

- b) Psychological factors, such as leadership confidence, attitudes toward management and decision-making self-efficacy;
- c) Structural conditions, including contrasts between classroom and administrative environments, institutional expectations and access to leadership training and digital resources.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Integration will occur at the interpretation and discussion stage, where qualitative findings will be used to explain and contextualise quantitative results. This approach will enable the identification of convergences, divergences and complementarities between datasets, strengthening the explanatory power of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be received from the London Churchill College Research Ethics committee prior to data collection. Participants will be informed of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. All data will be anonymised and stored securely in accordance with data protection regulations.

Discussion

This discussion will present an interpretative synthesis of data generated through both survey responses and qualitative interviews. Rather than seeking to confirm hypotheses, the study is structured to surface recurring patterns, significant differences and unexpected features in how teaching professionals encounter and describe the prospect of transition into management roles. The intention is to explore the range of ways in which academic staff engage with leadership opportunities, including those who embrace, resist or disengage from them altogether.

The design allows for close examination of how motivations for pursuing management may be shaped by previous experience, professional values and perceptions of role expectations. Particular attention will be given to distinctions between internally driven reasons and those that reflect organisational or social influence. Differences in motivation by age, career stage, or prior exposure to leadership responsibilities will be considered, without assuming fixed relationships or directionality.

The interview component will further explore how transitions are narrated over time. These accounts may reflect hesitancy, confidence, external encouragement or internal questioning. Experiences of mentorship and peer support are anticipated as areas of interest, particularly in relation to whether participants describe feeling prepared for leadership or excluded from opportunities. The influence of identity, professional, personal or cultural, may also be reflected in how individuals assess their readiness, belonging or aspiration in relation to management roles.

Gender and ethnic disparities have been recognised in prior research as factors that influence who accesses leadership and how. This study includes instruments that will enable examination of whether and how such disparities emerge in participants' accounts. Institutional type, size and policy environment will also be considered as possible contributing conditions.

Key Areas of Exploration

The data will be read for patterns relating to:

- a) Career shifts in relation to professional stage, educational background and institutional experience
- b) The role of mentorship, sponsorship or informal encouragement in shaping leadership intentions
- c) Comparisons between internally motivated decisions and those prompted by structural conditions
- d) Reported differences in access or experience across gender and ethnic groups

The study does not presume these to be the only or most significant themes; they are included in the design as areas of interest to be examined through the data.

Anticipated Relevance for Educational Policy

While the study is not structured to deliver policy recommendations directly, the findings may inform ongoing conversations around:

- The place of mentorship in leadership development for teaching staff
- The design and timing of leadership preparation programmes within academic careers
- The visibility and accessibility of leadership pathways across institutional types
- The identification and reduction of barriers to progression that affect under-represented groups

These issues will be addressed in relation to what the data show, not from prior assumption. The discussion will consider how reported experiences may inform the review or refinement of institutional and sector-level policy approaches to leadership development and staff progression.

Conclusions and Further Research

This inquiry is not intended to produce a final account of transition into management but to contribute to a more grounded understanding of how such transitions are experienced by those involved. The discussion will focus on what emerges from the data rather than prescribing ideal models or pathways. Attention will be given to where findings confirm, challenge or complicate earlier literature, particularly in relation to identity, motivation and institutional culture.

The study may also indicate directions for future investigation. These might include:

- a) Cross-national studies exploring whether findings are consistent across different higher education systems
- b) Longitudinal research that tracks how professional identities and leadership engagement evolve over time
- c) Evaluations of specific interventions or programmes designed to support leadership development
- d) Studies that focus explicitly on those who choose not to enter management despite opportunity

Such areas will be proposed where supported by the data and only in terms of possibility rather than prescription.

Appendix 1: the Questionnaire

Section 1: Welcome and Consent

You are invited to take part in a study exploring experiences and decisions related to leadership and teaching roles in higher education. This survey is confidential and voluntary. It should take around 10–12 minutes to complete. Your answers will be used for academic research purposes only.

Required Question (Multiple choice):

Do you consent to take part in this study?

- Yes, I agree to participate
- No, I do not wish to participate (→ *End form*)

Section 2: Screening Question (Key branching logic applied)

Question (Multiple choice – required)

Which best describes your current role in higher education?

1. I teach and hold a management or leadership position (e.g. programme leader, head of department) (→ Group 1)
 2. I teach but have never held a management or leadership position (→ Group 2)
 3. I currently work in a management or leadership role and no longer teach (→ Group 3)
 4. I am no longer working in higher education (→ *End form*)
-

Three Groups generated by the answers:

Group 1 – Teach and Manage

Group 2 – Only Teach – Never Managed

Group 3 – In Management – No Longer Teach

Section A: Background Information (All groups complete)

Q1. What is your age group?

- Under 30
- 30–39
- 40–49
- 50–59
- 60 or above

Q2. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

Q3. What is your ethnic background?

- White
- Black or Black British
- Asian or Asian British
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- Other (please specify):
- Prefer not to say

Q4. What is your highest level of education?

- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate (PhD or equivalent)
- Other (please specify):

Q5. How many years have you worked in higher education teaching?

- Fewer than 5
- 5 to 9
- 10 to 14
- 15 to 19
- 20 or more

Q6. What type of institution do you currently work in?

- Research university
- Teaching-focused university
- Further education college
- Private higher education provider
- Other (please specify):

Group 1: Teach and Manage (If "teach and manage" selected)

Section A: Background Information Questions 1-6. (Required data - All Groups)
Sections B through D: (Likert Scale – 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
Section B: Motivations for Leadership Role

What motivated you to take on a management or leadership role?

- I wanted to contribute beyond the classroom
- I was motivated by the opportunity for greater income
- I was encouraged by colleagues or mentors
- I felt confident in taking on leadership
- It was expected of me within the institution
- I was dissatisfied with aspects of classroom teaching
- I viewed it as a natural next step

Section C: Barriers and Challenges

To what extent did the following factors present barriers when taking on leadership?

- Lack of training or preparation
- Lack of support from senior staff
- Gender, age or ethnicity
- Workload or time constraints
- Limited mentorship or guidance
- Doubts about my ability to lead
- Concerns about work–life balance

Section D: Institutional Factors

How much do you agree with the following statements?

- My institution supports leadership development
- I had access to a mentor or coaching
- Leadership opportunities are openly communicated
- My teaching role was considered in workload allocation
- Digital resources were helpful in preparing me for leadership

Section E: Role Balance and Future Plans

Q7. How is your time currently divided between teaching and management?

- Mostly teaching
- Roughly equal
- Mostly management
- It varies considerably

Q8. Which best reflects your preferred future role?

- More teaching
- More management
- Equal balance

- No preference

Section F: Optional Comments

Open Text:

Please share any comments about your experience of holding both teaching and responsibilities

Group 2: Only Teach – Never Managed. (If I teach, but never held a leadership role selected.

Section A: Background Information Questions 1-6. (Required data - All Groups)

Sections B through D: (Likert Scale – 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

Section B: Reasons for Not Pursuing a Leadership Role

Please indicate how much you agree with the following:

- I am satisfied with my current teaching role
- I do not feel prepared for leadership
- I have not been encouraged to apply
- Leadership does not appeal to me
- I believe it would reduce my work–life balance
- I have applied for roles but was unsuccessful
- There are few visible opportunities in my institution

Section C: Perceived Barriers

To what extent do these factors prevent you from pursuing leadership?

- Lack of training
- Lack of time or flexibility
- Limited access to mentors or coaching
- Belief that my background may limit my chances
- No clear path to leadership
- Concerns about team management
- Lack of information on available roles

Section D: Institutional Factors (Same as Group 1)

Section E: Interest in Leadership

Q7. Do you see yourself moving into a leadership role in the future?

- Yes, definitely
-

- Possibly
- Not sure
- Unlikely
- No

Q8. What would make you more likely to consider leadership? (Tick all that apply)

- Training
- Mentorship
- Higher pay
- Encouragement from colleagues
- Flexible workload
- Better institutional culture
- Other (please specify):

Section F: Optional Comments

Open Text:

Please share any comments about your decision not to take on a leadership role

Group 3: In Management – No Longer Teach (If “currently in management and no longer teach” selected)

Section A: Background Information Questions 1-6. (Required data - All Groups)

Sections B through D: (Likert Scale – 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

Section B: Motivations (Same as Group 1)

Section C: Barriers (Same as Group 1)

Section D: Institutional Factors (Same as Group 1)

Section E: Career Progression

Q7. At what stage did you first consider moving into leadership?

- Within the first 5 years of teaching
- After 5–10 years of teaching
- After more than 10 years
- After a major career event

Q8. How long did it take from first considering leadership to getting your first management role?

- Less than 1 year
- 1–2 years

- 3–5 years
- More than 5 years

Q9. Was your move into management planned?

- Yes, and I actively pursued it
- No, but I welcomed the opportunity
- No, and I was unsure about the decision
- Other (please specify):

Section F: Optional Comments

Open Text:

Please share any reflections on your leadership journey or the transition away from teaching

Appendix 2: Qualitative Semi-structured Interview Guide

Qualitative Data Collection. Method: Open-Ended Questionnaire (Written Reflections)

Section 1: Consent and Context

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this qualitative study. This form invites you to share your personal experiences, views and reflections on your career path in higher education. Your responses are confidential. You are free to skip any question. There are no right or wrong answers, we are interested in your perspective.

Section 2: Core Qualitative Questions

Personal Narrative: Individual Responses

Q1. *Please describe your journey in higher education so far. What led you into teaching and, if applicable, into leadership or management?*

Role Identity

Q2. *How do you currently view your role as an educator and/or leader? How has this changed over time, if at all?*

Turning Points or Decisions

Q3. *Describe a moment or decision that significantly influenced your move (or decision not to move) into management?*

Motivations

Q4. *What motivated you to consider (or reject) leadership roles in your institution? Were there personal, professional or other reasons?*

Challenges

Q5. *What have been the biggest challenges or difficulties in your career so far, particularly related to progression or role changes?*

Institutional Environment

Q6. *How has your institution supported or hindered your leadership ambitions or professional development?*

Identity and Confidence

Q7. *How confident have you felt in your ability to lead others, influence decisions or take on strategic responsibilities? Why?*

Equity and Inclusion

Q8. *Do you feel your background (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, social class, etc.) has influenced your career path in higher education? If so, how?*

Future Outlook

Q9. *What do you see as the next step in your career? What would help or hinder that progression?*

Final Reflections

Q10. *Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences of teaching, leadership or career progression in higher education?*

Follow-up

Would you be willing to take part in a short follow-up interview (approximately 30 minutes) to discuss your experiences in more detail?

Yes – I'm happy to be contacted for an interview

No – I'd prefer not to take part in a follow-up interview

If yes, please provide your preferred name and contact email:

(Text box – optional)

Interview topic guidelines by Group

Group 1: Teach and Manage (Dual Role)

Opening Prompt

"Can you tell me a little about your current role and how you came to hold both teaching and leadership responsibilities?"

Areas and Questions Suggested for Group 1 Interviews.

1. Career Journey

What influenced your move into a leadership role while continuing to teach?

Was this a personal goal, or did it emerge from institutional needs?

2. Role Balance & Tensions

How do you currently balance your leadership and teaching responsibilities?

What challenges arise from holding both roles simultaneously?

Are there aspects you feel you cannot do well because of time or focus?

3. Institutional Support

Has your institution made it easier or harder to manage both roles?

What forms of support have been most (or least) helpful?

4. Identity & Confidence

Do you see yourself more as a teacher or a leader?

How has this dual role affected your confidence, sense of purpose or professional identity?

5. Future Thinking

Where do you see yourself going next, more teaching, more leadership or something else?

Group 2: Only Teach – Never Moved into Leadership

Opening Prompt

"Can you share your career path so far and how you've come to remain primarily in a teaching role?"

Suggested Questions

1 Leadership Consideration

Have you ever thought about moving into a management or leadership role?

What made you consider it — and what stopped you?

2 Perceived Barriers

Are there specific barriers (personal, institutional, cultural) that make leadership feel out of reach or unappealing?

3 Support & Culture

Have senior staff or peers ever encouraged you to take on a leadership role?

What does the culture of leadership feel like in your institution?

4 Confidence & Readiness

Do you feel ready or prepared for leadership?

If not, what would make you feel more confident or supported?

5 Aspirations

Do you see yourself remaining in a teaching role long-term?

Would anything shift your thinking about leadership?

Group 3: Fully in Management (No Longer Teach)

Opening Prompt

"Could you walk me through your transition from teaching into a full-time leadership or management role?"

Suggested Questions

1. Transition Decision

When did you first consider leaving teaching to pursue leadership?

What influenced or motivated that decision?

2. Adjustment & Challenges

What was the biggest challenge in moving fully into management?

Was there anything you wish you had known beforehand?

3. Loss & Identity Shift

Did you miss teaching?

How has your professional identity changed since taking on this role?

4. Institutional Journey

What role did your institution play in your progression?

Were there clear pathways or was it self-driven?

5. Leadership Style & Vision

How would you describe your leadership style now?

How do you support others who may want to follow a similar path?

References

Aiston, S.J. & Fitzgerald, T. (2024). Trajectories of merit: Re-viewing leadership in elite universities. *Educational Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2023.2267188>

- Alshdiefat, A.S., Lee, A., Sharif, A.A., & Rana, M.Q. (2024). Women in leadership of higher education: critical barriers in Jordanian universities. *Cogent Education*, 11(1), 2357900. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2357900>
- Alves, J.M., Tintoré, M. & Serra, L.J.P. (2025). Leadership, Learning, Well-being and Justice in Educational Organizations. *Frontiers in Education*, 10, Article 1577472.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bathmaker, A.M., & Thomas, W. (2020). Professional identity in teaching. *British Educational Research Journal*, 46(5), 943–958. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3628>
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P.C. & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(2), 107–128.
- Blackmore, J. (2013). *Educational leadership: A critical feminist perspective*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). 'The Forms of Capital', in Richardson, J. (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood, pp. 241–258.
- Bush, T. & Jackson, D. (2002). Preparation for school leadership: International perspectives. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 30(4), 417–429.
- Byrnes, G. & McGonagle-Daly, T. (2024). 'Pūrehuroatanga: an Aotearoa New Zealand Case Study in Whole-of-Institution Student Engagement and Success'. *Engagement in Higher Education*. Available at: <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/book/9781035314294/book-part-9781035314294-35.xml> (Accessed: 12 March 2025).
- Cheng, K.Y. & Zhou, Y. (2024). 'Empowering the Future of Construction and Quantity Surveying Professionals: Unveiling the Skills Revolution in New Zealand's Construction Industry'. *Innovative Teaching in Higher Education*. Available at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-97-2171-9_9 (Accessed: 12 March 2025).
- Coleman, M. (2007). Gender and educational leadership. In T. Townsend (Ed.), *International handbook of school effectiveness and improvement* (pp. 577–591). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Corcoran, A. (2025). How to Set Up and Run an Academic Programme; Academic programme leadership. *University of Nottingham Repository*. <https://nottingham-repository.worktribe.com/output/57611030>
- Courtney, S.J., & McGinity, R. (2021). Turning water into wine: Scripting multi-academisation through messianic educational leadership. *Narratives of Educational Leadership* (Springer, pp. 49–67). https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10141356/1/Ch3CourtneyMcGinity_AAM.pdf
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M.E. & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68–78.
- Du Plessis, T. & Postlewaigh, G. (2024). 'The Significance of Global Nature-Based Education to Ensure a Sustainable World: An Urgent Need for Change'. *Frontiers in Sustainability*. Available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sustainability/articles/10.3389/frsus.2024.1379223/pdf> (Accessed: 12 March 2025).
- Eddy, P.L. (2020). Faculty as leaders: Moving beyond reluctant leadership. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2020(191), pp.35–44. <https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20361>
- Eyal, O. and Berkovich, I. (2019). Ethics in third sector–school partnerships: a conceptual framework. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 57(4), 345–360. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-08-2018-0143>
- Ferro-Soto, C., & Vila-Alonso, M. (2025). Gamification and leadership identity. *Journal of Management and Business Education*, 4(1), 29–47. <https://doi.org/10.32700/jmbe.8073>
- Fuller, A. (2011). *Teacher Career Stages: Identifying Motivations for Transition into Educational Leadership*. London: Routledge.
- Gaikwad, H., & Pandey, S. (2026). From management to leadership: A comparative analysis of leadership styles among women in academic hierarchies. *Cogent Business & Management*, 13(1), Article 2597708. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2597708>

- Gibbons, L.K., Lewis, R.M., Nieman H. and Resnick, A.F. (2021). Conceptualizing the work of facilitating practice-embedded teacher learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 101, 103304. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103304>
- Gibson, S. (2024). 'Valuing our Clinical Educators'. *Focus on Health Professional Education: A Multi-Professional Journal*. Available at: <https://search.informit.org/doi/pdf/10.3316/informit.T2024101100002990938831818> (Accessed: 12 March 2025).
- Hallinger, P., Liu, S., & Aung, P.N. (2025). A systematic review of instructional leadership research conducted with the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS), 1983–2024. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432251358575>
- Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. Teachers College Press.
- Harris, A. and Jones, M. (2020). COVID 19 – school leadership in disruptive times. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(4), pp.243–247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1811479>
- Herzberg, F. (1959). *The Motivation to Work*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Huber, S. G. (2004). School leadership and leadership development: Adjusting leadership theories and development programs to values and the core purpose of school. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 42(6), 669–684.
- Huberman, M. (1989). The professional life cycle of teachers. *Teachers College Record*, 91, 31–57.
- Ingersoll, R. M., & Strong, M. A. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), 201–233.
- Johnson, D., & Delmas, P. (2022). Promoting diverse leadership: An examination of professional experiences and career advancement perceptions of Black women in higher education. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 42, 15–27. Available at: <https://awl-ojs-tamu.tdl.org/awl/article/view/417>
- Kelchtermans, G. (2005). Teachers' emotions in educational reforms: Self-understanding, vulnerable commitment and micropolitical literacy. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 995–1006.
- Kumar, P.A., Thaliyan, D. & Priya, J. (2025). Facilitating career decisions through servant leadership: a moderated mediation approach. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-08-2025-0374>
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership & Management*, 28, 27–42.
- Ljungberg, H.T., et al. (2025). Wish you were here': Managers' experiences of hybrid work in higher education, *PLOS One*, 20(12): e0339120 <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0339120>
- Lumby, J. & Coleman, M. (2007). *Leadership and diversity: Challenging theory and practice in education*. Sage.
- Márquez Añez, D.F. & Pastor Gosálbez, M.I., (202) 5. Sex differences in perceptions of structural barriers and career advancement factors among academic staff in Spanish universities. *SN Social Sciences*, 5(1), pp.1–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-025-01266-8>
- Mizrahi-Shtelman, R., & Drori, G. S. (2025). Professionalizing the professional bureaucracy: On training and expertise for leadership positions in universities. *Minerva*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-025-09584-0>
- Morley, L. & Crossouard, B. (2021). Women in higher education leadership: Absence, ambition and advancement. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 40(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1830037>
- Morley, L. (2021). Troubling intra-actions: Gender, neo-liberalism and research in the global academy. *Journal of Education Policy*, 36(3), pp.393–410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2015.1062919>
- Moynihan, J. A. (2025). Coaching in educational leadership: interferences to school principals' engagement. *Irish Educational Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2025.2549104>

- O'Connor, P. (2021). Gender imbalance in senior positions in higher education: Exploring the role of organisational micro-politics. *Gender and Education*, 33(5), 561–577.
- O'Connor, P., & Irvine, G. (2020). Women's under-representation in leadership in higher education: A feminist analysis. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 74(3), 275–289. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12245>
- Papé, N., et al. (2022a). Discourse and Analysis of Student Motivation; the unique nature of mature students and their needs and expectations in attending Higher Education, *Journal of Contemporary Development & Management Studies*, 10(1)), 64-87.
- Papé, N., et al. (2022b). Motivation of Mature Students in undertaking Higher Education at a UK Independent Provider: the role of financial benefits. *International Journal of Education Management*, accepted for publication 20 October 2022.
- Prasad, R.R. (2025). 'Climate Change Inclusion in Curricula'. *Springer Education and Climate Change*. Available at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-76436-3_4 (Accessed: 12 March 2025).
- Predoiu, A., Pânișoară, G. & Piotrowski, A. (2025). Innovation in Developmental Psychology, Education, Sports and Arts: Advances in Research on Individuals and Groups, Volume II. *Frontiers in Psychology*. [Read online](#)
- Rhodes, C. & Brundrett, M. (2009). Growing the leadership talent pool: Perceptions of heads, middle leaders and classroom teachers about professional development and leadership succession planning within their own schools. *Professional Development in Education*, 35(3), 381–398.
- Roark, S.M. (2025). Instructor perspectives on administrative change. *Virginia Tech Works*. <https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/items/41b764bf-0002-4322-b81e-3e5b02a10d09>
- Rossi, S.D., Stratford, E. & Byrne, J. (2026) Mobility matters: Effects of campus location on travel burden and educational equity in a regional city. *Applied Geography*. [Online] 104, 103264. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2024.103264>
- Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2000). 'Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development and Well-Being'. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
- Sachs, J. (2001). Teacher professional identity: Competing discourses, competing outcomes. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(2), 149–161.
- Takamura, G. (2025). Western women's influence in Japanese education, 1868–1912. *Journal of Contemporary Development and Management Studies*, 10(1), 52–64.
- Tampus-Judaya, J. & Escote, M.J.V. (2025). Exploring Principalship as a Career Path for Teachers: A Mixed-Methods Analysis. *Cognizance Journal*, 5(7), 771. [PDF Access](#)
- Torrance, D., Mifsud, D. & Niesche, R. (2023). Headteachers and the pandemic: Themes from a review of literature on leadership for professional learning in complex times. *Professional Development in Education*, 49(4), 712–728. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2023.2229333>
- Tschannen-Moran, M. & Gareis, C.R. (2004). Principals' sense of efficacy: Assessing a promising construct. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 42(5), 573–585.
- Zawacki-Richter, et al. (2019). Systematic review of research on artificial intelligence applications in higher education – where are the educators? *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16(1), pp.1–27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0171-0>
- Zegwaard, K.E. & Adams-Hutcheson, G. (2024). 'Exploring Wellbeing During Work Placement: A Comparative Study of Students' Paid and Unpaid Experiences'. *Work-Integrated Learning New Zealand Conference Proceedings*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Karsten-Zegwaard/publication/380291751_Work-Integrated_Learning_New_Zealand_2024_Refereed_Conference_Proceedings/links/66340a2435243041535b2ea5/Work-Integrated-Learning-New-Zealand-2024-Refereed-Conference-Proceedings.pdf#page=48
- Zhukabayeva, T., Baumuratova, D., & Zholshiyeva, L. (2025). Digital transformation in higher education. *Sustainability*, 17(24), 11132. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su172411132>

Situated Agency and Collective Meaning: Rethinking Development through Vygotskian Praxis. A Critical Inquiry into Collaborative Praxis, Political Engagement and Cultural-Historical Psychology

Professor Nick Papé

Abstract

This article reconsiders Vygotskian psychology through the lens of collaborative praxis, arguing that learning is not only a cognitive process but also a social, ethical and political act. Drawing on cultural-historical traditions and informed by dialectical materialism, the article positions education as a site of collective meaning-making, shaped by struggle, history and shared purpose. It engages with the contributions of key scholars who reassert Vygotsky's revolutionary commitments, highlighting the centrality of agency formed in relation with others and examines the limits of institutional models that reduce learning to measurable outputs. Empirical material drawn from mature learners and digital environments reveals the tension between student experience and institutional control, with collaborative projects offering alternative ways of organising knowledge and participation. Rather than offer solutions, the article calls for renewed attentiveness to memory, care and conflict as generative forces in educational practice. Collaboration is defined not as a method but as a commitment to work with others toward shared intellectual and social responsibility.

Key Words: Collaborative Praxis, Vygotskian theory, cultural-historical psychology, political agency, mature learners, higher education, student participation, educational ethics, digital pedagogy, institutional power.

Introduction: Historical Premises and Political Commitments of Collaborative Praxis

Any attempt to reconsider Vygotsky's contribution to psychology must begin with the historical urgency that shaped his thought. Writing amid the political and social upheavals of post-revolutionary Russia, Vygotsky's ambition was not to build an abstract theory of development but to craft a psychology adequate to the needs of a society in transition. As Blanck (1997) observes, his ideas cannot be separated from the social and political conditions that demanded new forms of education, communication and collective life. The formation of consciousness, in Vygotsky's view, was neither an individual matter nor a purely internal phenomenon. It was a social process mediated by cultural tools, language and signs which carry the weight of historical experience (Vygotsky, 1978).

This positioning rejects any neutral or depoliticised view of psychological development. Stetsenko (2020) has gone as far as to call this the moral and political imperative of cultural-historical theory: to recognise that knowing and acting are not separate endeavours but co-constitutive. She critiques mainstream traditions for their retreat into abstraction, suggesting that both behaviourist and constructivist paradigms often sidestep the social origins of psychological change and the conflicts embedded within them. In her view, theory is not a mirror of reality but a means through which people engage with, contest and attempt to transform the world around them. It cannot stand above the conditions it seeks to describe, nor can researchers remain passive interpreters. Praxis, in this sense, is present from the outset. It is not what follows theory but what gives it its urgency and shape.

This argument finds support in Dafermos's (2022) exploration of crisis as both a concept and a condition within cultural-historical activity research. His contribution is significant for refusing the temptation to treat crisis as a merely episodic or psychological disruption. Instead, drawing on dialectical traditions, he insists that crisis is constitutive of development itself. It marks moments where the contradictions within existing forms of practice are unsustainable, compelling new ways of thinking and acting. For Vygotsky, this was not an abstract proposition. His own theoretical trajectory accepted a recognition that human development occurs through struggle, contradiction and renewal, not despite these conditions but because of them (Dafermos, 2021). The analysis of Vygotsky's use of the crisis concept reveals the extent to which psychology must remain attentive to social contradiction. He revisits the term's etymological and historical roots, linking it to medicine, philosophy and political theory. In doing so, he makes a clear case for dialectics as a way of thinking about rupture, not as failure, but as the generative ground for reorganisation. Vygotsky's criticism of his contemporaries is directed precisely at their unwillingness to account for these contradictions, or worse, to resolve them through reduction to quantifiable metrics. What those traditions lose and recover in cultural-historical theory is an understanding of consciousness as both individual and social, reflective and productive, shaped by history but never wholly determined by it.

This historical and political reading of Vygotsky informs the emergence of collaborative praxis within educational and psychological research. Scholars including Arievidt and Stetsenko (2000) argue that learning is a co-constructed activity, grounded in shared projects and meaningful dialogue. The agent is no longer the isolated subject mastering fixed knowledge, but a participant in historically shaped activity systems where interaction informs meaning. This reframing challenges the neutrality of traditional pedagogies and repositions learners as active contributors to the shaping of knowledge and institutions.

The implications of this shift are not merely theoretical. They touch the daily realities of teaching and learning, especially within systems that increasingly adopt managerial metrics as proxies for educational value. Research on mature learners and working-age students, particularly in digital learning environments, shows how institutional assumptions about independence, engagement and success often obscure the material and emotional labour required to participate (O'Shea, 2016; Merrill, 2015). Digital tools, while offering new modes of access, can also impose regimes of surveillance and intensify expectations without corresponding support. In response, educators informed by Vygotskian praxis begin to reshape their environments, not through wholesale reform, but through local acts of resistance and reconfiguration.

One avenue of such work is the development of co-designed curricula and participatory forms of assessment. Here, learners do not merely adapt to pre-given expectations but contribute to shaping the aims and terms of their learning. This is consistent with Ferholt, *et al.*'s (2020) call to examine how people learn during and from conditions of crisis. Their editorial response to the COVID-19 pandemic invokes Leont'ev's (1981) idea of a 'leading activity': a form of collective practice that organises and gives direction to other developmental processes. They argue that education, if understood in these terms, must prepare learners not only to survive existing crises but to imagine and shape alternative futures. Collaborative praxis therefore insists on participation as a method, as it transforms the research process from an extractive activity into one of joint inquiry and mutual responsibility. As Papé, *et al.* (2025) argue about mature learners, such work demands that researchers relinquish control over meaning-making and open space for contested interpretations. The point is not consensus, but co-presence

facilitating participants bringing different experiences, languages and histories, and it is through dialogue, however difficult, that these differences become resources for thought and action.

The historiographic orientation of this approach is central; rather than treat history as background or context, collaborative praxis treats it as an active site of meaning-making. The question is not only what people do but how inherited narratives inform their practices, remembered exclusions and imagined futures. This is evident in the way that terms like 'support,' 'engagement' or 'inclusion' are mobilised within policy. As Quinn (2010) observes, such terms often carry hidden assumptions about who belongs and who does not. By tracing their history, researchers can begin to unsettle their authority and open space for alternatives grounded in lived experience. Thus, Vygotskian praxis remains unfinished but urgent, as it challenges any separation between knowledge and action, or between learning and struggle. It calls for a methodology that is historically informed, politically accountable and dialogically open. It insists that research is not a neutral activity but a choice to stand with, or apart from, those seeking to remake their world.

Methodology: Situated Praxis, Critical Reflection and Dialogical Knowledge-Making

This article positions itself within a cultural-historical tradition that regards knowledge not as a detached abstraction but as a situated, political and dialogical act. It adopts an ontological and epistemological orientation rooted in dialectical materialism, cultural-historical psychology and a critical-reflexive praxis of inquiry. Following Stetsenko and Arieievitch's (2014) assertion that theory is not separate from the practices and conditions that produce it, the methodology employed here treats research as an embedded, ethical and co-constructed process. Knowledge is co-created through dialogical engagements with texts, participants and practices, informed by a commitment to collective transformation.

The approach is qualitative, drawing on a wide-ranging synthesis of theoretical literature, empirical studies and policy texts. Rather than beginning with fixed categories or hypotheses, the inquiry has emerged through reflective engagement with mature learners, participatory research projects and critical readings of educational and psychological frameworks. Analysis is guided by critical discourse analysis, historiographic reflection and the collective memory of educational struggle, privileging lived experience and narrative meaning-making over managerial or positivist validation. In this framework, reflexivity is not a methodological add-on but central to the production of knowledge. The author's position, as both researcher and institutional actor, is shaped by the same contradictions, compromises and opportunities explored in the text. This involves acknowledging the partiality of knowledge, the relational conditions of its production and the need to account for the ethical-political choices inherent in all research practices.

Ethically, the work aligns with what Stetsenko and Arieievitch describe as a transformative activist stance, where research becomes a form of political action embedded in a broader social project. This view resists the abstraction of data from context and insists on co-presence, where participants, be they students, texts or co-researchers, are engaged not as sources of information but as collaborators in a shared ethical and intellectual endeavour. Data sources included a wide array of theoretical literature, including cultural-historical and critical pedagogical texts, policy documents and empirical studies involving mature learners. Additionally, the author's participation informs insights in collaborative research initiatives and ongoing educational practice. This methodological stance affirms Stetsenko and Arieievitch's

(2014) claim that knowledge and practice are not sequential but simultaneous, interwoven within historical conditions of struggle, possibility and shared human development.

Collaborative Praxis, Participation and Method: Ethics and Struggle in Research

To write about collaborative praxis is to write about politics. The term demands engagement with critical traditions that emphasise social change as both the subject and method of research. In educational settings, particularly with working-age adult learners, this often means contesting institutional norms that mask unequal power relations. Vygotsky's theoretical project, often domesticated in Western readings, emerges from an effort to develop tools for human development under radically changed social and economic conditions. Stetsenko (2020) takes this forward by arguing that psychology cannot be separated from politics. She critiques both behaviourist and constructivist approaches for sidestepping responsibility and calls instead for theory that does not merely describe the world but seeks to change it. According to her, praxis is not something that comes after theory; instead, it exists within the process of theorising itself.

Research with adult learners reflects this dedication to change, as their studies are frequently influenced by breaks in education, financial obligations, caregiving duties and academic environments that value individual achievement. Collaboration, in these accounts, is not an abstract value but a practical necessity. It refers to relationships through which learners manage uncertainty, affirm belonging and create shared knowledge. Collaborative practice opens up opportunities for co-design, allowing students to help develop materials and challenge the standards used to evaluate learning, questioning the very rules of learning assessment. In doing so, it contests systems that extend managerial control through digital platforms while claiming to promote independence or flexibility. This practice is considered political because it prioritises collective dignity over institutional metrics in education.

The methodological implications of this position are considerable. Vygotskian theory encourages researchers to ask not only what is happening but how it came to be and whose interests it serves. This historiographic stance is evident in recent work that examines how current categories of 'support' and 'independence' emerge from historical shifts in educational purpose, particularly the drift toward marketised logics (Merrill, 2015; Reay, *et al.*, 2010). These studies foreground how structures of meaning are not neutral but produced through ongoing struggle over what learning is for and whom it serves. In this way, collaborative praxis challenges researchers to move beyond technical accounts of method and instead adopt historically and ethically situated approaches that foreground power and participation.

Blunden (2014) contributes a vital dimension to this discussion by arguing that collaborative activity is a 'project' in the historical-materialist sense. Projects, in his account, are not simply tasks or institutional plans but long-term collective engagements that draw together motives, identities and histories. This aligns with Vygotsky's concern with activity as the ground for development and meaning-making. Collaborative praxis, seen through this lens, is not a pedagogical strategy but a form of ethical participation in collective life. It means working together not just in the classroom or in research teams, but in shared efforts to shape conditions of learning in ways that affirm justice and dignity.

Ferholt, *et al.* (2020) expand on the importance of using historical memory as a method, referencing Leont'ev's (1981) concept of a 'leading activity'. They argue that human development hinges on the emergence of shared forms of activity capable of addressing collective needs. In the face of crises, from the pandemic to climate collapse, education cannot

remain neutral. Rather, it must become one of the principal sites where shared agency affirms and renews. Their argument situates collaborative praxis not just as a pedagogical concern but as a societal necessity. By inviting researchers to engage with participants as co-authors of inquiry, they call for a shift in power within research relationships. Participants no longer appear as passive sources of data but as historical agents engaged in the co-production of knowledge. This shift in the status of participants requires more than participatory gestures. It demands a reframing of research as a collective project shaped by mutual responsibility and shared authorship. Stetsenko (2020) is again instructive here, arguing that method and ethics are inseparable. Her participatory approach treats inquiry as a site of political action, where the struggle to understand the world is also the struggle to remake it. The researcher does not simply observe or interpret but enters into relations with others in ways that have consequences for all involved.

Arievitch (2017) offers a related but distinct emphasis. He rejects accounts of learning that rely on abstract models of individual choice or cognitive growth and instead presents education as a moral act grounded in care, sociality and historical situatedness. His call for a humanising pedagogy resonates with Freire's (1970) insistence that genuine dialogue requires shared risk and commitment. In institutional settings dominated by metrics, Arievitch's reminder that pedagogy is always political becomes essential. This ethical perspective influences both conceptualisations and practices of collaboration. Within educational literature, the notion of 'collaboration' is frequently treated merely as a technical approach describing group work, cooperative tasks or discussion forums, rather than shared struggles over meaning and value. Dafermos (2022) warns that concepts like 'agency' or 'motivation' can be seen as fixed, despite being shaped by history and society. His critique reminds us that educators cannot understand development apart from the social contradictions that produce it. To speak of collaboration without addressing these contradictions is to empty the term of its force.

Collaboration, in this reading, becomes a way of resisting commodified models of education that treat learners as consumers and teachers as service providers. It demands recognition of the material conditions under which learning takes place and the multiple demands placed on adult learners, as education is not a linear path but a negotiated terrain shaped by family, work, debt and health. Studies by O'Shea (2016) and Reay, *et al.* (2010) document how these factors shape not only access but experience. Collaborative praxis offers no simple solution to these challenges but insists the lived realities of those involved grounds research and pedagogy. This involves a rethinking of agency itself. Stetsenko introduces the concept of '*collectivindidual*' agency to capture the relational nature of human development, suggesting individuals are not isolated units but always exist in relation with others, with social norms and histories. In research with mature learners, this concept has been useful in affirming the emotional, social and intellectual labour that goes into returning to education. It resists deficit models that treat learners as lacking and instead highlights the forms of strength that emerge through interdependence. Collaboration, therefore, is not only a method but an ethic, recognising that knowledge is made with others, not merely about them. It means challenging extractive modes of inquiry that treat data as property and, instead, working towards shared understanding and shared ownership. It means holding open the space for difference, disagreement and co-creation. Thus, collaborative praxis is ongoing; it is not a fixed model or strategy, but an active way of engaging with the world as it exists and may become. It is method, theory and action held together by the question: how do we live and learn together in ways that matter?

Collaboration, Power and Digital Learning in Higher Education

Digital education introduces both potential and difficulty for those working within traditions of collaborative praxis. While online platforms can extend reach and offer more flexible routes into study, their design often reflects organisational imperatives that prioritise control, efficiency and measurement over connection, trust and human need. These platforms frequently replicate managerial expectations in digital form, quantifying engagement through metrics and restricting interaction to measurable and trackable formats. In doing so, they risk marginalising those students least able to meet narrowly defined performance indicators, particularly working-age adults with limited digital access, caregiving responsibilities or other commitments that lie beyond the formal boundaries of institutional timetables.

However, these same platforms can be adapted, resisted or reimaged when learners and educators treat them not as neutral tools but as contested spaces. Sannino, *et al.* (2021) indicate that online peer learning can facilitate the development of professional agency, if social conditions promote participation, collaboration and teamwork. Where design fails to centre on these values, learners often describe experiences of alienation, frustration and passivity. The danger lies not with the technology itself, but with its use to extend surveillance, increase pressure or mask asymmetries in power. These findings match those of Merrill (2015), whose study of mature learners reveals that motivation arises not from fixed personality traits or external incentives but through lived experiences of participation, recognition and shared struggle. Involving learners in designing modules and making curricular decisions increases their engagement and ownership. Motivation is shaped by interactions with the learning environment, not just internal measures. Institutional risk indicators like attendance may overlook how policies can exclude students, such as those with caregiving responsibilities. The issue lies in academic expectations that ignore students' diverse realities, as noted by Reay *et al.* (2010) and O'Shea (2016). A reorientation toward collaborative praxis therefore demands not only new teaching methods or support services but an institutional willingness to share power. Empowering students is essential for acknowledging them as important contributors to learning environments. This means valuing informal educational roles they already play, like mentoring peers and helping others, as core to their achievement. Collaborative praxis demands a real redistribution of authority and responsibility, not just more empathetic listening.

These questions of power and participation extend into the daily practices of teaching. Literature on collaborative praxis attends to theory or policy, but the work of pedagogy unfolds in relationships. Studies of teaching with mature students, including those by Merrill (2015), find that certain lecturer characteristics of empathy, consistency and clarity, matter not only for engagement but for survival in education. These are not soft skills or personal quirks; they are professional commitments that shape whether students feel seen, heard and valued. Where institutions reward only individual outputs or performance indicators, these relational qualities are often ignored or even penalised.

Teaching, in this account, is not an individual performance but a shared inquiry. The lecturer does not stand apart from the student as an expert transmitting knowledge. Instead, both enter into a changing relationship. This does not imply that power is erased or that expertise becomes irrelevant; it means recognising that the conditions under which people learn are shaped in and through human contact and that this shaping is a form of ethical work. Arievitch and Stetsenko (2000) remind us that development cannot be abstracted from the social relations in which it takes place, stating learning is not only a cognitive achievement but a

moral and political act. Despite the significance of these practices, they often sit at odds with institutional cultures that prioritise metrics, outputs and strategic planning. This disjunction between the ideals of collaborative praxis and the structure of contemporary higher education is neither incidental nor accidental. It reflects a deeper tension between education as a public good and education as a private investment. Funding mechanisms, research assessments and workload models all operate in ways that marginalise dialogical, participatory or critical work. There is little room in these systems for uncertainty, shared authorship or co-produced inquiry.

To recognise this shortcoming is not to retreat into despair or abstraction. Stetsenko (2021) argues that even under constraint, researchers and educators retain the capacity to act, to organise and to experiment with alternatives. Collaborative research collectives, joint authorship, student-staff partnerships are not utopian gestures but small enactments of a different educational ethos. They allow for the redistribution of voice, the sharing of risk and the affirmation of learning as collective work. Blunden (2014) provides a conceptual language for these efforts, describing projects as social forms of activity that hold shared intention across time. His emphasis on the project form as central to human life helps clarify the stakes of collaborative praxis; it is not only a method of inquiry but a way of living together with care and purpose.

To write in support of collaborative praxis is therefore to write both critically and hopefully. It requires attention to material constraints, but also to possibility. Yet even as the literature grows, so too does the risk of repetition, abstraction or moralism. Terms like 'agency' and 'participation' can circulate without adequate attention to the labour and conflict they imply. Without grounding in lived conditions, collaborative praxis may be reduced to a rhetorical gesture. To avoid this, researchers must ask challenging questions: who participates, who decides, who benefits? They must remain open to doubt, tension and failure and resist the temptation to present collaboration as harmonious or complete. This includes examining their own position as academic labour is not separate from the systems it critiques; researchers are subject to the same demands for productivity, compliance and impact.

Collaborative praxis cannot mean only working with those who agree. It requires working with resistance, contradiction and sometimes hostility as well as holding open spaces where disagreement can be heard and where care is not confined to the interpersonal but becomes a method of research. Ferholt, *et al.* (2020) and Guarrasi, *et al.* (2020) remind us that collaboration is not only desirable but necessary for survival. They urge us to treat collaborative learning not as an option but as a leading activity capable of organising our response to shared crisis. To adopt this view is not to celebrate collaboration uncritically but to insist that learning, teaching and research are always social acts and that their shape depends on the values we choose to honour. Collaborative praxis, properly understood, is neither a tool nor a programme, it is a commitment to working with others toward conditions in which all may learn, act and live with dignity.

Collaborative Praxis and Institutional Tensions

Collaborative praxis requires a serious engagement with history, not as a passive record but as a field of conflict that shapes how people come to know, act and relate. Vygotsky's view that consciousness is formed through historically situated activity means that education cannot be separated from the social and material conditions in which it takes place. Memory, in this tradition, is not sentimental. It carries the potential to disrupt prevailing accounts of learning by restoring suppressed narratives and challenging the structures that marginalise them.

Stetsenko (2020) draws attention to this political dimension by showing that development is always entwined with struggle. She places agency not in individual traits but in the capacity of people to resist, reconfigure and reclaim their circumstances. Her work rejects neutrality and insists that theory itself is an intervention in the social world.

This has practical relevance for educators and students working under pressure. Mature learners return to study following periods of personal upheaval, redundancy, bereavement, illness or migration that often precede re-engagement with education. These experiences are not incidental; they are central to how learners see themselves and their reasons for studying. Research by Merrill (2015) shows that mature students frequently describe their learning as a personal commitment to change or recovery. Students speak of returning to study after difficult experiences, with learning framed as a means to re-assert confidence or self-worth. Similarly, O'Shea (2016) found that first-in-family and mature learners often described their education as emotionally significant, where persistence was tied to identity and recognition rather than outcomes alone. Education offers students a space to mourn, reflect or reconnect with forgotten ambitions; for others, it is a way to speak into public discourse from which they have long been excluded. These motives cannot be captured by metrics of employability or skill, as they speak to the emotional and political labour involved in learning (Pap   and Rahim, 2026). Collaborative praxis recognises this and calls on institutions to acknowledge the full histories students bring with them and to make space for these to shape learning, not be erased by it.

To engage collaboratively also means to accept disagreement. Collaboration is often mistaken for consensus, but genuine collaboration involves tension in which ideas are contested and differences emerge. Arievitch (2017) reminds us that power is negotiated and learning rooted in real life is messy and uncertain. The expectation that educational processes should be smooth or conflict-free only reinforces institutional norms that value conformity over critical thought. In practice, this means rejecting standardised delivery models that allow no room for dispute or understanding that assessment rubrics and module specifications can silence more than they reveal. In studies by Bovill (2014), when students were given the opportunity to choose materials, lead discussions or contribute to assessment design, disagreement sometimes increased, but so did commitment. Disagreements became part of the learning process, as students explored whose stories were valid, what knowledge mattered and what it meant to speak with authority. The role of the educator, then, is not to manage or eliminate tension but to support the process and remain present when certainty gives way to discomfort.

This approach challenges conventional ideas of knowledge, as academic cultures often rely on narrow expectations around formal writing, citation and abstraction. These conventions are not neutral; they exclude those whose ways of knowing do not conform. Tett, *et al.* (2017) found that mature students feared their experiences would be dismissed if expressed in their own words. Confronted with traditional academic expectations, some students chose to withdraw while others adapted. For those who received encouragement, creative expression became a way to participate; spoken word, collage, performance and journaling were not used as alternatives to academic thinking but as valid forms of meaning-making. These approaches were not simply supplementary additions to standard assessments; rather, they represented alternative ways of engaging with knowledge. These varied forms of academic expression enabled students to analyse, critique and reflect in ways that gave due respect to their individual histories and lived experiences. This repositioned education as an encounter among multiple ways of knowing, rather than a one-directional monologue. Academic rigour was not diminished by this diversity; instead, it was redefined. Rigour became the discipline of

listening, responding and remaining open to change, rather than simply adhering to fixed formats or conventions.

Working within systems that prioritise speed, uniformity and predictability is challenging. Tools like metrics, audits and rankings subtly influence educators and students, limiting what is considered valid or acceptable, which often discourages risk-taking. Collaborative efforts including co-design, peer research, or engaging with the public, can be dismissed as inefficient because they require more time, invite questions and are hard to measure. Carey (2013) documents staff frustrations when collaborative approaches to teaching were blocked or delayed by formal procedures. Approval panels often struggled with ambiguity and saw student-driven topics, especially those grounded in lived experience, as risky or lacking rigour. These responses expose the gap between institutional statements about inclusivity and the everyday mechanisms through which control is exercised. Rather than being shaped by values, educational cultures are often shaped by the systems that monitor and approve them.

Policy frameworks often make this worse. The language of value for money, student satisfaction and measurable impact now dominates public discussion of higher education. Collaboration becomes a branding term, the student voice is managed, not heard, and participation is simulated, not enacted. In this climate, collaborative praxis risks being co-opted and becoming a checklist for token gestures. To resist this, practice must remain grounded in shared work that refuses simplification and must involve real decisions, real risks and real shifts in power. Staff must be supported to experiment and must be trusted to lead. Institutions must be willing to revise their own assumptions; without this, the talk of collaboration collapses under the weight of its own contradictions.

Research projects embedded in community partnerships show how academic and public knowledge can be brought into relation. Watermeyer (2015) discusses modules and initiatives co-designed with local groups to address urgent social issues, including food insecurity, digital exclusion and housing. These activities did more than meet curriculum requirements. They created space for students, researchers and practitioners to work together on problems that mattered. Although the process was often slow and emotionally demanding, it offered new ways of understanding, renewed commitments to justice and challenged conventional definitions of expertise. Students reported that their learning became meaningful not only for themselves but for others. Researchers found purpose beyond institutional recognition, and practitioners gained access to tools often reserved for the academic world. These collaborations demonstrate that learning does not need to be solitary or abstract; it can be shared, practical and accountable to real lives.

Professionals must reconsider their roles: researchers cannot remain neutral and teachers cannot stay distant. Both should fully engage, embracing responsibility over sentiment, appreciating that sharing knowledge involves vulnerability, making mistakes and adapting education. As Arievidt and Stetsenko (2000) state, sharing knowledge is a moral activity that shapes values and identity, as collaborative praxis highlights not only what we teach, but also how, with whom, and why. This article examines the political, historical and epistemological dimensions of collaborative praxis within Vygotskian psychology. Rather than offering fixed answers, the aim has been to clarify what is at stake in this discussion and to contribute meaningfully to ongoing debates about the purpose of education, the ethics of research and the possibilities of shared intellectual and pedagogical endeavour. Collaborative praxis is not a technique or a trend. It is a commitment to forms of inquiry and learning that resist control, open space for shared authority and recognise the inextricable relation between knowledge

and power. It draws from Vygotsky's insistence that human development is social and historical, and from the political commitments of scholars including Arieviditch and Stetsenko, who challenge the depoliticisation of theory in psychological discourse. This commitment finds relevance in the lives of those who participate daily in education under pressure: mature students, precariously employed staff, marginalised learners and fatigued educators. These groups are not looking for innovation templates or generic toolkits. They seek relationships founded on trust, opportunities to speak honestly and institutions willing to be unsettled by those they serve. To reclaim the radical potential of Vygotskian thought is to begin from these needs. It is to assert that the purpose of education is not to generate compliant bodies or measurable outputs but to cultivate people capable of thinking critically, acting ethically and caring collectively.

To move forward, institutions must reconfigure their systems of evaluation and reward. Current metrics encourage individualism and quantify outputs, often to the detriment of collaboration. If co-authored work, participatory processes and experimental methods are to be taken seriously, they must be acknowledged in professional recognition and assessment. This also means supporting forms of student work that escape conventional academic formats. The complexity of co-produced learning cannot be captured through essays or timed assessments alone. Portfolios, critical journals and collective outputs must be recognised for their value.

Collaborative praxis also brings emotional and ethical demands. Teaching and researching in these ways involve vulnerability, discomfort and long-term care. Most institutional policies, however, reduce academic work to a technical activity devoid of affect. Staff need professional development that reflects the relational nature of collaborative work. This includes facilitation skills, ethical reflection and spaces to discuss the dilemmas of practice. Students too need emotional and material support, especially when projects intersect with experiences of trauma or injustice. Staff who are emotionally present and willing to acknowledge uncertainty are often more effective in supporting students to take risks, speak freely and stay the course.

Despite the language of participation, educational providers remain shaped by practices that retain control rather than share it; power is often masked by polite consultation, while core structures remain unchanged. Collaborative educational work requires more than gestures of inclusion, it depends on a willingness to redistribute authority, to make space for distinct kinds of knowledge and to fund this work in real and sustained ways. Students, communities and practitioners bring experience that should not be filtered through academic validation or treated with quiet condescension. If participation is to mean anything, it must include decisions about what counts as knowledge and who gets to shape it. This is a political question as much as pedagogical, as collaboration demands attention not only to what is taught but to how institutions operate. Without changes to how validation works, how research is measured and how teaching is resourced, the talk of partnership will remain a hollow formality.

The work of Vygotsky, particularly as reinterpreted by writers including Arieviditch and Stetsenko (2020), helps make this political dimension visible. His ideas of mediation and internalisation gain meaning when connected to social struggle rather than abstract theory. To reclaim the radical potential of his work is to examine the tensions it holds between theory and practice, between critique and action, between the individual and the collective. These tensions are not problems to be resolved but conditions to work within as collaborative praxis sits in that unsettled space, asking tough questions: who is learning, with whom and for what purpose? There are managers who argue that educational institutions may never fully support this kind of work. In response, others have created independent spaces of collectives, community

research groups and public education projects that challenge existing norms. These alternatives are not replacements but reminders that education can be organised differently. If such work is to survive and have influence, it will require resources, alliances and a refusal to accept market values as the measure of educational worth. Vygotsky wrote during upheaval with the belief that collective human effort could change the world. To honour that belief now is not to romanticise the past but to commit to education as a site of change and means treating collaboration not as a method but as a shared refusal to leave things as they are.

References

- Arievitch, I.M. (2017). *Beyond the brain: An agentive activity perspective on mind, development, and learning*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Arievitch, I.M. & Stetsenko, A. (2000). The quality of cultural tools and cognitive development: Galperin's perspective and its implications. *Human Development*, 43(2), 69–92. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1159/000022661>
- Blanck, G. (1997). Vygotsky: The man and his cause. *Learning and Instruction*, 7(1), 3–15. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0959-4752\(96\)00025-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0959-4752(96)00025-8)
- Blunden, A. ed. (2014). *Collaborative Projects: An Interdisciplinary Study*. Leiden: Brill.
- Carey, P. (2013). Student engagement: stakeholder perspectives on course representation in university governance. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(9), 1290–1304. DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2011.621022.
- Dafermos, M. (2021). The metaphysics of psychology from a dialectical perspective. *Theory & Psychology*, 31(5), 690–708.
- Dafermos, M. (2022). Conceptualising crisis in cultural-historical activity research: Revisiting dialectics and revolutionary theory. *Human Arenas*, 5(2), 189–207. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-022-00289-4>
- Ferholt, B., et al. (2020). Humanity's leading activity and survival in socio-political conditions. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 27(4), 315–320.
- Guarrasi, I., Jornet, A. & Rajala, A. (2020). Expanding bio-geographies and re-generating CHAT projects. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 27(4), 301–306.
- Leite, A., et al. (2020). Prefigurative activism and collective imagination: CHAT perspectives. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 27(4), 321–327.
- Leont'ev, A.N. (1981). *Problems of the development of the mind*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Merrill, B. (2015). Determined to stay or determined to leave? A study of non-traditional students in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(10), 1859–1871. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.912625>
- O'Shea, S. (2016). Avoiding the manufacture of 'sameness': First-in-family students, university experience and the practice of retention. *Higher Education*, 72(1), 59–78. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9938-y>
- Papé, N. & Rahim, A. (2026). Behind the Grade: What Students Learn That Is Never Recorded, *Journal of Contemporary Development & Management Studies*, 10(2), 30-40
- Papé, N., et al. (2025). Evaluating Teaching Methods for Mature Learners: A Mixed-Methods Investigation of Learning Preferences in Higher Education, *International Journal of Business Performance Management*. Accepted for publication 09 September 2025
- Quinn, J. (2010). *Learning communities and imagined social capital: Learning to belong*. London: Continuum.
- Reay, D., Crozier, G. & Clayton, J. (2010). 'Fitting in' or 'standing out': working-class students in UK higher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(1), 107–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920902878925>

- Sannino, A., Engeström, Y. & Jokinen, E. (2021). Digital peer learning for professional agency. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 52(4), 1597–1610.
- Stetsenko, A. (2020). Theory for and as social practice in Vygotsky's work: Educational research as a political and moral project. *Educational Theory*, 70(1), 41–61.
- Stetsenko, A. (2021). Reassessing CHAT in times of historic socio-political turmoil. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 28(2), 157–163.
- Stetsenko, A. & Arievidt, I.M., (2014). Vygotsky's theory of learning and development and the sociocultural genesis of individual identity. In: *B. Wagener and J. Valsiner, eds., The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 435–457.
- Tett, L., Cree, V.E. & Christie, H. (2017). From further to higher education: Transition as an on-going process. *Scottish Educational Review*, 49(1), 69–85.
- Tur, G., de Benito-Crosetti, B. & Arnab, S. (2025). Data literacy for citizenry through game-based learning: Adult perceptions of fun and learning with the DALI Toolkit. *First International Journal of Digital Learning*. Coventry University. DOI: 10.1111/dali.110374921
- Vella, F. (2025). *Reading motivation and reading habits in university students in Malta: Implications for digital literacy and performance*. University of Malta Institutional Repository. Available at: <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/139589>
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- _____. (1987). *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky, Volume 1: Problems of General Psychology*. Edited by R. W. Rieber and A. S. Carton. New York: Plenum
- Watermeyer, R. (2015). Lost in the 'third space': the impact of public engagement in higher education on academic identity, research practice and career progression. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 5(3), 331–347. DOI: 10.1080/21568235.2015.1044546.

Behind the Grade. What Students Learn That Is Never Recorded: The Silent Curriculum: Identity, Emotion and the Reasons Students Stay

Professor Nick Papé, PhD and Abdur Raham, PhD

Abstract

This article explores forms of student learning in Higher Education that are often unseen, unmeasured and unrecorded. Focusing particularly on mature students, it argues that personal growth, emotional persistence and identity shifts play a central role in educational experience, yet remain largely invisible in curriculum design and institutional review. Drawing on original research, student testimony and relevant theory, the article examines how confidence, belonging and motivation emerge through relational and affective moments rather than formal instruction. It critiques performance-led systems that prioritise outcomes, arguing these often ignore the emotional labour students perform simply to stay engaged. The article proposes that curriculum be considered not only as a structure of content but as a site of human exchange where conversation, care and recognition support deeper learning. It does not call for reduced academic standards but for greater attentiveness to how students experience learning amid fear, failure or self-doubt. By highlighting emotion, relationship and identity, the article invites a broader definition of success: one that acknowledges not only what students know, but how they come to believe they can learn. It concludes with a call for new research into emotional presence and meaning-making in educational settings.

Key words

Mature students; higher education; affective learning; student voice; learner identity; curriculum design; academic self-concept; educational persistence; invisible learning; emotional engagement

Introduction

What do students learn that comes not from instruction but through experience? Often it happens quietly; it might be the decision to return after failure, a shift in self-worth when someone listens or a moment of silent determination no one sees. These are not written into unit handbooks and are not included in learning outcomes or discussed in staff meetings. Yet they matter. For many students, these moments are what allow learning to continue when pressure or doubt take hold. This article explores those aspects of learning that are harder to see or measure, it does not offer a model or solution, instead, it asks a central question; what do students learn that is never recorded?

Learning is often framed by formal structures of modules, outcomes and assessments. These features are designed to ensure consistency and support accountability, but they do not capture the whole experience. Alongside planned delivery sits another kind of learning, one that grows through memory, emotion and lived uncertainty. It includes rebuilding trust after educational harm or finding courage after silence. These are not usually tracked or credited, but they shape how learning feels and whether it continues. For many students, especially those studying alongside work, care or personal challenge, they matter more than grades.

The reflections shared here build on earlier research with mature students, their accounts show that meaning is often found not just in content but in how they feel about being in the

room. They speak of staying not because the content was engaging or the feedback useful, but because a tutor paused, listened or responded with warmth. These were not planned features of the course; they were moments of recognition. They showed that who the student is becomes part of how they learn; yet Higher Education still often works on the assumption that emotion sits outside the curriculum, that learning is purely cognitive and students arrive fully ready. This assumption is not just inaccurate; it is harmful. Many students carry earlier academic damage, some are first-generation learners, others are managing illness, loss or care and some have never been told that their thoughts matter. These realities are rarely named in teaching documents; yet they shape how students engage. Emotional presence is not a side concern but is often what allows academic focus to take root. Confidence, identity and the ability to trust in oneself are not outcomes in the formal sense; they are often the ground from which all other learning grows.

This article follows a structure that gives space to those quieter elements. It begins by examining how formal systems reward what is visible and measurable, often leaving personal meaning out of view. It then explores stories from students whose learning includes effort, silence and emotional persistence. Later sections discuss how growth in confidence and identity remains absent from most forms of assessment. The article ends by suggesting that curriculum might be seen not only as delivery but as conversation. This is not a call for less rigour; it is a call for attentiveness as when students are seen as people, not only performers, learning becomes more than progress, it becomes something students carry with them, quietly but with strength.

What Measured and what is Meaningful; A System in Tension

Higher Education presents itself as a system of structure, measurement and progress. From induction to graduation, the student journey is marked by units, deadlines, modules and points of assessment. Curriculum maps outline what is taught, learning outcomes declare what must be achieved, and performance frameworks set out how success will be judged. These features give an outline to academic experience and are often justified in the name of clarity, transparency and fairness. Yet beneath the surface of these measurable elements lies a quieter tension of what counts institutionally that is not always what matters to the learner.

Curriculum is increasingly framed through outcomes, as every module must declare in advance what students will know or be able to do. These outcomes are then linked to forms of assessment, which themselves must be mapped against criteria to ensure consistency and comparability. On paper, this process appears tidy, but in practice it often invites a kind of instrumentalism, where learning is treated less as an enquiry and more as a task to be completed. Teaching shifts toward coverage and compliance; students may learn to aim not for meaning but for marks. This is not simply a product of poor teaching but a reflection of structural priorities that reward visibility and measurement over personal growth or reflection.

The logic behind these systems is not hard to understand. Institutions are held accountable for student outcomes, and league tables compare continuation, completion and progression rates. Courses are audited through external review processes that require evidence of consistency and quality. Within this climate, it becomes safer to show what can be counted than to describe what cannot. Yet many students experience learning not through these metrics but through emotional risk, small shifts in confidence and private acts of persistence. These are rarely named in curriculum documents, and they often disappear entirely from institutional review.

Recent studies highlight this gap, Bryson and Hand (2021) argue that a focus on outcomes narrows the space for students to explore identity or find personal meaning in their work. Cook-Sather and Felten (2021) propose that students often experience a disconnection between the formal language of assessment and their internal sense of progress. Zembylas (2020) adds that the emotional dimensions of learning are routinely silenced by systems that view them as irrelevant or unmanageable, and the result is a curriculum that may be technically sound but emotionally thin. This disconnection is particularly sharp for students who enter Higher Education with previous experience of exclusion or failure. Mature learners, students from minoritised groups or those juggling caring responsibilities often carry additional emotional weight; they may arrive already uncertain about whether they belong. When courses focus only on what is visible (attendance, submission, results) they risk missing the learning that is already taking place in silence evidenced by Dunne, *et al.* (2021) suggesting that inclusion requires more than access. It depends on whether students feel recognised in the spaces they enter. For that to happen, the curriculum must allow for meaning that is not only institutional but personal.

The tools used to shape and evaluate curriculum rarely make space for this kind of meaning. Curriculum mapping, for instance, often aims to ensure coherence and coverage across a programme, but coherence for whom and coverage of what? A map can show that learning outcomes are built across levels, or that assessment points are well spaced, but it cannot show whether a student feels safe enough to speak in a seminar, or whether a tutor's comment makes someone feel good about being seen. These moments do not fit easily into maps, but they may be the reason a student chooses to continue. Performance frameworks operate in a similar way; they track data on submission rates, student satisfaction and progression. They may flag areas of concern, but they cannot detect when a student's motivation begins to falter or when shame begins to replace curiosity. Kahu and Nelson (2021) argue that student engagement is not simply a matter of presence but is shaped by emotional connection, sense of purpose and perceived value. These factors are rarely captured in formal reviews; yet they shape every moment of the learning experience.

This is not a call to abandon structure. However, students deserve clarity about what they are being asked to do. Tutors need guidance to make assessment fair, without the current balance between what is measurable and what is meaningful remaining skewed. What is counted begins to determine what is valued, and what is visible becomes what is praised. The result is that a narrowing of what learning can be as motivation is reduced to completion, feedback becomes correction and reflection becomes optional, rather than essential. The problem is not simply one of method, but of attention. When systems are designed to reward evidence, they begin to ignore what cannot be easily proven. Meaning is often found in what slips past the checklist. Examples might be in a tutorial where a student speaks for the first time; in a decision to return after failure, or in the quiet pride of understanding something once feared. These moments resist performance measures, but they are where much of the learning lives.

If Higher Education is to remain a place where people can grow, then its systems must allow for forms of growth that resist easy classification. That does not mean removing expectations or softening standards, it does mean remembering that what students bring and what they carry away are not always the same things that institutions measure. Cook-Sather and Felten (2021) propose that teaching can act as partnership, where tutors and students both remain open to learning. This requires a shift in attention, not toward perfection, but toward presence. There is a structural tension between what is measured and what matters and poses the

question if institutions measure performance but students remember presence, then what kind of curriculum are we building? If meaning is made in moments that systems overlook, then perhaps our maps are incomplete or misdrawn. The challenge is not to reject measurement, but to recognise its limits and make deliberate space for the kinds of learning that remain unseen yet influence how students grow, persist and find meaning in their studies.

Literature Review

There is substantial writing on curriculum structure, student engagement and teaching strategies in Higher Education. Yet relatively little of it explores how students actually experience learning. Personal meaning-making, emotional uncertainty and the effort required to persist through doubt are often absent from formal curriculum design or quality frameworks.

Learning Outcomes and Institutional Metrics

Curriculum structures in Higher Education are heavily shaped by performance indicators and quality assurance processes. These systems aim to promote consistency and accountability but tend to define learning by what can be tracked. Biggs and Tang (2011) remain widely cited for work on constructive alignment; yet the focus on mapping outcomes can limit attention to less visible forms of understanding. Torrence (2021) argues that outcome-based teaching reinforces a model of education where students perform the right answers rather than explore ideas. Similarly, Neves and Hewitt (2020) posit that satisfaction metrics tell us very little about student development or emotional engagement, and the same perspective advocated by Bryson and Hand (2021) suggest that performance-focused delivery narrows the meaning of success and makes little room for students' identities within the curriculum.

Student Voice and Personal Meaning

The phrase '*student voice*' is now widely used in HEI marketing and quality strategies, but its meaning varies. Cook-Sather (2006) and Bovill (2020) have championed student involvement in design and delivery, and co-creation has grown in both theory and practice. However, much of this work has been absorbed into systems that measure engagement as compliance rather than shared ownership. Dunne, *et al.* (2021) examine examples of staff–student partnership and find that consultation often follows institutional scripts informing that students were invited to comment on delivery or structure, but not on the emotional labour of study or what success personally meant. Healey, *et al.* (2020) reach similar conclusions, noting that partnership is often framed through policy goals. College research reports that mature students frequently found these mechanisms unhelpful as their learning is often shaped by identity, history and private struggle, which are difficult to express within standard feedback processes. The emotional reality of their experience sits outside institutional expectations.

Emotion, Belonging and Confidence

There is growing recognition that emotion shapes learning in powerful ways. Zembylas (2020) describes the emotional silence that surrounds HEI study, with students and tutors often discouraged from speaking about discomfort or difficulty. Thomas, *et al.* (2021) found that belonging is a significant factor in retention, especially in the early stages of study. Recent articles accepted for publication contribute directly to this theme, Papé, *et al.* (2025) explore tutor behaviours valued by mature students and find that consistency, warmth and encouragement matter more than technique. In a related study the authors propose that confidence grows not only from achievement but also from moments of being seen and acknowledged (Perry and Gunn, 2025). These findings echo the work of Devis-Rozental, *et al.* (2017), who studied socio-emotional intelligence in first-year students, that indicated

emotional learning emerges quietly through relationships and persistence. Curriculum documents rarely acknowledge this; yet it is central to how students decide to stay, speak or succeed.

Psychological Models and Lived Experience

Educational psychology has provided many of the terms now used to describe student development. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory and Zimmerman's (2002) work on self-regulation, remain widely applied. These models offer useful ways to think about motivation and strategy, but they are often used without much regard for context or lived experience. Trigwell (2012) adds that teachers' emotional engagement with teaching influences their pedagogical choices, which in turn helps shape the emotional tone of a classroom. Simons and Baeten (2022) propose that engagement varies with personal history, family demands and emotional safety. The College's own research contributes directly to this area, exploring mature students' reasons for staying in Higher Education, highlighting that emotional persistence was often motivated by deep personal need, especially the wish to change one's story, to return to education with pride or to re-establish self-belief after earlier failure.

Mature Students and the Question of Identity

Work on widening access has begun to show that identity matters in education. Mature and non-traditional students, particularly, often experience a conflict between institutional assumptions and their own reasons for study. Hodge, *et al.* (2020) explore identity work in returning learners and suggest that education often requires them to renegotiate their self-perception. Uddin, *et al.* (2024) reported that mature students frequently describe their learning as personal rather than professional. Many were motivated by long-held goals, rather than by credentials. In a companion piece, Papé *et al.* (2025c) examine pedagogical preferences and find that trust and care are more important to students than delivery methods or resources. These findings are also reflected in the international collection *Exploring Widening Access for Mature Age Students* (Eds. Baker *et al.*, 2026), which includes Chapter 9, authored by Papé and Hasan, based on case study research. Students speak not only about academic challenges but also about how education reshapes their sense of identity. Some describe study as a return to self, rather than a move forward.

Taken together, these works suggest that education is not just a series of outcomes but a human process and is built from memory, effort, support and risk. The current literature shows some awareness of this, but more attention is still needed to the emotional and reflective dimensions of learning, especially for students whose experiences are rarely seen or heard.

Methodology

The research presented in this article drew on a mixed-method approach designed to illuminate dimensions of student experience that resist traditional measurement. To explore the emotional, relational and identity-based aspects of learning, three primary strategies were employed; a comprehensive review of academic literature via electronic platforms, a targeted student survey and direct correspondence with senior academic and administrative figures involved in course design and delivery.

To establish a scholarly foundation, a structured search was conducted using academic databases including EBSCOhost, JSTOR, and SAGE Journals. The focus was placed on peer-reviewed material concerning curriculum design, student voice, mature learners and the emotional dimensions of learning in Higher Education. Additional sources were drawn from

Scopus and Google Scholar to widen access to cross-disciplinary perspectives. This literature served not only to contextualise emerging themes but also to highlight gaps between institutional priorities and the lived experience of students. Particular attention was paid to papers that examined the relationship between identity, belonging and persistence within educational settings.

In parallel, a digital survey was disseminated to a cohort of students enrolled at different stages of business and health programmes across three campuses. The sample included first-year entrants, continuing students and finalists, in order to capture varied reflections on belonging, motivation and emotional presence during study. Questions were a mixture of open and closed formats, allowing both measurable patterns and personal narratives to emerge. Participation was voluntary and anonymised, with all responses stored securely and in accordance with data protection guidelines. The student voice was not viewed as supplementary to the research but integral to its development. The purpose was not to seek consensus but to allow for the complexity and range of responses to remain visible.

To gain a wider institutional view, a series of correspondences were undertaken with senior staff, respondents were asked to reflect on how emotional experience is accounted for in course design, the extent to which student identity is considered in pedagogical planning and what role they believe informal learning moments play in retention and progression. The responses were not analysed for statistical frequency but considered thematically alongside student comments and literature findings. Where appropriate, selected quotations were incorporated into the discussion sections of the article.

These combined methods allowed for the triangulation of data without reducing complexity to categorical claims. While statistical generalisation was not the aim, the range and depth of testimony from both students and senior staff allowed for a careful reading of what might be missing from standard curriculum review processes. The methodology acknowledges from the outset that not all learning can be itemised or tracked. Instead, it seeks to pay attention to the emotional and relational layers of education that remain under-represented in policy documents, despite being central to whether students persist, engage and ultimately succeed.

Stories Students Carry; Learning Moments that Escape the Record

The most significant learning moments for students are often the least visible. They take place between deadlines, in moments of quiet self-reflection, or in the decision to return after a setback. These experiences do not appear on transcripts, evaluation forms or learning dashboards; yet they carry more weight than any module descriptor could capture. For many students, particularly those studying later in life or amidst competing demands, these moments are where learning begins, deepens or is held onto.

One mature student, returning to study after over twenty years spent raising children, described the feeling of her mind having '*gone to sleep*' and how the act of study had begun to '*wake it again*'. No assignment reflected this change, nor did any tutor see the nightly effort of opening her laptop while others slept. She simply repeated '*I have to study. I have to just study*'. That phrase stayed with the researcher not because of its content, but because of its quiet expression of commitment, endurance and repair. It was a sentence shaped more by personal history than pedagogy, but it told a story of return. Another student wrote, following a long period of loneliness, '*Now I have friends. We go to the cinema, the park together.*' This reflection would never feature in a progression report, yet it speaks directly to the foundations of educational persistence. Confidence does not always emerge through academic

performance, but through feeling seen and accepted. For this student, friendship did not supplement learning, it made it possible. As Hooks (1994) and Thomas (2012) argue, belonging is not an optional extra to education but often its enabling condition.

Not all emotional experiences are affirming. One student described how a change of tutor mid-course unsettled her more than expected. She recognised in her response a familiar pattern – the wish to please someone new, echoing earlier family dynamics. This response was not a failure of the curriculum but a reminder of how classroom relationships can awaken older emotional scripts. The student wrote of being *'caught off guard'*, recognising that something had been learned – not about the subject, but about herself. It was a moment of personal insight with no formal place in the module but one that reshaped her self-awareness. As Illeris (2018) notes, deep learning often carries emotional disruption; it resists design and emerges unexpectedly.

These experiences resemble what Mezirow (2000) describes as 'disorienting dilemmas': emotionally charged events that challenge the learner's previous assumptions. They are not interruptions to learning but part of its process. For some, these moments do not feel disruptive but hopeful. One student wrote *'I can make myself something'*, while another spoke of wanting to *'change the status quo in my own life.'* These are not goals drawn from institutional rubrics. They are statements of intent that reflect internal transformation rather than achievement that signal belief in the possibility of change – a belief often more formative than any content mastered. However, these expressions also hint at discomfort. They reveal the friction between individual aspiration and institutional language. Students are often aware that their goals do not fit official definitions of success. The language of transformation, development and personal meaning sits uneasily alongside standardised outcomes or assessment criteria. This is not because those criteria are inherently flawed, but because they cannot hold what many students actually value, i.e. the reconstitution of belief and the possibility of self-renewal (Brookfield, 2017; Mezirow, 2000).

Many of these moments occur in solitude. No tutor hears the inner negotiation after failure, the quiet decision to try again, or the fear that resurfaces during submission week. No policy captures the relief of being understood or the silent pride of speaking in class for the first time. Yet these are not marginal moments. They are the conditions under which formal learning can happen. They are formative because they reshape the learner's self-concept. As Cousin (2009) argues, the most powerful elements of education often resist quantification. They are not easily codified or extracted. Attempts to formalise them can diminish their meaning. Rather than seek to evidence these moments, Cousin suggests education must *'hold space'* for them. This does not require special provision or therapeutic practice, but attention. It asks tutors and institutions to be aware that real learning often begins in silence, far from the mechanisms designed to capture it.

These stories also suggest a need to reconsider what counts as success. For some students, particularly mature learners, success is measured not by the attainment of outcomes but by the rebuilding of confidence. One student described joining a study group for the first time and noted that *'spending time together in study is a fun time.'* The phrase is simple, yet it conveys something profound: the shift from isolation to inclusion, from self-doubt to participation. These moments, though small, are pivotal. They are part of what Thomas (2012) identifies as the return of belonging. The theories of Deci and Ryan (2000) help to explain why these relational experiences matter. Their work on self-determination suggests that autonomy, competence

and relatedness are essential for motivation. Of these, relatedness, the experience of being recognised and connected, is often the most fragile in educational settings, yet the most powerful in sustaining effort. Zimmerman (2002) similarly emphasises that self-regulation depends not only on skills but on a student's capacity to manage doubt, assess progress and stay engaged in uncertainty. These are emotional acts, not merely cognitive ones.

Despite their importance, most course designs make little room for these emotional and relational dimensions. Performance metrics track attendance, submission and satisfaction, but not the daily effort of continuing. Marks may record achievement but not what it took to reach that point. As Beard, *et al.* (2007) have shown, emotional labour in higher education is often invisible but essential. It is the work students do to stay composed, to ask for help, to try again after silence. For tutors, emotional labour involves noticing, responding and offering presence even when there is no procedural reason to do so. It is the human work of education that holds the rest in place. These accounts show that learning does not only take place in formal instruction. It lives in small, often unnoticed exchanges. One student, reflecting on her return after years away, said simply '*I am trying to become a better person.*' Another described study as '*something that will personally make me happy.*' These comments do not fit the language of module descriptors, but they speak directly to the purpose of education. They suggest that, for many students, study is not a transaction but a search for identity, for connection, for a sense of what is possible.

Academic standards should remain high, with clear expectations and fair assessments. However, students are more than their results. When they share their motivations and challenges, educators see that learning is an active process which students pursue, despite fear or fatigue, that warrants recognition. As Biesta (2010) argues, education should not be reduced to qualification and socialisation alone. It must also include subjectification, the process by which individuals become agents of their own learning and lives. The stories students carry are evidence of this process; they are not add-ons to the curriculum but reflections of its real effects. When students stay after failing, when they try again after silence, when they find friendship in a seminar, these moments reshape who they believe they are. It is not always teachable or testable, but it lasts. If educators can learn to notice and to honour it subjectification without capturing it, then education becomes not only a system but a relationship, not only an outcome but a human act.

What Can't Be Marked; The Limits of Formal Recognition

Higher education systems prioritise what can be recorded as learning outcomes are mapped, teaching delivery aligned and assessment regimes standardised. These frameworks help bring order and comparability, serving institutional and regulatory expectations (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Biesta, 2010), but what these systems measure does not always reflect the learning students value most. Students do describe education as a process that reshapes how they see themselves, not just what they know. Ecclestone (2007) highlights how adult learners experience identity shifts through learning, often navigating tensions between personal agency and institutional structures. Students often describe study not as the pursuit of a grade, but as a step towards personal change. '*I wish to become a better person,*' one student writes. Another describes study as '*something that will personally make me happy.*' These are not abstract sentiments; they are grounded expressions of purpose, they do not feature in module handbooks, nor are they easily measured against institutional benchmarks; they reflect the emotional and ethical substance of student persistence (Papé *et al.*, 2025). In practice, confidence rarely emerges from assessment scores alone. It grows through relational

moments, being acknowledged, being invited, being heard. One student describes the comfort of being included in a study group; another says plainly '*Spending time together in study is a fun time.*' These small encounters convey more than sociability, they communicate belonging which give students reasons to remain even when the formal structures of education feel distant or overwhelming (Thomas, 2012; Hooks, 1994).

These student reflections are not isolated anecdotes. Rather, they mirror longstanding research in educational psychology, informing Deci and Ryan (2000), through their self-determination theory, to emphasise that human motivation depends on the fulfilment of three psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. When students experience a sense of connection and recognition within learning environments, their intrinsic motivation strengthens; conversely, when they feel unseen or excluded, their confidence erodes and disengagement often follows. Zimmerman (2002) further contributes to this understanding by demonstrating that academic persistence cannot be reduced to cognitive strategy alone but instead depends on emotional resilience, i.e. the learner's capacity to self-monitor, set meaningful goals and sustain motivation in the face of difficulty.

Yet emotional resilience does not exist independently of institutional conditions, as it is not a fixed personality trait but a relational and contextual process. When educational systems reward only visible performance or measurable achievement, they risk obscuring the affective and emotional labour that underpins student persistence. This labour, often unacknowledged and unmeasured, manifests in multiple forms, from the effort required to re-engage with study following prior failure, to the courage it takes to speak in class despite fear of judgement. For mature learners, or those managing complex life responsibilities, the mere act of arriving to class or submitting work on time may reflect a deeply personal and often invisible commitment. Tutors, too, participate in this emotional economy evidenced by Hochschild (1983) who introduces the concept of emotional labour as the work individuals perform to manage feeling within professional roles. In educational settings, this includes subtle but meaningful acts to offer assurance, such as demonstrating patience with anxious learners, or staying behind after sessions to listen. Beard, *et al.* (2007) note that such behaviours are not embedded within formal job descriptions or workload models; yet they frequently make the difference between a student continuing or quietly withdrawing. These forms of care are not incidental to learning; they sustain it.

Nevertheless, curriculum design remains closely tied to completion metrics and performance targets; assessments prioritise product over process, correctness over reflection and standardisation over adaptation (Boud and Molloy, 2013; Torrance, 2021). Yet student accounts repeatedly express a desire not for leniency, but for acknowledgement. What many seek is recognition that their lived experience, particularly the emotional cost of learning, forms part of what they bring to their study. They do not necessarily request adjustment to standards, but rather visibility within them. As one student expresses, '*I have to study. I have to just study*', describing solitary late-night work once her children are asleep. Her statement carries little academic flourish yet conveys a depth of emotional resolve that escapes formal appraisal. Other narratives speak to the social dimensions of learning. One student reflects on a newly found sense of inclusion after beginning the course: '*Now I have friends. We go to the cinema, the park together.*' This expression does not align with course outcomes, but it reveals something essential about why education matters. For many, learning becomes possible only when they experience connection and safety. The sense of belonging described here is not incidental; it is often the precondition for sustained engagement. As Hooks (1994) and Thomas

(2012) argue, belonging is not a peripheral benefit of education, it is fundamental to it.

At times, learning also arises from discomfort and disruption. A student recalls how a tutor change prompted old patterns of seeking approval to resurface, leading to personal insight about how her past relationships shaped her academic behaviours. The curriculum did not intend this response; yet it catalysed a form of internal reflection no less important than mastering content. This echoes Illeris (2018) and Mezirow (2000), who suggest that significant learning often follows emotional disturbance or '*disorienting dilemmas*'. These moments, while difficult, frequently mark the beginning of genuine transformation.

Crucially, such experiences are not anomalies. They characterise the learning journeys of many: particularly, mature students whose educational paths are impacted by earlier interruptions or academic trauma. Yet these moments of becoming, of self-realisation and emotional growth, find no natural home in formal learning outcomes. They resist codification and cannot be marked. Biesta (2010) refers to this process as 'subjectification' describing the emergence of the learner as an ethical, reflective individual. It is distinct from learning conceived as the acquisition of skills or integration into institutional norms. For many, especially those returning to education after a long absence, subjectification is not a supplementary benefit but the very reason for study. One student writes simply, '*I can make myself something.*' Another offers the ambition, '*I want to change the status quo in my own life.*' These statements, modest in language but expansive in intent, do not appear in programme specifications or module guides. Yet they articulate the purpose of education for those who experience it as a means of personal renewal. They are not rhetorical flourishes but genuine declarations of change-in-process.

However, institutional systems often fail to register this kind of change. Performance dashboards track marks, attendance and retention, but not the gradual rebuilding of confidence or the quiet perseverance that follows a previous failure. Kahu and Nelson (2021) argue that student engagement is as much emotional and cognitive as it is behavioural. Students remain engaged when they feel their work matters—when it holds personal as well as institutional meaning. To acknowledge the emotional dimensions of learning is not to weaken educational standards. On the contrary, it adds complexity and relevance to how we understand academic achievement. It moves the question from '*what did the student produce?*' to '*what did the student overcome, endure or discover?*' This reframing requires educators to see students not only as recipients of content but as individuals negotiating memory, identity, aspiration and fear. It also calls for attentiveness to those moments when students persist, reflect or re-engage, not because a course design required it, but because something within them remained committed. This does not entail a therapeutic model of education. As Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) caution, not all emotional expression requires intervention, nor should emotional labour be mined or extracted. However, failing to acknowledge these experiences risks presenting education as a purely technical process, divorced from the human conditions that make learning possible. As Zembylas (2020) argues, emotional awareness is not a distraction from rigour but a necessary feature of ethical pedagogy.

Practically, this might mean building spaces within the curriculum for reflective writing or dialogical assessment, where students can speak to their lived experiences without reducing those experiences to data. It also means treating moments of relational connection, for example being welcomed into a conversation, being heard, being invited back after absence, not as peripheral gestures but as critical components of the learning environment. When

students feel good about being seen, they are more likely to continue. When they do not, disengagement may follow, not dramatically, but quietly and persistently. Disengagement is often misread as students who stop attending or submit work with diminishing quality are sometimes labelled as disinterested or unmotivated. But beneath this behaviour may lie a more complicated story including of effort unrecognised, or identity not reflected in course design. Biesta (2010) and Brookfield (2017) both propose that learning involves not only performing tasks but seeing oneself in the learning process. When students cannot locate their values or voice in the material, withdrawal may be less a choice than an outcome of exclusion.

At its most thoughtful, education recognises and leaves space for what is not measured. It attends to emotional and relational experiences without reducing them to checklists or evaluation forms. Cousin (2009) insists that certain kinds of learning resist formalisation, precisely because they are shaped through emotion, dialogue and human encounter, to mark them would be to diminish their meaning. The aim, then, is not to count everything, but to remain open to what cannot be counted, for instance *'I am trying to become a better person,'* one student writes. This is not a learning objective or a benchmark of attainment, it is something else entirely, a quiet declaration of growth, situated not in the measurable but in the meaningful. If education can learn to witness and honour such statements, without attempting to standardise them, it moves closer to the change it claims to support.

Curriculum as Conversation; Teaching with the Whole Learner in Mind

Curriculum is often presented as a plan, with mapped outcomes, unit descriptors and measurable assessments. This design implies smooth, linear progression from entry to graduation. In practice, however, the experience of learning rarely follows a straight path. Students arrive with complex histories, competing priorities and very personal reasons for being there. They do not simply absorb knowledge, they interpret, resist, carry, reshape and live through it. When we begin to take student meaning seriously, the limitations of a delivery model become clear. This is a call to allow structure to remain open to something more personal and unpredictable. The idea of curriculum as conversation invites this possibility not as a model or method but an attitude: one that holds the student in view not only as a learner but as a person whose presence in the classroom already holds meaning.

To think of curriculum as conversation is to acknowledge that students bring something with them and that teaching is not a one-way act. The term conversation does not imply politeness or mutual agreement but suggests presence, response and the possibility of change on both sides. When students struggle to participate or to submit a piece of work that falls short, they are not simply failing to meet an outcome. They may be managing fear, doubt or longstanding emotional patterns. These conditions are rarely visible in formal processes, yet they shape the effort required to learn. Zembylas (2020) describes the emotional silence of academic life and argues that this silence must be broken if education is to matter in real ways. What is often dismissed as distraction or lack of preparedness may in fact be the unspoken weight of previous learning wounds.

Relational teaching does not mean offering therapy or reducing expectations, it means noticing. It means hearing what is said between the lines and offering enough space in the curriculum for students to bring meaning with them. Matthews (2021) writes about curiosity and partnership as *'foundations for meaningful learning'*. His work supports the view that students need not only to be taught, but to be taken seriously. Some of the students involved in previous research describe moments where the most important learning happened when

someone simply paused and paid attention. These moments were not built into the timetable. They emerge because a tutor recognises a human being rather than a name on a list. Fang, *et al.* (2025) found that mature learners especially valued this kind of attentiveness, as for them, learning was never just about gaining knowledge. It was about returning to education as a way of reclaiming agency, often in the face of long histories of exclusion or self-doubt.

This approach has clear implications for curriculum design without requiring the removal of content or the dilution of academic standards. It requires small shifts allowing students to reflect on what learning means to them and making room in assignments for emotion, not as indulgence but as part of the work of making sense. Recognising effort, even when performance falls short, as Kahu and Nelson (2021) argue that sustained student engagement is linked to emotional safety and a sense of purpose. When a student continues after a failure or turns up to class after a difficult night, that is an act of learning as much as completing a task; yet this effort often passes unremarked because it cannot be measured. Thomas, *et al.* (2021) maintain that a sense of belonging is one of the most reliable indicators of student success and that it is not created by policy but built through interaction, presence and care.

Assessment, too, needs to be considered within this view. When students are assessed only on their ability to recall or reproduce. They are invited to perform correctly, which may reward those who are already confident, but risks alienating those who are still trying to find their place. Cook-Sather and Felten (2021) make the case for assessments that invite students to position themselves in relation to what they are learning. This does not mean that standards fall; it means that students are asked to think rather than recite. It allows space for students to be present in their work, to bring who they are to the task as Bryson and Hand (2021) argue, identity and learning cannot be separated; outcomes-only approaches are likely to fail the very students they aim to support. The tension between standardisation and responsiveness is not easy to resolve, but it begins by asking whether the current approach really reflects what learning looks and feels like for students.

These ideas have particular resonance for students whose lives sit outside the assumed norms of higher education: for example, mature students, students with caring responsibilities and students who have experienced academic failure before, who often arrive with little confidence but deep motivation. Dunne, *et al.* (2021) highlight how identity and inclusion are shaped not by grand interventions but by everyday acts of recognition. For those students, curriculum as conversation is not a luxury but is often the only space where they feel allowed to belong. When the curriculum makes no space for this, the student may still complete the course, but something is lost. When it does make space, students often describe their learning experience not only in terms of course content but also about who they are and what they are capable of. None of this denies the need for structure or coherence; it asks instead that those who design and deliver curriculum remember that learning happens in the middle of real lives: i.e., that students are more than bodies on chairs or names on spreadsheets. When curriculum is seen as conversation, it becomes a space where knowledge is not simply transferred, but also made meaningful. It invites tutors to listen not only to what students say and the experiences they bring with them, but also to recognise that effort, emotion and experience are not distractions but part of the fabric of learning. By doing so, tutors can treat students not as problems to be solved but as people already learning, from the outset and long after lessons have been completed.

Conclusion; Learning That Lasts

Not all learning can be seen or marked. This article has returned to that idea from different angles: through student voices, institutional routines and teaching practices. Higher Education often focuses on what can be listed, timed or assessed, yet many of the most lasting learning moments are quiet and unrecorded. They happen when confidence begins to build, when failure is met with dignity or when someone feels that they belong. These experiences do not sit in the official curriculum, but they shape how students learn, and these moments hold more weight than any grade. If education is to support change that truly lasts, then more care must be given to what is not easily measured.

Throughout this discussion, the stories of mature learners offer a reminder that meaning often lies in how learning feels, not just in what it includes. These students show that confidence grows when someone takes time, that belief builds when a voice is heard and that identity shifts when past failure is no longer treated as a life sentence. Their experiences suggest that educational achievement is not just a matter of skill or knowledge, it depends on trust, relationship and a sense of possibility. These factors are not marginal to learning; they are often the reason it continues, especially when students face difficulty; yet these elements remain largely ignored in course documents, teaching policies and evaluation tools.

This is not a call for lower standards or soft approaches as academic challenge matters. But to support real growth, we must acknowledge that students do not arrive in identical shape, with many carrying earlier disappointments, self-doubt or pressure they cannot name. They study while working, caregiving or managing illness and persist while unsure if they belong. In those conditions, what helps is not simply clever content but moments of being seen, thus noticing matters. When tutors pause, when they speak with care, when they give room for a hesitant question, something shifts; the student begins to believe in learning. That is not performance but is trust being built and it is central to what makes learning possible. The system around them, however, often fails to see this, as although the student voice is widely promoted, it is often reduced to forms, surveys or scripted panels. Few studies have seriously explored the emotional weight of returning to study or the inner changes that shape student persistence as most retention research still focuses on logistics, not belief. Many students who leave do so quietly; they do not say much, but something inside them has shifted. The moment is emotional, not just practical. If institutions want to understand what helps students stay, they must look past grades and workload calculators, they must ask different questions and they must listen to what is often missed: for example, those private movements in confidence or purpose that come long before the student leaves or excels.

This article ends with a quiet invitation asking tutors to notice more. It asks course designers to leave room for meaning and for institutions to treat students as people who are changing, not just performing. It also asks researchers to do more as there is very little large-scale work that centres on emotional experience in course design. We know that confidence, identity and belonging matter, but they remain outside most educational planning. Awareness of the gap provides opportunities for tutors and institutions to treating learning not only as achievement but also as a positive relationship, wherein students can experience belief and change and, sometimes, carry away the memory of being seen, when it mattered most.

References

- Beard, C., Clegg, S. & Smith, K. (2007). *Acknowledging the Affective in Higher Education*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Biesta, G. (2010). *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- Biggs, J. & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university*. 4th ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Boud, D. & Molloy, E. (2013). *Feedback in Higher and Professional Education: Understanding It and Doing It Well*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bovill, C. (2020). Co-creation in learning and teaching: The case for a whole-class approach in Higher Education. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 4(2), pp. 91–98. DOI: 10.15173/ijpsap.v4i2.4073
- Brookfield, S.D. (2017). *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. 2nd edn. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Bryson, C. & Hand, L. (2021). Learning outcomes and identity: Who is higher education for? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 26(6), pp. 751–764. DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2020.1732904
- Cook-Sather, A. & Felten, P. (2021). Transforming education through student voice and pedagogical partnership. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 5(1), pp. 1–7. DOI: 10.15173/ijpsap.v5i1.4398
- Cook-Sather, A. (2006). Sound, presence and power: Student voice in educational research and reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36(4), pp. 359–390. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-873X.2006.00363.x
- Cousin, G. (2009). *Researching Learning in Higher Education: An Introduction to Contemporary Methods and Approaches*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Deci, E.L. & Ryan, R.M. (2000). 'The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behaviour', *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), pp. 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Devis-Rozental, C., Eccles, S. and Mayer, M. (2017). Developing socio-emotional intelligence in first year higher education students through one-to-one learning development tutorials. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 12, pp. 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.v0i12.389>
- Dunne, E., Zandstra, R. & Brown, L. (2021). Staff–student partnerships: Power, identity and inclusion. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 26(5), pp. 680–694 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1892642>
- Ecclestone, K. (2007) 'An identity crisis? Using concepts of "identity", "agency" and "structure" in the education of adults', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39(1), pp. 5–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661544>
- Ecclestone, K. & Hayes, D. (2009). *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*. Abingdon: Routledge
- Fang, J., Ren, X. & Sotardi, V.A. (2025). Rethinking Student Wellbeing in Higher Education: A Multifaceted Approach to Stress Management. *Education Sciences*, 15(7), pp. 1–19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15070872>
- Healey, M., Flint, A. & Harrington, K. (2020). Students as partners: Reflections on a conceptual model. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 4(1), pp.16–29. <https://doi.org/10.15173/ijpsap.v4i1.3954>
- Hochschild, A.R. (1983). *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Hodge, S., Harvey, L. & Drew, S. (2020). Identity work in mature learners returning to education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(3), pp. 585–597.
- Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.

- Illeris, K. (2018). *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists... in Their Own Words*. 2nd edn. Abingdon: Routledge
- Kahu, E.R. & Nelson, K.J. (2021). Student engagement in the educational interface: Understanding the mechanisms of student success. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 40(3), pp. 456–469, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2017.1344197
- Matthews, K.E. (2021). Curiosity, inquiry and partnership in higher education. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, 5(1), pp. 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v5i1.4452>
- Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Neves, J. & Hewitt, R. (2020). *Student Academic Experience Survey 2020*. Higher Education Policy Institute and AdvanceHE.
- Papé, N., et al. (2025). Independent higher education educators in England: Tutors behavioural characteristics preferred by mature students on business management courses. *Journal of Statistics and Management Systems*, 26(7), pp. 1-13. DOI: 10.47974/JSMS-1145
- Papé, N., et al. (2025a). Learning Needs Including Preferences and Digital Technologies: A Study of Mature Students in Higher Education in England, *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies*, 19:14, pp. 07-19; <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijim.v19i14.56921>
- Papé, N., Uddin N. & Hasan, R. (2026). Life Experience & Knowledge Construction: Mature Students as Returners to Higher Education. In: D. Baker, L. Ellis and N. Uddin, eds. *Exploring Widening Access for Mature Age Students: International Data, Experiences and Practices*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 148-156. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003540144-12>
- Perry, S.A.B. & Gunn, N.P. (2025). We Must Create Space to Feel It All: Empowering BIPOC Women Through University-Based Professional Development. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 37(2), pp. 6–25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/19394225251339037>
- Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), pp. 68–78.
- Simons, M. & Baeten, M. (2022). Why students engage: Emotion, resilience and meaning in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 27(4), pp. 509–524. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1872537>
- Thomas, L. (2012). *Building Student Engagement and Belonging in Higher Education at a Time of Change*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- Thomas, L., Herbert, J. & Teras, M. (2021). Promoting belonging and student success at university: A review of current practices. *Enhancing Learning in Higher Education*, 13, pp. 56–75. <https://research.edgehill.ac.uk/en/publications/promoting-belonging-and-student-success-at-university-a-review-of>
- Tinto, V. (2017). ‘Through the eyes of students’, *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 19(3), pp. 254–269.
- Torrance, H. (2021). Assessment, accountability and standards: Reframing the issues. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 46(2), pp. 168–180. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2020.1754764>
- Trigwell, K. (2012). Relations between teachers’ emotions in teaching and their approaches to teaching in higher education. *Instructional Science*, 40(3), pp. 607–621. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11251-011-9192-3>
- Uddin, N., et al., (2024). Evaluating teaching methods for mature learners: A mixed-methods investigation. *International Journal of Business Performance Management*, accepted for publication.
- Zembylas, M. (2020). The emotional silence of academic life and the emergence of caring pedagogies. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 23(3), pp. 382–396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2020.1716997>
- Zimmerman, B.J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(2), pp. 64–70. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2

JCD&MS Guidelines for Contributors

Manuscripts must be submitted in a single Microsoft Word file. Files submitted in other text versions, for example, PDF or Apple, will be returned to the contributor for resubmission in the required application. All submissions must be emailed to journal@lcc.ac.uk and t.anderson-jaquest@lcc.ac.uk within the submission deadline.

Essential requirements for all submissions.

A Front Sheet preceding the submission providing the following information:

- Designated submission category: examples, academic articles; working papers, student submission
- The full title of the submission
- The full names of all authors (including their affiliations and email addresses),
- A Profile provided for each author (circa 200-300 words)
- Word count [excluding the abstract, reference lists, tables, and figures]

Abstracts

Abstracts are required for all submissions, except Editorials, For Debate Articles, Commentaries, Letters and Book Reviews (discussed further in the Guidelines).

Contributions without abstracts will be returned to the author for re-submission. Abstracts must be separated from the main text and should contain between 200 and 500 words. Text must be clearly stated and understandable to readers unfamiliar with the subject area. Formatting and presentation requirements: Arial, 11 point, 1.15 spacing.

Abstracts will vary according to the nature of the research undertaken, but their purpose is to provide the reader with an overview of the particular research project. Abstracts should set the context, indicate the key findings and render main conclusions. Do not include citations, numbers, abbreviations, acronyms or measurements, unless numerical information is essential to the conclusions rendered. Any figures mentioned in an abstract must match exactly with those given in the main contribution.

Keywords

A list of up to eight keywords should be added underneath the Abstract to identify the contents of the paper.

Formatting and Presentation Requirements for all Submissions.

JCD&MS will be published on-line in single column format. Therefore, all contributors are asked to observe the simple guidelines described below and illustrated in the examples provided.

Headings and Subheadings.

- Title (Arial, 12 point, bold. Capitalise 1st letters of Important words.
- Authors 12-point font, normal.
- Headings and sub-headings: Arial 11-point, Bold, with double 1.15 line spacing

Main body of text.

- Microsoft WORD 2000 or higher; docx preferred.
- Margins (normal): 2.54 top and bottom and left and right.
- Alignment: justified.
- Font: Arial 11-point (normal), with 1.15 line spacing
- Paragraphs: left margin alignment: 1.15 line spacing between paragraphs.
- Long quotes, if any, should appear in the text, indented, using Arial 9 with 1.15 line spacing.
- Citations: must be written in the text, using the Harvard Reference System. Authors using the EndNote system to reference the views of others in the text will be required to resubmit their contributions.

References Harvard Referencing System required. (Consult LCC HRS Guidelines for detailed information.)

- Format: Arial 10, single space. Single space between entries.
- References presented in EndNote format will be required to resubmit their contributions.
- Presentation: Author, alphabetical Order, Last name or family name first
- Date of publication enclosed in brackets Ex: Smith, Alan (2023)

- Titles of articles in journals in plain text; Journal titles in italics.
- Titles of books in italics
- Titles of individual chapters published as part of an edited collection in plain text
- Individual Entries – Arial 10, Text - single spaced
- Single space between entries.

Section two: options for submission

A list of categories most frequently used to submit contributions for publication is set out below, followed by a brief description of each option.

- Academic Articles
- Research Reports
- Literature Reviews
- Working Papers: new section
- Student Contributions: new section
- Letters
- Monographs
- For Debate Articles
- Commentaries
- Editorials
- Book Reviews

Academic Articles (the most common category for submission)

Subject focus: Choice is wide-ranging. Common examples: issues and developments (global, national, regional or local), and subject-specific articles related to business and management, hospitality management; healthcare; and education and training.

Indicative structure: Introduction (circa 500 words); A review of relevant literature; A description of the methodology adopted; Research findings; Discussion of results and Conclusions.

Indicative Word count: 3,000 to 6,000 words but can be increased to 10,000 words, depending on the subject and the depth and scope of coverage. Word count excludes abstracts, tables and reference lists.

Presentation suggestions: Subheadings should be concise and used only when needed. All Figures and Tables should be inserted in the main body text and the source cited immediately below each table. Legends should be provided in cases where symbols or data require further clarification.

Referencing: 12 – 50 references. Aside from older sources deemed essential to the subject (classics, for example), references should include the most recent relevant literature available and, where appropriate, not be restricted to a single research group, region or country.

Research Reports

Indicative structure: studies may be qualitative or quantitative and could involve experimental or non-experimental designs.

Indicative word count: around 6,000 words excluding abstracts, tables and references, but length may vary depending upon the complexity of the report and details relating to the findings.

Authors submitting research reports are expected to follow the same guidelines set for Academic Articles in respect of abstracts, introductions, sub-headings, the presentation of figures and tables and referencing.

Literature Reviews

Subject focused: choice is wide-ranging.

Indicative structure will vary but will be designed to draw together a body of literature to reach one or more major conclusions, with a particular research objective in mind. Submissions must provide descriptions of the search strategy adopted and explain the selection criteria for the articles selected.

Indicative word count: around 5000 words, but could be longer or shorter depending upon the complexity of the research objectives.

Authors submitting literature reviews are expected to follow the same guidelines set for Academic Articles in respect of abstracts, introductions, sub-headings, the presentation of figures and tables and referencing.

Working papers

Working Papers provide opportunities for all contributors to share research ideas and interests with other colleagues during the formative stage of development, without going through the formal process of peer review, normally required for publishing completed academic articles in *JCD&MS*. Although it is most likely that Working Papers will eventually be transformed into completed articles, the working paper format will allow individuals the flexibility of changing directions or abandoning projects in the earlier stages of development. To submit a Working Paper:

Indicate clearly that your submission is a working paper. Failure to do so, means that it will be considered as an academic paper, subject to peer review. Provide a brief abstract: length around 150-200 words.

Produce a well-written paper: initial suggestion: 1500 – 2000 words, but length can vary upward or downward, depending upon scope and your own inclinations.

Follow the same guidelines set out for formatting and presentation that apply to all submission categories. Failure to do so, means that the Working Paper will be returned, and the author will be requested to resubmit using the required guidelines for formatting.

Identify your research question and very briefly indicate what methods you intend to use to address the topic.

Discuss and cite several references (at least 5-10) to show that you've already carried out some research relating specifically to your ideas and have taken into account others' views on the subject.

Briefly describe/discuss your progress what initial opinions/conclusions you've formed to date.

Indicate future plans, if any, for developing the subject further.

Provide a list of the sources you've consulted to date.

Student Projects.

A new section has been created to accommodate student contributions. This will provide LCC students, in particular, with an opportunity to publish their final year projects or other significant academic papers completed in the final year of their programmes.

Student contributions assessed at distinction or merit will be selected for publication. To facilitate their efforts, students will receive guidance from LCC's Head of Programmes and Academic Management (HoPAM) and/or the postholder's designated representative, who will serve as a mentor throughout the process.

Final Projects produced for Pearson HND awards, must be submitted in full and in accordance with Pearson guidelines and requirements, including the designated word count.

Submissions should be clearly worded and well-written.

The Principal Editor will review and approve all student submissions for publication.

Letters

Subject focus: choice is wide ranging.

Indicative content: may express opinions about articles previously published in the Journal, report on a development, or comment on some issue of potential interest to readers. Letters do not normally include new findings unless such information extends the finding of a paper previously published in *JCD&MS*. If a letter contains comments upon a paper already published in the Journal, then this should be cited at the beginning of the letter. The author of the paper cited will be given the right to reply.

Indicative word count: 60-150 words and up to 20 references.

Review status: The Principal Editor will review and approve all letters submitted prior to publication.

Monographs

Subject focus: wide ranging.

Indicative content: a major piece of substantive writing and in-depth analyses and syntheses that cannot be expressed within the normal word length limits set for articles. Monographs submitted must provide robust theoretical underpinnings to support the primary thesis. Contents may include extensive systematic reviews of major topics or investigate critically a series of linked studies addressing a common research question.

Indicative wordcount: up to 14,000 words, excluding titles, abstracts, tables, figures and reference lists.

Authors interested in submitting monographs are advised to contact the Principal Editor in the first instance, as only monographs will be accepted that align with the *JCD&MS* remit. Authors wishing to submit monographs for consideration should submit in the usual way, but should add a note on their cover page explaining that they would like the submission to be treated as a monograph.

Monographs should follow guidelines described for academic articles in respect of abstracts, introductions, sub-headings, the presentation of figures and tables and referencing.

'For Debate' articles

Subject focus: wide ranging. 'For debate' articles are opinion pieces, synthesising research in a way that adds new insights. Focus should be placed on making one or two key points that reflect opinion rather than fact. The point[s] will normally challenge existing thinking, raise an issue that has been neglected, take an issue forward that is currently being considered, or reinforce one side of a debate that is currently underway.

Indicative structure will vary, but text should be written in a lively and engaging style.

Indicative word count: around 3500 words.

Interested parties may submit commentaries about 'for debate' articles in subsequent issues. If commentaries are accepted for publication, then the author of the 'For Debate' article will be given the opportunity to respond to any commentaries made.

Commentaries

Description: A commentary should add a further perspective or point of view to a particularly important item published in *JCD&MS*. Rather than being a review of the article, authors should use the findings as a stepping stone to make one or two points of wider relevance to the field.

Indicative content: There is no abstract, but commentaries should begin with a one or two sentence summary setting out the main points.

Indicative word count: 500-1000 words, with up to 20 references.

When commenting upon an item published previously in the Journal, a direct reference to the title and the author should be included at the beginning of the commentary and cited in the reference list.

Editorials

Description: Editorials appear at the start of every issue of *JCD&MS* and are significant pieces of academic writing that differ substantially from academic articles, reports or reviews. Their purpose is to stimulate debate, identify issues and push ideas forward.

Indicative content: An editorial should make one or two key points that are more in the way of opinion rather than fact. The point[s] will normally challenge existing thinking, raise an issue that has been neglected, take a current issue forward, or reinforce one side of a current debate. Editorials should be cautiously optimistic but provocative in approach. As is the case with 'For debate' articles, the focus is most commonly placed on matters of policy, treatment, assessment/diagnosis, theory or methodology.

Indicative word count: around 1500 words and contain no more than 20 references.

Book Reviews

Book reviews should place the book in the context of other literature deemed to be relevant in the field, rather than just summarising the content. Books should be selected on the basis of their general relevance to areas normally covered in the Journal. Indicative wordcount: around 1,000 words and contain no more than about 10 references.

Authors should endeavour to make them a 'good read and identify what is good and useful in their evaluations. In cases where a negative appraisal of the book must be made, then the critique should be rendered in a professional manner.

Section three: Important information regarding submissions

English-language editing

Authors are expected to apply computerised spelling and grammar checks to their work prior to submission. If English is not the first language, then contributors are advised to have their manuscripts reviewed by an individual highly skilled in written English. The Principal Editor will only provide nominal proofreading assistance. If the meaning of the English text is not clear, then the manuscript will be returned to the contributor for resubmission.

Defamatory statements

Authors must refrain from making defamatory statements about specific individuals or organisations, or cultural practices, whether or not they believe such statements are justified.

Permission to reprint source material

If a paper uses all or parts of previously published material, it is the author's responsibility to obtain permission from the copyright holder and, if requested, to obtain permission in writing and provide copies to the Principal Editor.

Histograms

Do not include histograms with three-dimensional blocks or shading as this can make interpretation difficult.

Colour illustrations

Authors are expected to pay the full cost for reproducing colour artwork in hard copy publications.

Electronic figures for publication

Please contact the Principal Editor of *JCD&MS* for instructions regarding any high-quality images that are included in the submission.

Supporting information

Additional material comprised of lengthy appendices [e.g. extensive reference lists or mathematical formulae/calculations], deemed to be relevant to a particular submission may be considered for publication in the on-line version, but it is unlikely to be included in a print edition of the Journal, due to length.

Non-compliance with requirements

A manuscript that does not comply with journal requirements will be returned to the author.

Ethical Principles

JCD&MS supports ethical principles. As such, when submitting papers online, authors may be asked to state that: they have been personally and actively involved in substantive work leading to the report and will hold themselves jointly and individually responsible for its content;

All relevant ethical safeguards have been met in relation to patient or subject protection, or animal experimentation, including, in the case of all clinical and experimental studies review by an appropriate ethical review committee and evidence of written informed patient consent.

Papers will be returned that contain sexist, racist or other non-acceptable language.

Declarations of interest

Any declarations of conflicts of interest should appear after the list of authors and addresses. Declarations of interest do not indicate wrongdoing, but they must be declared in the interests of full transparency. For example, any contractual constraints on publishing imposed by an organisation or private party that has funded the research must be disclosed. The time window for declaring such financial links is normally within three years of the date of article submission.

If an undeclared conflict of interest comes to light, the Principal Editor reserves the right to withdraw the paper from the JCD&MS production process.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism involves using someone else's work without appropriate attribution. If sections of text numbering more than 10 words have been copied verbatim, they must be put in quotation marks and a full citation given. Plagiarism is treated as serious professional misconduct, and any evidence of plagiarism will result in the withdrawal of the submission for further consideration.

The Review Process

Each manuscript is screened initially by the Principal Editor. Those deemed to be inappropriate for publication in JCD&MS will be declined without going to full review. In those cases, authors will receive an explanation as to why the manuscript has been declined.

In addition, the Principal Editor will also return manuscripts to contributors that require substantial re-writing, because the text is unclear, the material has been poorly organised, or substantial errors in written English exist that could have been remedied had the contributors proofread their own material and conducted spelling and/or grammar checks. The initial screening process may take up to three to four weeks. Contributors who are asked to re-submit work will be given extra time to do so, but the duration will be limited.

Manuscripts, excluding Working Papers, Student Submissions, letters, commentaries, editorials, and certain smaller submissions that pass this stage, will be independently reviewed prior to selection for publication. In the majority of cases, reviewers will be JCD&MS Editorial Panel members. The Principal Editor will provide feedback to contributors.

If authors are invited to revise and resubmit a manuscript, then they should submit the revised version by the due date set by the Principal Editor in order to meet issue publication deadlines. An extension may be granted in unusual circumstances. A decision on the revised version may be taken by the Principal Editor or she/he may consult an Editorial Panel member or put the revision through another full review process, depending on the nature and extent of the revisions requested. A decision on the revised version should normally take less time than the original review process.

Evaluation Criteria

Work submitted for publication in the JCD&MS is evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Degree to which the contribution fits within the remit of JCD&MS;
- Appropriateness of the analysis;
- Evidence of original thinking, including new ideas and insights;
- Significance of the theoretical and methodological contributions, if applicable;
- Appropriateness of the literature review, if applicable;
- Implications for practitioners, academicians and scholars;
- Quality of the discussion and interpretation of the results;
- Organisational structure;
- Coherence and clarity of text;
- Professional standard of writing (grammar, punctuation and spelling);
- Appropriate use of the Harvard referencing system.

Reviewers' Disclosure

Reviewers have the option of disclosing their identity to the authors by adding their name to the bottom of their review comments.

Appeals

Requests for appeal are normally considered only in cases where authors make the case that one or more Reviewers have clearly made a substantive mistake. They are unlikely to be considered in cases where opinions differ about the importance of the findings nor in situations where the author believes that issues initially identified by the reviewers can be resolved by providing a revised version, without going through the formal resubmission process.

It is important to bear in mind that the comments received by authors are primarily intended to help authors make revisions, either for publication in *JCD&MS* or submissions elsewhere. Occasionally, the decision not to publish an article will be made on grounds of priority, given the pressure on space within a particular issue of the Journal. In those cases, individuals will be informed of opportunities available to resubmit their work at a later date.

Proof-reading and Corrections

Authors are responsible for all statements made in their contributions. *JCD&MS* does not accept responsibility for any statement or textual errors appearing in the published work that the author has failed to correct prior to final submission.

Copyright

Authors have permission to publish their own contributions in other sources, providing the Principal Editor is informed. Authors are responsible for obtaining permission to reproduce copyright material from other sources appearing in their submissions to *JCD&MS*, in cases where this is required.



Professor Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, PhD (LSE, International Relations, IR), Doctor of Music (ABD, Pi Kappa Lambda); MA (IR-Dist); MA (Soc); M Mus (Music); Diploma (IR, Dist); B Mus (Music-Hons), FHEA, FISM, CertsEd (Tertiary)

Principal Editor, *JCD&MS*, London Churchill College

11 May 2026



**LONDON
CHURCHILL
COLLEGE**

— ABOUT THIS JOURNAL —

Journal of Contemporary Development and Management Studies

JCD&MS

*A national peer-reviewed journal dedicated to
connecting research to practice.*

PUBLISHED BY

London Churchill College

156b Green Street, Barclay Hall, London E7 8JQ

www.lcc.ac.uk

♦ ♦ ♦
VOLUME 10 · ISSUE 2 · SPRING 2026
